



Andrzej Walicki

# The Flow of Ideas

Russian Thought from the Enlightenment  
to the Religious-Philosophical Renaissance

70

**EASTERN EUROPEAN CULTURE,  
POLITICS AND SOCIETIES**



PETER LANG  
EDITION

This history of Russian thought was first published in Polish in 1973 and subsequently appeared 2005 in a revised and expanded publication. The current volume begins with Enlightenment thought and Westernization in Russia in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and moves to the religious-philosophical renaissance of first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This book provides readers with an exhaustive account of relationships between various Russian thinkers with an examination of how those thinkers relate to a number of figures and trends in Western philosophy and in the broader history of ideas.

Andrzej Walicki is a Polish historian, Professor Emeritus at the University of Notre Dame (USA) and a member of the Polish Academy of Sciences. He specializes in the history of Polish and Russian philosophy, Marxism, and liberal thought, and is associated with the *Warsaw School of the History of Ideas*. Walicki is the author of over twenty books.

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EASTERN EUROPEAN CULTURE,  
POLITICS AND SOCIETIES

Edited by Irena Grudzińska-Gross  
and Andrzej W. Tymowski

VOLUME 7

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Translated by Jolanta Kozak and Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka  
Editorial Work by Cain Elliott



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## Author's Note

The present *Outline of Russian Thought* is an altered and much extended version of the book published in Polish in 1973, entitled *Rosyjska filozofia i myśl społeczna od Oświecenia do marksizmu* ("Wiedza Powszechna," Warsaw). An English-language edition entitled *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism* (translated by Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka) followed several years later, first in the United States (Stanford University Press, 1979) and then in the United Kingdom (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1980). In the introduction to that edition, I emphasized that I believed the book to be a product of the scholarly community to which I felt related (known then in Poland as "the Warsaw School of History and Ideas").<sup>1</sup> I also thought it useful to point out the particular Polish conditioning of my interest in Russia. On this subject, I wrote as follows:

My interest in Russian thought originated from the awareness, shared by many people in my country, that a sympathetic understanding of Russian culture is of vital importance to the Poles. There is a Polish tradition behind this book to which I am greatly indebted. Despite the widespread notion of an alleged Polish hostility toward everything Russian, even in partitioned Poland there were scholars and writers who fully appreciated, and sometimes even admired, the great traditions of the Russian intelligentsia, and who conceived their task as creating intellectual bridges between Russia and Poland or, more ambitiously, between Russia and the West. Suffice it to mention that one of the first histories of the Russian revolutionary movement (and the best one before World War I) was written by a Polish Marxist, Ludwik Kulczycki;<sup>2</sup> that the first historical novel extolling the heroes of the "People's Will" and the whole intellectual tradition of Russian Populism was written by the most influential Polish philosopher and literary critic of the beginning of our [20<sup>th</sup>]

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1 I enlarge upon the subject in the Afterword to the second edition of my book, *W kręgu konserwatywnej utopii. Struktura i przemiany rosyjskiego słowianofilstwa* [In the Circle of the Conservative Utopia. Structure and Transformations of Russian Slavophilism], Warszawa 2002, pp. 452-460.

2 See Kulczycki, *Revolucja rosyjska* (2 vols.; Lvov 1909). A German translation, *Geschichte der russischen Revolution* was published in Gotha in 1910. A Russian translation, made from a specially prepared version of the author's manuscript, appeared under the title *Istoriia russkogo dvizheniia* in St. Petersburg in 1908.

century, Stanisław Brzozowski;<sup>3</sup> and finally that a Polish Catholic philosopher, Marian Żdziechowski, was one of the first men in Europe (along with the Czech philosopher and statesman T.G. Masaryk) to recognize fully the importance of Russian religious philosophy.<sup>4</sup>

I also mentioned the inspiring role of my contact with British and American scholars, initiated in 1960 during my stays in the U.S. and U.K. on a Ford Foundation scholarship, and the contact that continued in the following years. The list of those contacts is rather long. Sir Isaiah Berlin appears first in this list; a scholar with whom I instantly struck a strong bond of intellectual exchange that later grew into a friendship.<sup>5</sup> There are also a large number of American experts on Russian intellectual history whom I met on the East Coast (mainly at Harvard University) and in California (Berkeley) – including R. Pipes, J.H. Billington, M. Malia, N.V. Riasanovsky, G.L. Kline and others. They were young at the time, interested in the news from behind the “iron curtain” and convinced of the importance of their object of study – which, no doubt, had a certain resonance with my own motivation. Last but not least, there was the enormous privilege of meeting and sharing ideas with eminent representatives of the Russian émigré community: Roman Jakobson, Alexander Gerschenkron, Pitirim Sorokin, Boris Nikolaevsky and Father George Florovsky.

But that is by no means all. I should have added to this list the names of Leonardo Schapiro from the London School of Economics, Harry Willetts and George Katkow from St. Anthony’s College in Oxford, Alexander Erlich from Columbia University, Waław Lednicki and Gleb Struve whom I met at Berkeley, and Victor Weintraub, above all others. I likewise ought to have mentioned the names of the New York Mensheviks with whom I held hours of disputes in the tiny apartment of Lidia Osipovna Dan, the sister of Leo Martov and former secretary of “Iskra” [The Spark]; alongside Sergei Utekhin and Eugene Lampert with whom I maintained very close contact at Oxford, as well as of Nikolai Zernov, author of the classic book on the Russian religious-philosophical renaissance and activist for the Orthodox ecumenical movement. I feel especially sorry today for not having mentioned the tragic figure of Wiktor

---

3 The title of the novel (published in 1908) is *Płomienie*, which means “The Flames.” Brzozowski was fascinated by Russian culture and devoted many pages to it in his books. Among other things, he wrote a splendid essay on Herzen.

4 Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism*, translated from Polish by Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka, Stanford University Press, 1979, pp. IX-X.

5 See A. Walicki, *Encounters with Isaiah Berlin. Story of an Intellectual Friendship*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main 2011.



Sukiennicki who had been favorably moved by my book *Osobowość a historia* [*Personality and History*], as well as by my unpublished essay, “Od narodnictwa do leninizmu” [From Populism to Leninism].<sup>6</sup> I had not done so, believing that an introduction to a book that was supposed to serve as a university manual ought to only name people with academic degrees. For the same reason, I neglected to quote the name of the spiritual master of my youth, the eminent Russian philosopher, Sergei Hessen.<sup>7</sup> It seemed to me that mentioning a person who had died in 1950 in distant Poland would have been too intimate and lacking in context in an American handbook.

I see things differently today. If a book on Russian thought is being republished after more than 30 years, in an extended form that nevertheless maintains interpretive continuity, it seems worthwhile to openly declare its intellectual and moral debts of inspiration. I have no doubt that these accounts must first be settled in relation to two Russian emigrants of Jewish origin, deeply grounded in European philosophy and perpetually attached to the pre-Revolutionary ideological traditions of the Russian intelligentsia – Sergei Hessen and Isaiah Berlin.

In the following years, I twice revisited All Souls College in Oxford (the academic year 1966-1967 and the autumn semester of 1973), thereby making it possible for me to co-operate closely with Berlin. In the academic year 1966-1967, Berlin and I held a joint seminar on Russian Populism, the fruit of which was my first English-language book (*The Controversy over Capitalism*, Oxford

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6 Sergei Utekhin, d. July 2004, in California, was a Russian emigrant of the Wartime period, member of People-and-Workers' Union “Solidarists” whom I met in Oxford thanks to I. Berlin. He was the author of *Russian Political Thought*, New York-London 1964. Eugene Lampert, an Orthodox priest and a social radical who wrote worthy essays on Belinsky, Bakunin, Herzen and Chernyshevsky, was a pupil of Berdiaev and Bulgakov. Information about him can be found in Roger Bartlett's introduction to *Russian Thought and Society 1800-1917 Essays in Honour of Eugene Lampert*, Keele 1984. Nikolai Zernov, author of *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century* (New York-Evanston 1963) was glad to share with me his memories of eminent thinkers and writers of the Russian Silver Age.

On Wiktor Sukiennicki (whom I met at Harvard University in the spring of 1960 and then at Stanford in 1976) see: M. Kornat, *Bolszewizm, totalitaryzm, rewolucja, Rosja. Początki sowietologii i studiów nad systemami totalitarnymi w Polsce (1918-1939)*, t.1, Kraków 2003, pp. 162-230. The text “From Populism to Leninism” (written in 1958 for Prof. S. Ossowski's seminary) is now available in my book, *Idea wolności u myślicieli rosyjskich* (Kraków, 2000).

7 See my homage to Hessen, “Mój łódzki mistrz i pluralizm wartości,” *Res Publica Nowa*, No 9, pp. 42-48.

1969). Several years later, an English translation of my post-doctoral thesis (*The Slavophile Controversy*, Oxford 1975; originally, *W kręgu konserwatywnej utopii*, Warsaw 1964) was published, following a careful reading by Berlin with his personal corrections. A year later, I was invited to guest-lecture at Stanford by Prof. Terence Emmons. One of the results of my stay in California, thanks to the personal involvement of Emmons, was the interest of Stanford University Press in publishing a translation of the present book (as a joint enterprise with Clarendon Press in Oxford).

My publishers' hopes that English-language universities would accept the book were fulfilled. The book went through several reprints in the United States and two British editions, and has been used as a handbook to the present, having even been honored with the international award of the Italian-Swiss Eugenio Balzan Foundation (1998).<sup>8</sup> However, it seems obvious that the great historical transformations in the final decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have created the need to look on Russian intellectual history from a new, post-Communist perspective.

As I have already noted, creating a new version of the book did not necessitate a fundamental change of the existing text, which had been, from the outset, written with determined independence from the obligatory interpretive patterns in the U.S.S.R. The changes I have introduced in the text were therefore limited to acknowledging new sources literature on the subject and new directions in my own interests. However, a fundamental change which has influenced the entire book was the addition of a final part concerning Russian thought from the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The decision to bring the book only up to the year 1900 was dictated by purely external circumstances: I realized that even under the conditions of the People's Republic of Poland, incomparably better than those in the Soviet Union, I could not allow myself to write freely on Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?*, or on the Russian religious-philosophical renaissance at the onset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Stopping at the turn of the century was thus a purely pragmatic decision – a price paid for the independence I had allowed myself in describing Russian thought of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Even today, I consider the decision to have been profitable.

In its present version, the book has been extended by the entire first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, it comprises the crisis of Marxism which gave birth to Russian neo-idealism and neo-liberalism, the genesis and progress of the religious-philosophical renaissance, the radicalization of Russian thinkers following the 1905 Revolution, and the period of reflection on the reasons for its

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8 The materials concerning this prize (Laudation, my "acceptance speech" and the self-presentation entitled "A Panoramic View of My Work") were published in *Dialogue and Universalism*, No 1-2/2000, pp. 5-23.

failure. In other words, it arrives, roughly, in the years 1910-1912 – the moment when the so-called Silver Age of Russian culture took shape and the mainstream of that culture, represented by the religious thinkers, was separated from the culture of secular radicalism which was gradually appropriated by revolutionary Marxism. We may assume that the chronological limit of the book is thus the first Russian Revolution and the succeeding period of revealing its intellectual and cultural results.

It would probably be more effective to bring the book up to the October Revolution of 1917. And yet, it is hardly conceivable that the Bolshevik putsch be treated as an intellectual caesura. The real caesura was the year of Lenin's death preceded by the end of the "War Communism" experiment of 1921 and the expulsion of idealist philosophers (and other "bourgeois scholars") from Russia in 1922. But in order to arrive at that caesura, the chronological scope of the book would have to be extended by more than ten years – including the entire War-cum-Revolution period, extremely important and abounding in long-term consequences (which it would be necessary to discuss at least in a draft form) and, in addition, broken in half by the Leninist Revolution. That, however, would not fit in the frame of a book devoted to the history of pre-Revolutionary Russian thought. It would necessitate the writing of a separate volume.

That is why the present book – rather than end in the catastrophe of the Revolution that opened a new era in Russia's history – terminates with the flourishing of culture preceding the Revolution that is known as the Silver Age of Russian culture.<sup>9</sup>

*Granger, Indiana, July 2004*

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9 The term has been questioned in a book by Omra Ronen (*The Fallacy of the Silver Age in Twentieth-Century Russian Literature*, Amsterdam 1997), arguing that, in fact, it was a "golden age" of Russian literature. From the perspective of the history of Russian philosophy, this correction seems all the more grounded.



## Introductory Remarks

The first Polish edition of the present book included in its title the words “Russian philosophy and social thought.” The formula combining philosophy and social thought, very popular at the time in Socialist countries, is, however, somewhat misleading. Indeed, the book does pertain to philosophy, but it defines philosophy very broadly, renouncing strictly academic criteria. Rather than with philosophy in Russia, i.e., a history of a certain theoretical matters within the boundaries of the Russian state, it is concerned with the philosophical aspects of the ideological search by the Russian elite to claim responsibility for the fate of their country. It does, of course, comprise social thought – along with political and religious ideas; it does not, however, discuss social thought on the level of popular consciousness, or political thought in particular actions of the Russian Government, or the religious thought of the official Orthodox Church and other religious structures in Russia. The subject of the book is thus, in essence, a history of the critically thinking elite with particular regard to philosophy – especially social, political and religious philosophy. The title of the English edition which refers to “a history of Russian thought” is therefore more adequate.<sup>1</sup>

Discussing the developments of philosophical controversies in the context of a broadly defined intellectual history is, I believe, a natural option for a scholar studying the history of philosophy in a “national cross-section.” The history of philosophy as philosophy, i.e., as a history of the theoretical problems of ontology, epistemology and other classical philosophical disciplines, can hardly be squeezed into a national frame – unless the philosophy of a nation constitutes, in a particular period, a separate chapter of universal philosophy. On the other hand, for a historian interested, first of all, in the *worldview content* of philosophical theories, their historical conditionings and their functioning in a society, examining philosophy in the context of a particular national culture creates an especially favorable situation, in that it allows for perceiving its multifold connections with a certain political and intellectual situation, as well as with the cultural traditions of a given country. In order to exploit this

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1 “History of thought” is in the U.S.A. a synonym of “intellectual history.” The former term is chronologically older. Cf. eg. Vernon L. Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, vol. I: *The Colonial Mind, 1620-1800* and vol. II: *The Romantic Revolution, 1800-1860*, New York 1927.

possibility, however, one must not limit oneself to the philosophical question itself – it is necessary to treat the examined philosophical concepts as integral elements of a given national culture and show how they reflect and shape the spiritual biography of the nation that has created them.

In the case of Russia (as in the case of Poland), there exist a number of additional arguments for a “broadened” treatment of the subject of philosophical history. In Russia, philosophy appeared rather late and for a long time it could not find a way to constitute itself as a separate, autonomous area of knowledge and creative effort. Its autonomy was hindered by exceptionally difficult political conditions which made an unrestrained development of philosophy impossible at strictly politically-controlled state universities (certain symptoms of changes for the better appeared in this respect only in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century). Nor was it favored by the intellectual situation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian intelligentsia – a painful awareness of political oppression, backwardness and the ensuing social problems distracted attention from questions that were not directly related to social practice and focused reflection on ethical, historico-philosophical and political – oftentimes religious – questions, at the same time provoking a certain undervaluation and neglect of classical ontological and theoretical-cognitive issues. Apparently constituting the most influential intellectual formation of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Populist intelligentsia went so far as to maintain that a preoccupation with “pure philosophy” was immoral and a betrayal of the hallowed issue of the people.

These particular qualities of Russian philosophical thought in the 19<sup>th</sup> century make writing its history from the point of view of a narrowly defined philosophical perspective an especially thankless task – as proved by its synthetic treatments by Radlov, Shpet and Yakovenko, among others.<sup>2</sup> Having focused on professionally practiced philosophy and employed formalized criteria of “the philosophic,” the authors produced an impoverished picture of the history of Russian philosophical thought and, in their final conclusion, denied it any originality. Even though the conclusion can be refuted on the grounds of their own assumptions, it must be admitted that with the narrow

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2 E.L. Radlov, *Ocherk istorii russkoi filosofii*, Sankt Petersburg 1912; G. Shpet, *Ocherk razvitiia filosofii v Rossii*, Petrograd 1922; B. Jakovenko, *Dejiny ruske filosofie*, Prague 1939. The books are of little use nowadays, whereas the classical book by Masaryk, treating the history of Russian thought from the perspective of the historical-philosophical and philosophical-religious issues, has retained considerable value until this day. (See T. G. Masaryk, *Zur russischen Geschichts-und Religionsphilosophie*, vol. 1-2, Jena 1913).

concept of philosophy's subject matter, the originality of Russian philosophy is indeed hardly discernible, marked above all else by a dependence on the philosophy of the European West. Its originality can only be fully perceived when we regard it from the perspective of Russia's intellectual history – from the point of view of the issues that had moved the hearts and minds of thinking Russians the most and were believed by them to be the most important for the fate of their country. This is especially true of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A unique intersection of influences; modernization of the life and culture of a huge nation in which curtailed historical development were rapidly evolving; an astonishing co-existence of the archaic and the modern in social, as well as mental, structures; the issue of an intensive Europeanization and resistance toward it; confrontations of the Russian intellectual elite with the social reality and the ideas of, on the one hand, Western countries and, on the other hand, the continuously rediscovered Russian reality; the deep and uncompromising ideological involvement of the Russian intelligentsia, the fervor of its ethical research, the acuteness and fundamentalism of its “damned problems” – all these accounted for the fact that the spiritual biography of the Russian nation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was more interesting and more dramatic than the intellectual histories of many other nations of incomparably richer philosophical traditions that were much more advanced in historical progress.

It is by no means the intention of these remarks to dilute philosophical issues in socio-political matters. I fully appreciate the importance of the current studies of Russian academic philosophy, practically unknown in the West and until recently ignored even in Russia.<sup>3</sup> The neglect was largely due to the official Soviet school, interested solely in a mystified controversy about the so-called fundamental philosophical question (materialism vs. idealism), and in dividing thinkers into “progressive” (i.e., falsifiable through co-optation) and “reactionary” (i.e., totally rejected and purposefully marginalized). This had created a situation in post-Soviet Russia in which a separation of studies of strictly philosophical matter from studies of ideologies was perceived as an indispensable condition of scholarly reliability. I also share the opinion that it is not true that all that is valuable in Russian philosophy had been allowed to be born only outside university walls. However, I agree with Berlin's opinion (quoted recently in an interesting book by his pupil Lesley Chamberlain) that the philosophical significance of Russian intellectual history has been the making of

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3 A breakthrough in this domain is the 900-page work by W.F. Pustarnakov, *Universitetskaia filosofii v Rossii*, Sankt Petersburg 2003. It comprises a monographic study and a biographical-bibliographical dictionary, offering information on Russian academic philosophers from the Enlightenment to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

people who were, broadly speaking, thinkers – rather than merely professors of philosophy.<sup>4</sup> The validity of studying Russian philosophy in an autonomous and strictly professional sense cannot thereby undermine the validity of studying philosophically significant aspects of Russia’s intellectual history. Besides, there seems to be no doubt that the intellectual history of pre-Revolutionary Russia is of worldly importance, which cannot be said of studies on the contributions of Russian philosophers of the time to the theoretical achievements of universal philosophy.

Considering these facts, it seems understandable that the chronological scope and the structure of the present book have been determined by criteria related to the general intellectual history of Russia, rather than to the development of philosophy itself. Priority in the book is given to the 19<sup>th</sup> century – the period of the greatest flourishing of Russian literature. It had a number of features that allow it to be treated as an integral entity. The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the emergence and the making of a tradition by the “intelligentsia,” in the specifically Russian sense of the term, denoting a class of people who were educated and felt responsible for the future of their country, hardly unanimous but united by the ethos of fighting for progress. (In that sense, “intelligentsia” was an ethical category; sometimes it was ascribed a political meaning which was in opposition to the authorities an indispensable element of an intellectual’s attitude).<sup>5</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the central problem of Russian thought became

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4 Lesley Chamberlain in her “philosophical history of Russia” has argued very strongly against the use of strictly formal philosophical criteria in a study of Russian philosophy, supporting her case with the opinions of I. Berlin and the present author (see L. Chamberlain, *Motherland. A Philosophical History of Russia*, London 2004, pp. XI–XII). In this context, she quotes Berlin’s devastating article on the book by N. Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy* (1952), published in the *Times Literary Supplement* of March 27, 1953 (see Lesley Chamberlain, op. cit., p. 92).

5 Especially characteristic in this respect is the neo-Populist history of Russian social thought by Ivanov-Razumnik (*Istoriia russkoi obshchestvennoi mysli*, Sankt Petersburg 1907). It presents the history of Russian thought from the perspective of two combating abstract principles – the non-conformist “ethical individualism” (culminating in self-sacrifice for the benefit of the people) and “bourgeois morality” implying philistinism, egotism and acceptance of reality. The “intelligentsia” is for Razumnik an ethical category par excellence, a true intellectual is only one who is an “individualist” opposed to the “bourgeois philistinism” personified as official Russian reality. Ivanov-Razumnik’s book offers the quintessence of the specific mythology of the Russian intelligentsia. It is a panegyric praise. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such an extolling tone would have been utterly unacceptable, as the Russian intelligentsia was then rather prone to lashing self-criticism. It was only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century – when the role of the intelligentsia



Russia itself. Who are we? Where do we come from and where are we heading? What are we bringing to humanity? What should we do to fulfill our appointed mission? Looking for answers to those questions, thinking Russians employed the specific “benefit of backwardness” – a possibility to compare the situation of their own country with those of more developed countries and making use of the intellectual achievements born in more advanced and progressive social conditions. Hence the immense importance of the reception of those achievements. A careful study of this reception is not a “study of influences, since it does not seek the reasons of intellectual development in external influences – instead, it investigates the intellectual context in which Russian thought took shape and which became a powerful catalyst of its development.

The introduction of the philosophical and socio-political issues of the 18<sup>th</sup> century is justified by their close connection with 19<sup>th</sup> century problems. It was then, during the reign of Catherine II, that a profound reflection on the model of monarchy and the roads of development for Russia started to emerge. The alliance of the ruling and educated elites was beginning to crumble. The “enlightened” class was gradually gaining independence from both the absolute power which had brought it to life by initiating the process of Europeanization and the ruling social class; Radishchev, who definitely severed his ties with the gentry, was in this sense the first Russian “intellectual.” Pavel Milyukov’s opinion that it was in the age of Catherine that the unbroken tradition of *critical* social-political thought in Russia took roots, therefore seems fully justified.<sup>6</sup>

Obviously, it did not emerge in a void. Recent studies have largely confirmed the fact that the dialogue between the Monarch and his closest advisers on the one hand, and the representatives of the social and cultural elites on the other, had been going on from the very beginning of the Europeanization reforms of Peter I.<sup>7</sup> It concerned the general direction of the reforms, but also the ideal model of power, and therefore had to include elements of a critical reflection on the current state of affairs. That is why the presentation of the mature Enlightenment ideas of the age of Catherine has been preceded in the

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as the leading force of the Russian “struggle for independence” came to its definitive end – that a tendency toward such an advanced retrospective self-idolatry could appear.

6 P.N. Milyukov, *Ocherki po istorii russkoi kultury*, St. Petersburg, 1901, pp. 248-250. See also Marc Raeff, *Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia: The Eighteenth-Century Gentry*, New York 1966.

7 See Cynthis Hyla Whittaker, *Russian Monarchy. Eighteenth-century Rulers and Writers in Political Dialogue*, Dekalb 2003.

book by a brief discussion of the crucial issues of Russian political thought in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Closing the book are chapters on the Russian thought of the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I have adopted the assumption that the 1905 Revolution marked the natural end of the Russian 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1905, the Russian autocracy entered the phase of its final decline; the opposition against it took on organized political forms while the newly won constitutional freedoms allowed for an open political life and the rapid development of institutionalized forms of civic society – which, however, did not cut short the revolutionary processes. This is how the revolutionary 20<sup>th</sup> century began within the history of the Russian Monarchy. The present book deals with this only insofar as it is necessary for understanding the intellectual trends born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In Russia's intellectual history, the 19<sup>th</sup> century that had ended in the first Russian Revolution and the 20<sup>th</sup> century were divided by several years of transition – a period of critical reflection on the experience of the Revolution, a painful reckoning of the hallowed traditions of the radical intelligentsia, and an axiological reevaluation of the entire intellectual achievement of the previous century. A profound account of the radicalism of the intelligentsia was offered by the almanac *Vekhy* [*Signposts*], published in 1909 and rightly considered to denote the close of the Russian 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup> In the following year, the philosophical publishing house “Put” [“Road”] was founded (in co-operation with the authors of the almanac), its objective being to reevaluate the heritage of the past and to radically renew Russian culture in the spirit of a modernized religious and national consciousness. It was an elitist program, breaking with the populism of the old intelligentsia, rehabilitating independent creativity and emphasizing the transcendental dimension of culture. I was inspired by the so-called religious-philosophical renaissance – the major ideological trend of the Silver Age of Russian culture.

The turn of the first and the second decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century discussed at the end of this book was thus a vitally important caesura in the history of Russian thought. From that moment, Russian culture has been marked by a dramatic dualism, the culture of the intellectual elite standing apart from the culture of revolutionary Russia.<sup>9</sup> After the October Revolution, these two

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8 See W. Rydzewski, “Syndrom rosyjskiej idei,” *Archiwum Historii Filozofii i Myśli Społecznej*, No 43, 1998, p. 115.

9 Cf. I.V. Kondakov, *Vvedeniie v istoriju russkoi kultury*, Moscow 1994, Ch. IX and X. This cultural dualism is reflected in synthetic discussions of the history of Russian philosophy. Soviet books used to utterly marginalize, or even eliminate, the idealist-religious trend, while the syntheses published in exile marginalized the trend of secular

cultures split definitively –symbolically manifested in the expulsion of idealist philosophers from Soviet Russia in 1922. Following that incident, the culture of the Russian religious-philosophical renaissance was continued only in the diaspora, while the culture of revolutionary Russia, left prey to an ideocratic dictatorship, became self-destructive or primitively degraded.

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The original version of the present book included seventeen chapters – the present one has twenty-three.

To help the Reader find his way in the contents, I have divided them into five sections, defined by chronology and subject matter. I hope this is a clear division which requires no comment.

Five of the twenty-three chapters of this book are entirely new: Chapter 15 concerning Chicherin; Chapter 20 discussing metaphysical idealism, including a detailed presentation of Leo Lopatin's and Sergei Trubetskoi's philosophies; as well as the three final chapters, 21, 22, 23, which concern the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There are also some new sub-chapters: Part 1 of Chapter 1 which deals with the paradoxes of Westernization); Parts 1-2 of Chapter 3 on the concepts of international order and liberalism in the times of Alexander I; Part 2 of Chapter 4 on the anti-philosophical crusade; Part 4 of Chapter 5 detailing the religious Westernism of Ivan Gagarin and Vladimir Pecherin; Parts 5-6 of Chapter 6 on the ideology of "official nationality" and the imperialist utopia of Tutchev; Part 5 of Chapter 9 which deals with Pamfil Yurkevich and Fedor Bukharev; Part 5 of chapter 13 on Nikolai Chaikovsky and Godmanhood; Parts 4, 5, 7 and 11 of chapter 18 related to the ecumenical and theocratic ideas of Soloviev, his philosophy of law and his place in the intellectual history of Russia; and lastly, Parts 5-6 of chapter 19 on the beginnings of the anti-Positivist breakthrough and the theological anthropologism of Nesmelov. All the remaining parts of the book

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radicalism, which made them useless for understanding of the genesis of the Russian Revolution. This is quite strikingly evident in the aforementioned (see footnote 4) book by Lossky; a subtler approach was that of V. Zenkovsky (*A History of Russian Philosophy*, London 1953) who described the secular radicals as subconsciously religious thinkers with close links to Orthodox Christianity. It is worth noting that the eminent British historian of philosophy F.C. Copleston (a Jesuit and admirer of Russian religious philosophy) found such a biased approach unacceptable. See F.C. Copleston, *Philosophy in Russia. From Herzen to Lenin and Berdyaev*, Notre Dame, In., 1986, p. VII. On that point, W. Goerdts's *Russische Philosophie. Zugänge und Durchblicke* (Freiburg-München 1984) totally marginalizes Russian Marxism, devoting a mere couple of pages to it.

have been re-edited, introducing a number of important changes and additions. New footnotes have been supplied, naming the most important books on the subject published since the appearance of the book in its first English edition in 1979.

*Andrzej Walicki*  
*Granger, Indiana, August 2004*

## **Part I**

### **From the Enlightenment to Romanticism**



# Chapter 1

## Trends and Tendencies in Enlightenment Thought

The development of Enlightenment thought in Russia was extended over several decades. Tracing its genesis requires reaching back to the reforms of Peter the Great which had transformed the Muscovite Empire into a Europeanized, Imperial Russia. Among Peter's closest collaborators were people representing the rationalist culture of the early Enlightenment, such as Teophan Prokopovich (1681-1736), an eminent Church activist and alumnus of the Kiev Academy, and Vasili Tatishchev (1686-1750), a historian and economic activist. Most historians, however, locate the beginning of a mature Enlightenment in Russia as late as the second-half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, marked by the ascendance to the throne of Catherine II (1762-1796).<sup>1</sup>

One of the main objectives of Peter I's reforms was to modernize the state as fast and as effectively as possible – in the military, administrative and technological senses. The reformer Tsar did not intend to introduce any new political doctrine in public life – being of a utilitarian frame of mind, he ignored abstract ideas and was not fully aware of the long-term consequences of his own reforms. During his tour of Europe from 1697-1698, he mastered the art of sailing and shipbuilding, as well as such trades as that of a cobbler, barber and dentist. Talking with Patriarch Adrian (in 1700) about the necessity of changes at the Moscow Slavic-Greco-Latin Academy, he entirely omitted religious questions. He just proposed eliminating theology and philosophy from the Academy schedule and instead introducing applied sciences such as medicine, military science, administration and civil engineering.

Recognizing the primacy of practical issues over the theoretical and ideological ones was also typical of Peter I's collaborators and those who sought to further his activity. As Plekhanov has rightly observed, they had viewed the

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1 Some scholars believe that the Enlightenment started in Russia as early as ca. 1740. The view is justified from the point of view of the history of literature, but from the perspective of the history of philosophy, a more apt date seems to be the beginning of the reign of Catherine II.

Enlightenment “from the angle of immediate practical profits.”<sup>2</sup> Alien to their general outlook was the idea of indispensable fundamental changes in the political and social system. They fervently believed in the “Mosaic rod” of autocracy and its civilizing mission of waking up the nation and driving it toward enlightenment and progress. The conviction was fully shared by Mikhail Lomonosov (1711-1765), a tremendous Russian scholar, poet and theorist of literature, as well as co-founder of Moscow University (established in 1755).

During the reign of Catherine II, the situation underwent a fundamental change. Enlightened public opinion gained independence, separating itself from the opinions of enlightened court circles. There came the time for a critical reflection on the civilizing and moral effects – as well as further prospects – of Europeanization. As moral sensitivity increased, more evil was observed in current reality and the reactions to it were more acute; the awakened thought began to look for reasons for the evil in the theretofore unquestioned foundations of the social system and state administration structures. Thus, the germs of a modern political opposition emerged in Russia, which naturally cooled the reforming zeal of the enlightened autocracy and made it embark on a road of repressions, creating steadily growing discord between the authorities and the intellectual elites of the country.

## **Introductory Remarks: The Paradoxes of Westernization**

It is not the objective of the present book to present the history of Russian thought in the period between the rule of Peter I and that of Catherine II. Following the pre-Revolutionary tradition of Russian historiography which identified the history of Russian social thought with the history of the Russian intelligentsia,<sup>3</sup> I begin the proper narrative from the age of Catherine, since it is only then that the Russian intelligentsia emerged – chiefly in Freemason circles – as an intellectual elite independent from modernizing authorities and united by a common system of values and the sense of an emancipatory social mission. The emergence of this particular group marked the beginning of the history of an enquiry about Russian identity, the sense of the Russian past, the perspectives of Russia’s development and the content of Russia’s quest within universal history. This was the set of issues that shaped Russian intellectual history of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, determining its continuity and thematic coherence.

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2 G. Plekhanov, *Historia rosyjskiej myśli społecznej*, vol. I, Warsaw 1966, p. 316.

3 Cf. R. V. Ivanov-Razumnik, *Istoriia russkoi obshchestvennoi mysli*, 1st edition, 1907.



The present introductory remarks do not aspire to encompass the history of early Enlightenment Russian thought. They are sketchy and purposefully selective. Their aim is to introduce the reader into the process of intellectual and cultural changes which resulted in transforming the Moscow autocracy into a form of modern absolutism. Considering the powerful influence of foreign – Western – patterns, the specific character of the process has been known as Westernization.

Contemporary studies on the subject furnish that term, once unquestionable, with numerous restrictions. An influential interpretation of the Russian historical process, termed “essentialist”<sup>4</sup> by its opponents, argues that Peter’s reforms in Russia were by no means a “new beginning” inaugurating the introduction of the tsarist state to Europe, since despite a superficial Europeanization, Russia had remained a world apart, essentially different from Europe.

Arguments in support of the theory, broadly developed by Richard Pipes,<sup>5</sup> stress the fact that the Russian autocracy – unlike Western absolute monarchies – was not restricted by private property (in the Roman sense of the term) preventing political authorities from interfering with the sphere of ownership relations. A Russian autocrat’s power was total, its scope encompassing the whole of social life. Social classes in Russia were not legally granted corporative autonomy, while land ownership existed only in conditional form, depending on the fulfillment of particular duties for the benefit of the state. In reference to the gentry, it was a duty and an obligation to serve in the army or become a civil servant at locations indicated by the monarch, which made it impossible to create strong corporative ties of the territorial type. In return for the reduction to the status of “service people,” the gentry enjoyed a right to exploit the labor of the peasants on their lands and to wield their own jurisdiction over the peasants. The particular character of this state of affairs has been described by the representatives of the so-called state school of Russian historiography, who explain its genesis as the result of a specific combination of geographical and historical circumstances (vast areas and invasions by the steppe tribes having created a necessity for centralization and strict control of the dispersed population). Pipes draws the conclusion that the system of the

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4 Criticism of “essentialism” as a theory of the “radical otherness” of Russia has been strongly expressed by Martin Malia in his book, *Russia Under Western Eyes. From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum*, Cambridge, Mass. 1999. He mentions the book by Jan Kucharzewski, *Od białego caratu do czerwonego* (7 volumes, Warsaw 1926-1933) as classical for the theory which is now being supported chiefly by R. Pipes (cf. Malia, op. cit., pp. 437-438).

5 See R. Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, London 1974.

Muscovite Empire can be defined as “patrimonial,” i.e., one in which the entire country was being treated as the patrimonial property of its ruler. The estates in this system were organized top-down and did not represent a social force independent from the government. Nor could there exist independent legal institutions such as the French “parliaments” with hereditary judges. A strong, centralized state authority claimed the role of the solitary subject of social life.

The reforms of Peter I did not change this system of general dependence. Indeed, they strengthened and legally regulated the serfdom of peasants, while the gentry were, more than ever, subjected to the State. The Table of Ranks (introduced in 1722 and binding until the downfall of the Russian monarchy) made nobility formally dependent on a specific rank in the military or civil service, while at the same time it opened access to the service for people unable to prove their “noble descent.” The abolition of the patriarchy and its substitution by a state office called “The Holiest Synod,” along with appointing the Emperor as the formal head of the Church, additionally increased the omnipotence of the State – in keeping with the inner logic of “patrimonialism.” Viewed from this perspective, Peter’s reforms could indeed be said to have deepened the differences between Russian autocracy and European absolutism, continuing the “totalitarian” tendencies of the Orthodox Muscovite Empire.<sup>6</sup>

And yet, such a generalization would have been a serious mistake, for at least four reasons, each of which deserves a separate brief discussion in the present book. Firstly, it is not true that Peter I was merely a pragmatic utilitarian without any overall vision of his own transformations. Pavel Milyukov and other left-wing historians of Peter’s reforms were certainly right when they argued that the reforms – which strengthened autocracy and serfdom – could not have resulted in political and social emancipation.<sup>7</sup> Emphasis on this – indeed, obvious – fact must have been necessary in the period of struggle for the delegitimization of autocracy – but it can hardly be ignored that the reverse side of that attitude was a certain undervaluation of the *civilizing* aspect of Peter’s achievements. In this respect the reformer Tsar – rather than a mere cautious pragmatist – became a proper “revolutionary on the throne” (Herzen’s words),

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6 In his book that is today considered a classic, *Istoki i smysl russkogo komunizma* (Paris 1955, p. 10), Nikolai Berdiaev called the Muscovite Empire a “totalitarian state.” In the same book, Peter’s methods were defined as “utterly Bolshevik” (p. 12).

7 Milyukov elaborated on this opinion of Peter’s reforms in his dissertation, “Gosudarstvo Rossii v piervoi chetverti XVIII stoletia i reforma Petra Velikovo” (1892), as well as in *Ocherki po istorii russkoi kul'tury* (3 volumes, 1901). See N.V. Riasanovsky, *The Image of Peter the Great in Russian History and Thought*, New York-Oxford 1985, pp. 176-184.

phenomenally audacious in his war with Muscovite traditionalism and heading for Europe, not blindly but methodically, with the awareness of making a decisive civilization-bound choice. Even at the very beginning of his rule, he introduced a new calendar era, introducing Russia to European time: starting January 1, 1700, Russia began to count years not “from the beginning of the world” but from the birth of Christ, shifting the onset of the calendar year from September 1<sup>st</sup> to January 1<sup>st</sup>. The decreed reform of manners, forcing the gentry to shave off their beards and wear European clothes was, in turn, a symbolic introduction of Russia to European cultural space: overnight, Russian noblemen were transformed into Europeans due to a duties of service, but they identified with their new role without much resistance and surprisingly quickly. The crowning of these actions was the transfer (in 1709) of the state capital from Moscow to Petersburg – a city that had been built by Europeans and was entirely European, shifting Russia’s center of gravity toward European geographical space and opening a “window to the West” for it. In the light of these facts, uniform in their implication and truly spectacular as they seem, it is difficult to understand Pipes’ opinion that Peter had been interested mainly in the power of the State, “especially in the military, rather than the Westernizing, power.”<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, Peter may not have been a political doctrinarian, but that is not to say that his reforms realized some partial objectives that were not part of an overall vision of a well-governed state. In fact, those reforms, initiated immediately after the Tsar’s return from his first journey abroad, encompassed the full scope of Russian life: administration, the army, economy, finance, education and the Church – and were meant to serve a comprehensively studied rationalization of the State, according to a clearly defined model of rationality. As Marc Raeff has pointed out, the most attractive and, at the same time, the easiest model for the Russians to follow was, according to Peter, the civilized “police state” [*Polizeistaat*], most perfectly represented by the Protestant German states.<sup>9</sup> The adjective “police” meant, in this context, the efficiency of a centralized, enlightened administration, actively promoting economic progress, while providing everyone with a minimum means of existence. In the small German principalities, it took on the form of a paternalist rationing of life – a detailed rationing, including not only education, building industry and health care, but also the dress code and the consumption of food. At the same time, however, this paternalist authoritarianism was combined with a chamber-style economic policy attempting to modernize the economy with fiscal-

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8 See R. Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, p. 128.

9 See M. Raeff, *The Well-Ordered Police State: Social and Institutional Change Through Law in the Germanies and Russia, 1600-1800*, New Haven, Conn. 1993.

administrative methods. From the point of view of economic development, it was thus a version of mercantilist policy that was typical at that time of all the absolutist monarchies of Europe. Whatever may be said about it from the perspective of future free-market liberalism, it had been in its time a policy of active social modernization. And, obviously, it was doubly attractive to backward countries that did not have a strong class of private owners and were thus forced to catch up with civilization with the help of state intervention.

Thirdly, the limitations of individual freedom in the conditions of a modernizing autocracy must not be confused with the profound anti-individualism of traditionalist societies. Contrary to popular stereotypes, state absolutism was an ally, rather than an enemy, of individualization, paving the way for the liberation of individuals from the tyranny of traditionalist collectivism. In an excellent analysis of this phenomenon, Michael Oakeshott argues that individual freedom requires political authority endowed with three attributes: (1) it must be a homogeneous and supreme authority, since only the concentration of authority in a single center allows an individual to escape from the communal pressure of the family, the guild, the Church and the local community; (2) it must be a sovereign authority, unbound by the common prescription and thus able to cancel old laws and create new ones; and (3) it must be an authority powerful enough to secure order, but not so powerful as to become a real threat to individuals.<sup>10</sup>

Peter's autocracy fully embodied the two former attributes, at least partly representing the third one. In comparison with the all-powerful collectivist traditions and religious rituals characteristic of social life in Muscovite Russia whose omnipresent power had been felt every day and every hour – the omnipotence of a centralized political authority, enabling individuals to break out from the power of local communities and opening the roads to state careers based on rational and meritocratic criteria, was perceived as a colossal broadening of the scope of individual freedom. In fact, the bureaucratic centralization of state authority restricted an emancipated individual to a much lesser degree than did the rigorous discipline of religious rituals, continuous fasts and traditional conventions restraining freedom in all public and private spheres of life.

Fourthly and lastly (a fact mentioned by Pipes, among others), Peter's reforms resulted in replacing the patrimonial idea of the state (as the monarch's property) with the idea of the state as a public good [*bien public*], all-national and, therefore, separate from and superior to the monarch. Peter was the first

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10 M. Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, new edition, Indianapolis 1991, pp. 368-369.

Russian emperor to treat himself as a servant of the state; he claimed “public good” to be the objective of his actions and referred to this objective in his decrees – he even introduced the custom of publicly explaining his own actions in the Government newspaper.<sup>11</sup> Peter’s closest collaborator, Teophan Prokopovich – head of the Holyest Synod since 1721 – justified in his writings the idea of “monocracy” in the service of “public good” [*obshchee blago*] as an authority that could oppose any particularity, including particular interests of the Church, in the name of the national interest identified with the good of the whole population. An analogous idea was developed by Vasilii Tatishchev who, in his five-volume history of Russia (written 1727-1739), argued that in a country of vast territory and open borders, an efficient defense of the public good could be secured only by a monarchy.<sup>12</sup> Both thinkers referred in their arguments to Western theoreticians of natural law, especially to Grotius, Samuel Pufendorf and Christian Wolff. Tatishchev, more radical than Prokopovich, also comes up with a critique of Machiavelli and Hobbes as theoreticians justifying absolutism with the notions of struggle and force, rather than demonstrating it as a rational and moral aspiration to the public good.

The most serious argument against the authenticity of Russia’s Westernization is, of course, the fact that Peter I largely strengthened the autocratic power of the Russian Emperor, simultaneously widening its scope, which runs contrary to the assumed directions of political development in Europe. Some scholars believe that even the unconditional subjection of the Orthodox Church to the secular state authority, enacted with Peter’s *Spiritual Rationing* (1721), ought to be interpreted not so much as an act of secularization but, rather, a logical consequence of the Byzantium-style idea of making the Tsar a superior of the Church (in support of the thesis, Prokopovich’s *Rozisk o pontifiexsie*, 1721, has been quoted).<sup>13</sup> An even more important extension of Tsarist power was, however, its endowment with the mandate to enact progress by force. Following the French Revolution, this provoked association with a revolutionary dictatorship, rather than a normal absolutism – Herzen saw Peter as a “crowned revolutionary,” while the next century brought a widespread analogy between the reformist activism of Peter I and the Bolshevik Revolution.

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11 Cf. R. Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime*, pp. 128-120. *Vedomosti*, published since 1703, was the first Russian newspaper.

12 See S.V. Utechin, *Russian Political Thought. A Concise History*, New York-London 1964, pp. 48-51.

13 See Boris A. Uspensky, Victor M. Zhivov, *Car i bóg. Semiotyczne aspekty sakralizacji monarchy w Rosji* [Tsar and God. Semiotic Aspects of the Monarch’s Sacralization in Russia], Warsaw 1992, pp. 64-65.

There is, undoubtedly, much truth in these observations. However, it must not be forgotten that the activist concept of wielding power was typical, to a various extent, of many European absolute monarchies of the 18<sup>th</sup> century – especially those that had to face the problem of backwardness. Suffice it to name (following Raeff) the German “police states” or the Hapsburg monarchy under Joseph II. The Moscow autocracy cannot be accused of a tendency to legitimize violence with the idea of progress. Instead, the idea of state modernization became, thanks to Peter, an important element of the legitimizing ideology of the Russian monarchy.

Peter’s decree on the succession to the throne (1722) abandoned the principle of an automatic inheritance of the throne according the order of primogeniture, replacing it with the selection of a suitable candidate (from amongst the persons related or attached to the Romanovs) on the merit of his “ability” to continue the reforms. Thus, the dynastic justification of power gave way to a theological legitimation.<sup>14</sup> The latter was elaborated on by Teophan Prokopovich in his essay, *The Truth of the Monarch’s Will* (1722), with references to “people’s will” and the idea of a social contract. The importance of the essay is proven by the fact that it was printed in 1200 copies – a record-breaking circulation in those times.

The authority’s commitment to enact progress defined as common good was thus officially recognized. Combined with the notion of the State as a public good separate from the person of the monarch, this legitimizing principle must have induced the idea of civic responsibility for the State. Peter’s collaborators thus faced the problem of reconciling the enlightened autocracy to civic participation. Tatishchev tried to solve this problem with his project of state reform submitted in 1730 to Empress Anna Ivanovna in response to an attempt to limit her power by the aristocratic oligarchs of the Supreme Secret Council. The project proposed a participating monarchy and obliged the ruler to consult the Higher Chamber of 27 men performing legislative and administrative functions, as well as the Lower Chamber of 100 members representing the interests of the gentry, the merchants and the religious. In view of the Empress’ conflict with the Supreme Secret Council, the project clearly supported monarchy against oligarchic constitutionalism. It must be emphasized, however, that both sides of the conflict were fully in favor of accepting the Western model of Russia’s development. The “conditions” presented to Empress Anne by the Supreme Council of Six had nothing to do with the “old-boyar” criticism of Peter’s reforms – they did not mention the 17<sup>th</sup> century Land Counsels or an

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14 See Cynthis Hyla Whittaker, *Russian Monarchy. Eighteenth-century Rulers and Writers in Political Dialogue*, Dekalb 2003, p. 59.

appeal to religious feelings, nor did they demand resurrection of the patriarchate or a ban on the process of secularization. The Council's leading ideologist, Prince Dmitri Golitsyn (1663-1737), descendant of Grand Duke Giedymis of Lithuania, was a model Enlightenment man, citing Sweden as an example to be followed by Russia, i.e., proposing an alternative model of Westernization.<sup>15</sup>

Contrary to a widespread opinion expressed in publications on the subject, the failure of the Supreme Secret Council oligarchs did not mean a return of a Peter-style model of unlimited absolute power. Quite the opposite: Empress Anne (just like her predecessor, Catherine I, Peter's plebeian wife who – from the dynastic point of view – held no claim to the throne) had taken power as a result of an election and recognized the election principle. Election by the political elite made up of the Governing Senate (12 men), the Holiest Synod (12 men) and the generals (some 200 officers), and reinforced with the acceptance by the highest civil servants and the gentry (guards regiments included) currently present in the State capital, came to be recognized as a necessary condition of a monarch's legality. An equally important requirement was that power be wielded in a consensual way, free of the arbitrariness and unpredictability that were characteristic of despotic rule. During the age of Catherine, the recommended model took on the shape of a Montesquieu-type doctrine of the supremacy of law being a guarantee of security, both personal and that of possession. Drastic violations of those rules were, in the eyes of the political elite, ample reason for depriving a monarch of power, or even of life. Organizers of court putsches could thus believe themselves to be executors of the law and count on the general acceptance of their actions.<sup>16</sup>

In the light of the abovementioned facts, the thesis postulating an unbroken continuity between the Muscovite Tsarist State and the post-Peter Russian Empire seems unsupported. More arguments for a lack of continuity between the old and the new Russia are supplied by the reception of Peter's reforms in the West. Western diplomats and travelers saw Orthodox Muscovite Russia as an exotic country, no less alien to Europe than Muslim Turkey. Thanks to the impetus of Peter's reforms, observed at close quarters by Peter's Western advisers, Russia gradually came to be perceived as a suitable ground for creating an ideal Kingdom of Reason, with its Emperor as "a new Solon." Leibniz – who met Peter twice and prepared for him the project of the Russian Academy of

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15 See Isabel de Madariaga, "Portrait of an Eighteenth-Century Russian Statesman: Prince Dimitri Mikhailovich Golitsyn," *Slavonic and East-European Review*, vol. 62, No 1, January 1984 (reprinted in: *Imperial Russian History*, vol. I: 1700-1861, G.M. Hamburg ed., New York-London 1996, pp. 82-106).

16 See C.H. Whittaker, *Russian Monarchy*, p. 63.

Science (founded in 1721) – argued that the new Russia, having completely destroyed its old barbarian institutions, had become an “unwritten chart,” a virgin country where an enlightened monarch might create an ideal society following the principles of *la republique des lettres*. He even completed the vision with a hope that a renewed Russia would fulfill the ecumenical mission of uniting all Christian denominations in a single Church.<sup>17</sup>

Russia’s prestige increased even more due to its successes in the military field. Following the Battle of Poltava (1709) and the victorious finale of the Great War of the North (with the Nystadt Treaty of August 30<sup>th</sup>, 1721), Russia became one of the pillars of the “European superpower concerto.” Voltaire in his *Historie de Charles XII, roi de Suede*, published 1731, portrayed the war between Charles XII and Peter I as a combat of a traditional versus an enlightened monarchy, the latter representing human civilization in general.<sup>18</sup> Years later, he praised the achievements of the Russian Empire in *Anecdotes about Peter the Great* (1748). Finally, having gained a reputation as an expert on the subject, he wrote the two-volume *Historie de l’empire de Russie sous Pierre le Grand* (1759-1763), commissioned by Peter’s daughter, Empress Elizabeth. In that book, the creation of Peter’s Empire was described as an extraordinary, unprecedented extension of European civilization – “the greatest breakthrough in the life of Europe since the discovery of the New World.”<sup>19</sup>

Voltaire was neither unique, nor even the first, in his enthusiasm for the reformer Tsar. He had been preceded by philosopher and critic Bernard de Fontenelle, Secretary of the French Academy of Science and author of *The Praise of Peter I*, written for the Tsar’s visit to France in 1717. In his opinion, Peter was the greatest and most creative emperor in world history for having raised his country from utter barbarianism and adjoining it to civilization. Similar opinions were held by René d’Argenson, a French politician and friend of the Encyclopedists.<sup>20</sup>

The enthusiasm surrounding Peter’s achievements had a deep philosophical justification: the successes of Russia’s Emperor seemed to be unquestionable proof of the miracle-working power of rational legislation enacted by enlightened absolutism. A somewhat different view was held by Montesquieu, a thinker who advised respect for the continuity of development and introduced

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17 See Liselotte Richter, *Leibniz und sein Russlandbild*, Berlin 1946. Cf. M. Malia, *Russia Under Western Eyes*, pp. 46-47.

18 See M. Malia, *op.cit.*, p. 42.

19 Voltaire, *Historie de l’empire de Russie sous Pierre le Grand*, vol. I, pp. 1-2.

20 See Dimitri S. von Mohrenschildt, *Russia in the Intellectual Life of Eighteenth-Century France*, New York 1936, pp. 236-239.



the notion of “national spirit,” emphasizing the importance of “mediating bodies” as a factor restricting the arbitrariness of power. In *The Spirit of Laws*, in a chapter entitled “What are the Natural Means of Altering the Manners and Customs of a Nation,” he wrote:

Thus, when a Prince would make great alterations in his kingdom, he should reform by law what is established by law, and change by custom what is settled by custom; for it is very bad policy to change by law what ought to be changed by custom.

The laws which obliged the Muscovites to cut off their beards and to shorten their cloaths, and the rigour with which Peter I made them crop, even to their knees, the long cloaks of those who entered into the cities, were instances of tyranny. There are means that may be made use of to prevent crimes, these are punishments; there are those for changing our customs, these are examples.

The facility and ease with which the nation has been polished plainly shew that this prince had a worse opinion of his people than they deserved; and that they were not brutes, though he was pleased to call them so. The violent measures which he employed were needless; he would have attained his end as well by milder methods.<sup>21</sup>

Yet another opinion was formulated by the ideologists of the republican wing of the French Enlightenment – Rousseau and Mably. The former, in a famous fragment of *Contract social* (the one that provoked a violent protest and a replica by Voltaire),<sup>22</sup> vehemently criticized both the Russians and their Tsar, as well as the French Enlightenment methods of education, writing:

Russia will never be really civilized, because it was civilized too soon. Peter had a genius for imitation; but he lacked true genius, which is creative and makes all from nothing. He did some good things, but most of what he did was out of place. He saw that his people was barbarous but did not see that they were not ripe for civilization: he wanted to civilize them when they needed only hardening. His first wish was to make Germans or Englishmen, when he ought to have been making Russians; and he prevented his subjects from ever becoming what they might have been by persuading them that they were what they are not. In this fashion too, a French teacher turns out his pupil to be an infant prodigy, and for the rest of his life to be nothing whatsoever.<sup>23</sup>

Abbé Mably, an implacable opponent of all forms of monarchic absolutism, proved to be even more consistent, declaring that despotism as such was by nature incapable of doing good and so, the Western “enlightened” monarchism,

21 *The Complete Works of M. de Montesquieu, vol. 1 The Spirit of Laws*, Book XIX, Chapter XIV, London 1777.

22 Cf. Mohrenschildt, *Russia*, p. 241.

23 *The Social Contract and Discourses* by Jean Jacques Rousseau, translated with an introduction by G.D.H. Cole, London and Toronto 1923, Ch. VIII.

being in fact a variation of despotism, should not be treated as a model to be followed by anyone. Therefore, he addressed the Russians as follows: “Perhaps you have done Europe too great an honor by making it a model for yourselves.”<sup>24</sup>

Evidently, the post-Peter Russia became not only an object of admiration for Western Enlightenment thought, but also its intellectual problem of sorts. As we shall see, 18<sup>th</sup> century Russian thought also evolved toward an ever clearer recognition of the complexity and the problematic nature of Peter’s reforms. Putting it as briefly as possible, it was an evolution from an uncritical acceptance of the reforms (Teophan Prokopovich) to an attitude closer to that of Montesquieu, i.e., accepting Westernization, while at the same time postulating autonomy of social forces and cultivation of the national factors of development. The most radical representative of the Russian Enlightenment, Alexander Radishchev, did not hesitate to draw republican conclusions from Enlightenment philosophy. In doing so, he referred to Mably – yet, he remained most respectful toward the autocratic reformer of Russia, declaring his loyalty to the Western ideals of freedom.

The moving factor behind that evolution of thought, which mobilized social forces at the cost of the arbitrary power of the modernizing autocracy, was the shaping of a new national consciousness and – closely related – an increasing need for personal freedom among the educated, Europeanized gentry.

That national consciousness did not evolve from the “old-boyar” opposition toward Westernization, nor did it attempt to invoke it. Rather than by a need to defend the old customs and the traditional deposit of faith, it was spurred by a negative reaction to the endemic rule of foreigners in the reformed Russia. During the succession crisis of 1730, an important role was played by the guards attacking foreigners in officer ranks in the name of Emperor Peter.<sup>25</sup> During the reign of Anne Ivanovna, who was closely related to the German aristocracy of the Baltic region, an object of especially violent hatred became her all-powerful favorite, Ernst Biron [Beuhren] who, while having no official function, influenced all the decisions of the Empress. The “anti-Bironist” opposition, which revolved around Artemy Volynsky (supported, among others, by Tatishchev), promoted the interests of the gentry who wanted to increase their own influence on state policy by removing the oligarchs from power, especially

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24 Cf. Mohrenschildt, *Russia*, p. 244 [transl. J.K.].

25 Cf. Hans Rogger, *National Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century Russia*. Cambridge, Mass. 1960, p. 32.

the dominant German clique.<sup>26</sup> Volynsky was brutally executed, and yet, in spite of that, the war between the “national” party and the “German” party continued throughout Anne’s rule and terminated in the victory of the former. Thanks to the support of the Guards, Anne was succeeded (in November, 1741) by Peter’s granddaughter, Elizabeth, whom the German oligarchs had tried to eliminate from power. The new Empress’ initial decision was to get rid of the hated foreigners in Russian service. The military, Orthodox clergy and poets (Lomonosov amongst them) welcomed this as the liberation of Russia from a foreign yoke.<sup>27</sup>

The struggle, however, was not yet over – partly because, being the granddaughter of Peter I, Elizaveta Petrovna could afford to remain independent from the victorious party. A group of “Russian Germans” (as Herzen called them)<sup>28</sup> did retain meaningful influence in court circles – strong enough to make possible a renaissance of “Bironism” during the short reign of Elizabeth’s successor, Peter III (December, 1761 – June, 1762). Marked by some clearly psychopathic characteristics, this ruler despised all things Russian in an ostentatious and provocative way; he adored Frederic the Great, openly admired Lutheranism, ridiculed Orthodoxy and was even close to ordering the Orthodox clergy to shave off their beards and start dressing as foreign priests did.<sup>29</sup> No wonder he provoked the Guards to organize a new palace revolution which brought to the throne Peter III’s wife, Catherine. According to the gentry’s expectation, she began her rule – as Catherine II – by publicly cutting herself off from her husband, in the name of defending the Orthodox faith and national values.

In the cultural sphere, the shaping of a modern national consciousness manifested itself above all as a struggle for secularization of the literary language. To realize what great progress was made since the age of Peter I, it suffices to note the fact that Russia’s great reformer was absolutely unaware of the importance of the language question – insomuch that at a certain point he even considered making Dutch the official language of the Russian elite.<sup>30</sup> But

26 Notably, the Russian gentry referred to itself by the name *shlakhietstvo* [nobility]. This implies that its meaningful model, in striving to gain corporative privileges was, among others, the Polish nobility.

27 H. Rogger, *National Consciousness*, p. 30.

28 Cf. Herzen’s passionate article, “Russian Germans and German Russians,” of 1859. Herzen acutely criticized in it the “Byron-type,” arguing that “of all the Germans at the helm of the rule, the Russian ones are, of course, the worst” (p. 403).

29 Cf. H. Rogger, *National Consciousness*, p. 36.

30 Cf. N.V. Riasanovsky, *A Parting of Ways. Government and the Educated Public in Russia 1801-1855*, Oxford 1976, p. 24.

Mikhail Lomonosov, called “Peter the Great of Russian literature” by Vissarion Belinsky, understood perfectly the necessity of a linguistic nationalism, i.e., a conscious striving to create a language that would respond to the needs of a secularized Russia. In his original theory of “three styles,” he attempted to resolve the task, combining the modernizing priorities of the state with the defense of national identity against foreign influence: “low” and “middle” *secularized* styles were to serve modernization, while “high” style would be used for expressing lofty patriotic feelings and would retain old-Slavic archaisms as a barrier against “foreignness.”<sup>31</sup>

Understandably, the Russian gentry’s endeavor to vindicate national values and thus increase their own influence in the state was combined with aspirations to corporative autonomy and personal freedom. The pressure of those aspirations, expressed timidly but consistently, resulted in the “Manifesto on the Liberty of the Gentry” published in 1762 (during the reign of Peter III) – a document which abolished obligatory state service and thus made the gentry unconditional owners of their own lands. In addition to that, the gentry were now exempt from corporal punishment and granted the right to travel abroad. From that moment on, the post-Peter autocracy took on the features of a gentry-monarchy.

As Marc Raeff has pointed out, freedom from the obligation to serve did not involve a mass abandonment of service by the gentry elites. Owing to the idea of “public good,” state service had been associated with an active participation in public life, and thus with the possibility to live a life endowed with a purpose and an aim, as opposed to a passive, isolated vegetation in a country estate.<sup>32</sup>

A “man in service” enjoyed social prestige and a sense of his own worthiness. The service ethos could be interpreted idealistically – as an ethos of duty toward the homeland. In this sense, even in the times of Peter I, the patriotically committed “men of service” became distant precursors of the socially-minded intelligentsia, self-defined as a class uniquely endowed with a mission for the benefit of the people.<sup>33</sup> The ethos of patriotic service was very well expressed by the ideology of natural law in its Protestant-German version, emphasizing vocation [*Berufung*], obligation and social responsibility, rather than the rights of the individual. Being perfectly aware of this fact, Peter I commissioned a translation of Pufendorf’s works into Russian. The domination of German influences continued for several decades, although it was French that

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31 See D. Blagoy, *Istoria russkoi literatury XVIII veka*, M. 1946.

32 M. Raeff, *Origins of the Intelligentsia. The Eighteenth-Century Nobility*, New York 1966, p. 32.

33 *Ibid.*, pp. 168-171.

became the language of the Russian elites during the reign of Elizabeth. However, under Catherine II, Russian intellectual life fell under the powerful influence of French Enlightenment philosophy.

## Catherine II and Enlightenment Philosophy

The Protestant German interpretation of natural law expressed very well the ethos of patriotic service since it placed an emphasis not on individual rights, but on one's calling (*Berufung*), duty and social responsibility. Peter I understood this perfectly, which is why he commissioned a Russian translation of Pufendorf. The domination of the German influence continued for some decades, even though the French language was adopted by the Russian elites during Elizabeth's reign. During the times of Catherine II, however, Russian intellectual life came increasingly to be influenced by French Enlightenment thought.

The Empress herself initially encouraged the influx of French thought. What is more, she even attempted to use French Enlightenment philosophy as a tool in her own home and foreign policies.<sup>34</sup> She hoped to stimulate an intellectual movement that she would be able to steer from above, retaining the initiative in her own hands. Catherine has been called one of the "Philosophic Monarchs," although this is perhaps too flattering a description of her. Voltaire wrote in a letter to d'Alembert that "pupils such as our beautiful Catho bring little credit to philosophy." Nevertheless, Catherine should not be overlooked in an account of the history of Russian philosophy. One might even say that her role was vital, not because of her own contribution but because all the more prominent Russian thinkers of her time had to pay attention to her ideas and carried on open or camouflaged discussions with her.

What appealed to Catherine's ambitious nature was the vision of an "enlightened monarch" who would use his or her authority to change the hitherto "irrational" course of history. She was urged on by a boundless desire for fame and a wish to astonish the world; at the same time she appeared to have a greater chance than other rulers to make her vision come true. She was a foreigner (a member of the ruling house of the petty German principality of Anhalt-Zerbst) and thus was not held back by any prejudices in favor of or against her new home. Formally, at least, she had absolute power; moreover, she

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34 This is discussed in detail in P. N. Miliukov, *Ocherki po istorii russkoi kultury* (St. Petersburg, 1901), vol. 3. See also G. Makogonenko, *Novikov i russkoe prosveshchenie XVII veka* (Moscow – Leningrad [henceforth "M – L"] 1951), chap. 4.

was in command of a country where ancient traditions that might have proved an obstacle to the rational will of an enlightened ruler had been overturned or undermined by the violent reforms of Peter the Great. Diderot laid special stress on this latter circumstance. In his memorial to Catherine, entitled *Essai historique sur la Police*, he declared that it was impossible to reform existing legislation in France because it was too strongly bound up with traditional property relations, whereas in Russia “Your Imperial Highness is fortunate in being able to undertake everything and fortunate in desiring only good.” Diderot saw the Russia of Peter the Great as an emerging society unhampered by ancient petrified traditions and therefore particularly pliant material to the creative will of a wise legislator. “How happy is the nation where nothing has as yet been done!”<sup>35</sup>

On coming to power, Catherine entered into a lively correspondence with the French encyclopedists (Voltaire, Diderot, and M. Grimm). She referred to herself as their pupil and promised to realize their aims. In view of the difficulties the *Encyclopedic* was facing in France, she even offered to have further volumes published in Russia. This found an enthusiastic response in the “Philosophers’ Republic.” In a letter to Diderot, Voltaire wrote: “What astonishing times we live in! France persecutes philosophy and the Scythians offer it their protection.” Catherine tried to give the impression that she was essentially a republican and was aiming at the gradual abolition of despotism. She even tried to get in touch with so radical a thinker as Rousseau and invited him to Russia. Rousseau accepted neither the invitation nor the offer of a hundred thousand rubles, which he called an attempt by the “Russian tyrant” to defile his name in the eyes of posterity. Other Enlightenment philosophers, however, were suitably impressed by Catherine’s gestures. Writing to Voltaire, Diderot said she combined “the soul of Brutus with the charm of Cleopatra,” and in a letter to Catherine herself he declared: “Mighty Empress, I prostrate myself at your feet, I stretch out my hands toward You; I should like to speak to you, but my heart is convulsed, my head swims, my thoughts are confused, I am moved like a child.”

As a further step in her campaign to gain the reputation of an “enlightened monarch,” Catherine undertook to introduce important legislative changes. In

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35 Quoted in Plekhanov, *Istoriia russkoi [...] mysli*, p. 144. Plekhanov quoted D. Fonvizin as writing: “If they began to live earlier here, then we at least – in commencing our lives – can choose any form we wish, and avoid those inconveniences and evils which have taken root here. Nous commençons et ils finissent.” The idea of the “privilege of backwardness” was later taken up by Chaadaev, as well as by Herzen, Chernyshevsky, and the Populists.

1767 she convened a Legislative Commission to codify new laws and herself drew up the *Instruction* to the Commission making liberal use of formulations borrowed from the writings of Montesquieu and Beccaria. She affirmed her belief in the Enlightenment theory of natural law and promised to turn Russia into a law-abiding state that would respect the natural rights of all men. “God forbid,” she declared, “that after the completion of these legislative measures, there should be even one nation in the world ruled more justly than Russia and therefore more prosperous. If that were so the intention of our legislation would not have been realized; I would not wish to live to see this misfortune.”

Doubt has been cast by a number of scholars, especially Soviet ones, on the sincerity of Catherine’s intentions; some went as far as suggesting that the *Instruction* was published in several languages mainly for foreign readers, while inside Russia Catherine prohibited its wider dissemination. In reality, however, it would be more legitimate to charge the Empress with exaggerated propagation of her work: the *Instruction* had eight editions in Russia; it was read out at Legislative Commission meetings on a monthly basis, with more than fifty copies distributed to various offices, one received by each provincial chancellery. In the following year, 1768, the Senate instructed all offices to read the *Instruction* aloud, in its entirety, at least three times in a year.<sup>36</sup> Interestingly enough, publication of the *Instruction* was banned in France, based on the monarch’s decision.

As regards a general assessment of the *Instruction*, the emphasis ought seemingly to be placed on a different, somewhat paradoxical fact: it was the Empress of Russia, the most autocratic state in Europe (as a broad concept), who turned out to be most consistent in rendering a declaration of solidarity with the rules of the Enlightenment’s legal and political philosophy.<sup>37</sup> R. W. Ivanov-Razumnik, a neo-*narodnik* (and thus, a left-oriented thinker), was completely right when he noted that Catherine’s *Instruction* was the first official proclamation of human rights, issued from the heights of the throne – not only in Russia alone, but in Europe as a whole.<sup>38</sup> Not only did it declare the servitude of the monarch toward his or her people, and equality under the law and freedom of individuals within the limits determined by the law: Article 346 stated that all

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36 See C.H. Whittaker, *Russian Monarchy*, p. 114.

37 Franco Venturi, the eminent Italian expert in the Enlightenment matters, has stressed this point quite powerfully; see F. Venturi, *Utopia and Reform in the Enlightenment*, Cambridge, 1971, p. 127.

38 R. W. Ivanov-Razumnik, *Istoriya russkoi obshchestvennoi mysli*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, vol. 1, Sankt-Petersburg, 1908, p. 26.

subjects had to have secured a defined minimum level of subsistence, with special focus of their health-related needs.<sup>39</sup>

The Legislative Commission consisted of 564 representatives of various estates, including over 100 delegates representing the state peasants. Yet the serfs, who made up over half the peasantry, were not represented. Their fate had been decided even before the Commission was set up. Soon after coming to the throne, Catherine had traveled widely throughout Russia and had received over 500 desperate petitions from peasants. The result was that in 1765 a law was passed forbidding peasants to make complaints against their masters. The gentry, on the other hand, were granted the right to punish their serfs by exiling them to Siberia.

In Pushkin's words, Catherine's Commission was only the "indecorous performance of a farce." Its deliberations turned into a collective hymn of praise to the Empress. Several delegates, however, dared to put forward ideas that went beyond the proposals in the *Instruction*: Y. Kozelsky made a bitter attack on the privileged position of the hereditary nobility; the merchants demanded an extension of their rights; and G. S. Korob'in, as well as a representative of the state peasants, I. Chuprov, went so far as to plead for the mitigation of serfdom by "reasonable and humane" legislation. Debates began to get out of control, and it is hardly surprising that Catherine used the outbreak of war with Turkey (in 1768) as a pretext for disbanding the Commission, which was not subsequently recalled.

There is also another side to this episode. The failure of the experiment with the Commission marked the defeat not only of the hypocritical despot but also of the "enlightened monarch." The public's attitude to the elections must have given rise to melancholy reflections: most of the electorate obviously thought of representative functions as a burden that everyone would try to avoid. There were instances of the most unpopular men being elected, and such delegates complained comically that they had been chosen "to spite them." The deliberations of the Commission and the detailed instructions the electors furnished to their delegates gave Catherine insights into the unvarnished reality of Russian life. No doubt they convinced her that it was by no means easy to ensure the happiness of mankind, that powerful particular interests stood on guard over the status quo, and that attempts to enact the humane precepts of Enlightenment philosophy were a highly fallible way of gaining popularity in a society where even the proposal to abolish torture in criminal investigations aroused intense opposition.

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39 Cf. N.V. Riasanovsky, *A Parting of Ways*, p. 17.



Catherine's flirtation with the French *philosophes* was not an easy relationship either; in fact only Grimm became something like an agent of the Russian Empress. Diderot, d'Alembert, and Voltaire (who at the time of the Commission had even compared her to Solon and Lycurgus) soon became disillusioned with their self-styled disciple. It is true that they continued to praise her, but only in order to retain at least some influence over her. That Catherine was not deceived by this stratagem is shown by one of her letters to Grimm, where she writes that "these men often said one thing and meant quite another." Her own attitude to the encyclopedists also became increasingly equivocal. Despite Diderot's insistent reminders and her own solemn assurances, the new revised edition of the *Encyclopedic* did not make an appearance in Russia.

Diderot himself visited Russia in 1773. His notes of the long conversations he had with Catherine during his five-month stay in St. Petersburg make fascinating reading.<sup>40</sup>

St. Petersburg made a depressing impression on Diderot: in this city of huge palaces and government buildings everything bore witness to the unlimited powers of autocracy; there were hardly any ordinary streets, no signs of any active, independent public life. "A long tradition of repression," he noted, "has resulted in a general atmosphere of reticence and distrust, a recollection of terror in the mind, as it were, that is in complete contrast to the noble openness characteristic of the free and self-confident mentality of the Frenchman or Englishman." Asking "Why is Russia governed worse than France?" Diderot answered: "Because individual freedom is reduced to zero here, the authority of one's superiors is still too great and the natural rights of man are as yet too restricted." He tried to persuade Catherine that there was just as much danger in a "just and enlightened despotism," since it encouraged the nation to fall into a "sweet but mortal sleep." "After three rulers such as Elizabeth, the English would have been subjugated painlessly for many years," Diderot told the Empress, who made an equivocal answer expressing agreement.

Asked by Diderot if there were any legal ordinances governing the relationship between the gentry and their peasants, Catherine could only reply that legal guarantees were unnecessary since "every farmer looks after the cow that provides him with milk." Diderot took pains to remind Catherine of her promise to recall the Legislative Commission, and even urged her to transform it into a permanent representative body. "Does that mean that you advise me to set up a parliament on the English model?," she asked him. He replied: "I believe it

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40 Published by J. M. Tourneux in *Diderot et Catherine II* (Paris 1899).

would come into being tomorrow if your Highness could bring it about with one wave of a sorcerer's wand." He tried to impress on her the manifold benefits associated with an institution of this kind: "Even if it only gives the illusion of liberty," he suggested, "it will nevertheless exert an influence on the national character. The nation either must be free, which is to be preferred of course, or at least must believe itself to be free, for such a belief can have valuable results."

On his way home from Russia, Diderot reread Catherine's *Instructions* and wrote down his comments. He suggested, for instance, that if Catherine wished to avoid being a despot she ought to make a formal renunciation of her absolute powers. Then again he noted that the people have the right to remove a monarch who has transgressed the law and even to punish him or her by death. Catherine only received these comments after their author's death, and it is hardly surprising that she was not enraptured by them. In a letter to Grimm she dismissed them as "mere babble that shows neither knowledge of the subject nor discretion, nor insight."

Later Catherine tried to discredit Diderot by presenting him as a naive and unpractical dreamer. She was fond of repeating her reply to his projects: "You, as a philosopher, work on paper, which will bear everything; whereas I, poor empress, work on human skin, which is far more sensitive." There was a good deal of truth in what she said, although in this particular instance it was clearly not so much Diderot's plans that were naive (he was ready to make necessary changes) as his faith in Catherine's good intentions.

It should be added that Diderot's stay in Russia coincided with the Pugachev uprising, and therefore came at a highly inopportune moment. The Pugachev rebellion (1773-74) was a peasant uprising led by a Don Cossack who claimed to be the surviving Tsar, Peter III, and promised the peasants "land, meadows, and woods," as well as "beards" – in other words, a return to the old traditions of pre-Petrine Russia. The rebellion attracted widespread support: it was joined by metalworkers from the Urals as well as members of the Bashkir tribes, and became the greatest peasant war in Russian history, posing a serious threat to the empire.

After suppressing the rebellion, Catherine entered the second phase of what she herself called her "legislative mania." She now rejected the theory of natural rights and chose as her mentor the conservative English jurist William Blackstone in preference to Montesquieu and Beccaria. In her new legislation a sober, matter-of-fact tone replaced the former liberal phraseology; the chief aim of the legislation was clearly to strengthen the position of the gentry through the establishment of self-governing bodies subordinated to the tsarist bureaucracy. Catherine now referred to her famous *Instructions* as "idle chatter" and summed up her efforts during the early part of her reign as follows: "My ambitions were

not in themselves bad, but perhaps I took too much upon myself, being convinced that men might become rational, just, and happy.”

Equally significantly, Catherine now turned away from the Francophile enthusiasm and shallow Voltairianism of the aristocratic salons to the primitive nationalism characteristic of the petty provincial nobility. She justified the partitioning of Poland and her Balkan policies with theories that anticipated Pan-Slavism, began to take an interest in old traditions, and steeped herself in Russian history. One of her cherished projects was to show that the names of mountains and rivers in France and Scotland were of Slavic derivation, that the Merovingian dynasty could be traced back to Slavic origins, and that even the name Ludovic [Lud+dvig] was Slavic in origin. In a book with the characteristic title *Antidotum* (1770), a polemic against the Prince de Chappe’s malicious comments on Russia, she set out to prove that Russia was a prosperous country surpassing Western Europe in its observance of legality and in the living standards of its people.

Catherine was incensed also by the six-volume study on Russia by Nicolas-Gabriel Le Clerc, physician to Count Kirill G. Razumovsky (published in Paris, 1783–94). General Ivan Boltin (1735–92), the outstanding historian, entered into polemic with him, probably inspired to this end by the Empress.<sup>41</sup> By referring to Yaroslav the Wise’s *Russkaya Pravda* (“Russian Justice”), Boltin argued that Rus’, or Ruthenia, of yore was a genuine European country of a high legal culture, with each occurrence in the later history of Russia having its parallel in Europe. He found an original way to defend the Orthodox clergy against the charges cast by Catholics: in his view, unenlightened Orthodox priests did less evil than their Catholic counterparts – educated, and perfidious. He stressed that Russia was never a subdued country, since the Tatars never superimposed their customs or morals on it, nor did they attempt to change the Russian national character. Thus, Russia enjoyed its own, clearly defined national culture, whose continuity was breached only by Peter the Great who endeavored to alter the nation’s customs and thoughts through the authority’s coercion. This, according to Boltin, was a mistake, a move that caused a moral decline in the society. It would have been better if this reformer of Russia had achieved his goals by way of a gradual moral and intellectual evolution.

But there was not a hint of nostalgic conservatism in his criticism of Peter’s policies. Boltin was a resolute admirer of the West and a modernizer; as far as the national character was concerned, he shared the views of Montesquieu, and regarded the time of Catherine to be Russia’s golden age. National megalomania

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41 See H. Rogger, *National Consciousness*, pp. 228–238.

was foreign to him; he believed that human nature was basically unchangeable across historical periods and political systems, varying only due to geographic conditions. All in all, Boltin's book testified to a considerable increase of national awareness among the Russian people, and attested that their sense of deficiency was becoming successfully overcome.

More primitive and megalomaniac manifestations of a "national" tendency could be found in the *belles-lettres*. On the twenty-fifth anniversary of Catherine's reign, Hipolit Bogdanowicz wrote a play titled *Słowianie* ("The Slavs"), arguing the superiority of the ancient Slavs over the educated Athenians, transparently implying that the same could be said of the relation between his contemporary Russia and Western Europe, which was apparently superior only as far as the development of sciences was concerned. A few years later, Pyotr Plavilshchikov published a treatise *On the Innate Properties of the Russian Soul* (1792), which resolutely opposed the imitation of Western models by the Russians.<sup>42</sup> The author justified this postulate by the Russian nation's extraordinary skill to develop in a "self-created," or "natural" fashion, and illustrated his argument with examples of Russian men of natural genius who had reportedly come ahead of Western science in many a field.

Let us however resume the thread of the evolution of Catherine's views, which originated in her response to Pugachev's rebellion.

The French Revolution was the final blow. At first Catherine ascribed it solely to the tactical blunders of Louis XVI: in a conversation she told Prince Khrapovitsky that in the French king's place "I should have invited the ambitious LaFayette to join me and would have turned him into my defender. Take note of how I acted here after coming to the throne."

This admission throws a good deal of light on Catherine's tactics, including her flirtation with the *philosophes*. Subsequent events, however, made it clear that there were situations too serious for the application of such tactical skills. The execution of the king of France left her "stunned as by a hammer-blow" and brought about her final parting of the ways with the encyclopedists. She had their busts removed from the Hermitage one by one, until only that of Voltaire was left. Finally, he, too, was banished to the palace cellar.

At the same time Catherine dealt summarily with the progressive thinkers of the Russian Enlightenment: Radishchev was exiled to Siberia in 1790 and Novikov was imprisoned without trial in the Schlüsselburg Fortress in 1792.

The last years of Catherine II's reign should not be regarded as crucial to a historical assessment of her reign in its entirety. Soviet historians denied

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42 See D. Blagoy, *Historia*, pp. 468–9; H. Rogger, *National Consciousness*, pp. 271–5. For a discussion of the content of Bogdanowicz's play, see Rogger, *ibidem*, pp. 134–7.

Catherine the title “Great,” but it was not a matter of coincidence or anti-Soviet reflex that most Western historians did not follow them. Comprehensive studies on the age of Catherine have given grounds to the idea that the period was one of enormous civilizational and social progress in Russia’s history. “The gap between her words and actions was no greater than that of any other ruler of the time, and where it existed it often signified nothing more than the limitations inherent in eighteenth century absolutism.” The influence of Montesquieu on the direction of her rule was nowise alleged but, by all means, real. According to the above-quoted American researcher, in the context of pre-revolutionary political thought the Russian monarch earned the genuine right to claim a “republican soul.”<sup>43</sup>

From the standpoint of the conditions of Russia’s intellectual development, the lasting achievements of Catherine’s reign included, first of all, Russia’s transformation into a nobility-based monarchy, marking the completed process of the formation of a relatively autonomous social elite which was conferred with personal freedom and a sense of their own rights. The second crucial aspect was the start of the process of the autonomization of the educated elite, with the resulting emergence of independent public opinion in Russia. Freed from the state’s wardship, the Russian thought became an autonomous driver of the history of a reformed Russia. The often repeated words of Russian educational activist Ivan Betsky: “Peter created the Russians but it was Catherine who gave them souls” should be understood within this context.<sup>44</sup>

It is quite significant that the greatness of Catherine was recognized and admitted also by some radical critics of the Russian Empire. On summarizing the significance of the past century in his poem, *The Eighteenth Century* (1801), Radishchev, who had suffered repression under Catherine, praised the durable achievements of Peter and Catherine: the two adamant rocks upon which the nineteenth century can be founded. Pyotr Chaadaev spoke in a similar spirit as he adhered to a patriotism “according to the model of Peter the Great, Catherine, and Alexander” in the Crimean War years.<sup>45</sup>

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43 David M. Griffiths, “Catherine II: The Republican Empress,” *Jahrbuch für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 21: 3, 1973, pp. 323–344. Quoted after: *Imperial Russian History*, vol. I: 1700–1861, an anthology, ed. by G.M. Hamburg, p. 155.

44 Cf. R.V. Ivanov-Razumnik, *Istoriia russkoy obshchestvennoy mysli*, vol. 1, pp. 24–25.

45 P.Y. Chaadaev, *Vypiska iz pis'ma neizvestnogo k neizvestnoy*, [in:] idem, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i izbrannyye pis'ma*, vol. 1, Moscow, 1958, pp. 101–2.

## The Emergence of Professional Enlightenment Philosophy

Quite apart from Catherine's real attitude to the ideas of the Age of Reason, the atmosphere of the early part of her reign favored the widespread influx of French Enlightenment thought into Russia and a more active interest in philosophy in general. This helped to reduce the influence of Wolffianism (which in the 1750s had come to dominate the University of Moscow, the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, and even Russian theological academies),<sup>46</sup> and led to the emergence in Russia of a genuine Enlightenment philosophy, practiced by professional philosophers and emancipated from the influence of religion.<sup>47</sup>

A characteristic figure in this trend was Yakov Kozelsky (d. after 1793).<sup>48</sup> Kozelsky, who was born about 1728 in Ukraine and educated at the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, published his *Philosophic Proposals* in 1768, the first systematic exposition of philosophical ideas by a Russian author. The book still bears traces of Wolffian thought (for instance in the schematic arrangement of the material and in the emphasis on definitions rather than analysis), but there is a striking attempt to shake off this influence. The popular textbooks of logic, metaphysics, and moral philosophy written by Wolff's disciple Baumeister are subjected to strict critical analysis, and their pedantry and formalist concentration on meaningless problems are held up to ridicule. Kozelsky himself adopted a deist position and made no attempt to construct a system of "natural theology." He defended the autonomy of philosophy and opposed the teleological tendencies and utilization of philosophy to vindicate divine providence and theological dogma that were characteristic of Wolffian apologetics. He also criticized Wolffian idealism and rejected the conception of the soul as a totally autonomous spiritual monad. On the problem of the relationship between body and soul he was closer to materialism (although he did not state this plainly), and on the question of immortality he significantly did not comment at all. To the authority of the Wolffian school Kozelsky opposed that of Voltaire, Helvetius, Montesquieu, and Rousseau; in moral philosophy he also referred to Shaftesbury, whom he had read in French translation. His interest in and wide reading of French philosophy is shown by the fact that two years after the *Philosophic Proposals* appeared he published his own translation

46 See V. Y. Kogan, *Prosvetitel XVIII veka Y. P. Kozelsky* (M, 1958), pp. 101-2.

47 The chief works of the thinkers discussed here – Kozelsky, Anichkov, and Desnitsky – have been reprinted in *Izbrannye proizvedeniia russkikh myslitelei vtoroi poloviny XVIII veka*, Moscow 1952, vol. 1, with an introduction by I. Y. Shchipanov.

48 He should be distinguished from his brother and namesake, a delegate to the Legislative Commission.

of the articles on philosophy and (in a separate edition) on moral philosophy included in Diderot's *Encyclopedic*.

Kozelsky defined philosophy as a science that investigates the causes of "natural," "logical," and "moral" truths. It could be divided into theoretical philosophy, which includes logic (or in other words a general theory of knowledge) and metaphysics (ontology and psychology), and practical philosophy, which includes jurisprudence (ethics and legal science) and politics. In epistemology Kozelsky supported a moderate sensationalism – he cited Helvetius but opposed the reduction of concepts to sense perceptions. Ontology he defined as a science of things, with a "thing" being everything that is "possible"; the inner essence of things, however, was unknowable (a thesis that was intended to protect philosophy from the dangers of scholasticism). In psychology – the science that deals with beings endowed with will and reason – Kozelsky based himself on Helvetius's *De l'esprit*, but in order to avoid an open conflict with the Church he toned down its main arguments and combined them, somewhat eclectically, with certain Wolffian ideas.

For Kozelsky, practical philosophy was of primary importance. Although his exposition was largely theoretical, he had a very practical aim: he hoped that the humanitarian principles expounded in his book would have some effect on the work of the Legislative Commission. His acceptance of the theory of natural law led him to condemn despotism; though he supported enlightened absolutism, he suggested that from a theoretical point of view the most perfect system was republicanism. The ignorance of the common people was regrettable, he wrote, but before they could acquire "polish" it would be necessary to improve their lot. He admired Rousseau as the greatest exponent of "practical philosophy" and shared his idealization of the state of nature; however, he recognized (as Rousseau did himself) that this primary state had been irretrievably lost and that at present every effort must be made to take advantage of the positive sides of the social state. He condemned luxury and extreme inequality, defended the dignity of manual work, and even spoke up for the ideal of an eight-hour working day. In his ethics Kozelsky followed Shaftesbury rather than Helvetius and valued virtue higher than reason and moral training higher than intellectual education. He proposed that men's conduct should be regulated by virtue rather than by enlightened self-interest, since virtue engenders solidarity and mutual aid. In cases of misfortune, he even suggested that the needy should be assured the help of society as a whole. Politics, too, should be founded on ethical principles; Kozelsky defined it as the science concerned with the realization of just aims by the most effective and just means. Though accepting the need for defense, he condemned wars of conquest (including colonial conquests) and argued that the defensive capacity of a state

depended not only on the strength of its armies, but also – and even chiefly – on its internal relations.

Twenty years after the *Philosophic Proposals*, Kozelsky published a philosophical dialogue entitled *Reflections of Two Hindus, Kalan and Ibrahim, on Human Cognition* (1788). This dialogue, which was intended to be the first part of a larger work, contained philosophical meditations on natural history that on many points came close to a materialist approach.

An important contribution to the raising of the standard of philosophical discussion in Russia was made by Dmitry Anichkov (1733-88), a philosopher and mathematician, and a professor at Moscow University. His works included the *Discourse on the Principles and Origins of the Natural Cult of Deities* (1769), *Concerning the Properties of Human Cognition* (1770), the Latin essay *Annotationes in Logicam et Metaphysicam* (1782), and *On Different Ways of Explaining the Close Connection between Soul and Body* (1783).

The earliest of these works is without doubt the most original and also most typical of Enlightenment thought. In it Anichkov ascribed the origins of religion to the terror of natural phenomena, to “hallucinations” or the play of the imagination, and to “admiration” for the cult of heroes – that is, the ignorant masses’ adoration of individuals of exceptional physical strength, dexterity, and talent. Discussing the transformation of religion into an organized cult, Anichkov stressed that the material interests of the priests and theocratic rulers forced upon them a policy of conscious duplicity. His main sources were *De rerum, natura* by Lucretius and 18<sup>th</sup> century travelers’ tales with accounts of the beliefs of primitive peoples. The views he put forward in the *Discourse* concerned only pagan religions in theory, but they nevertheless aroused bitter opposition in clerical and conservative academic circles. The Synod ordered almost the entire edition to be publicly burned, and only a few copies survived. Later, Anichkov was permitted to publish a new edition of the *Discourse*, but only after introducing a number of emendations. He also had to change the title in order to leave no doubt that his work only concerned the religions of “unenlightened peoples.”

In his essay on cognition, in which he examined the theory of innate ideas, Anichkov supported the view that there was nothing in the mind that had not previously been in the senses. At the same time he followed Kozelsky in opposing the extremes of sensationalism and suggested that cognition consisted of three stages – sense perception, the arrangement of sense impressions into concepts, and thinking with the help of these concepts. In listing the sources of errors, he approvingly described Bacon’s theory of idols and expressed support for the Cartesian principle of methodical doubt. In a separate essay dealing with obstacles to cognition (published in 1774), he expounded, among other things,



characteristic Enlightenment views on the role of nurture and the environment in intellectual development, drawing special attention to the harmful effects of contact with the superstitious masses.

In his essay on the relationship between soul and body, Anichkov discussed materialist, idealist, and dualist theories; among the proponents of the last-named he distinguished the occasionalists, who believed in a Leibnizian “pre-established harmony,” and the Peripatetics. He preferred the latter’s views because they assumed a soul acting upon the body rather than a parallelism of two entirely independent series of phenomena. The moral argument was decisive: he rejected the dualism of body and soul on which the systems of Leibniz and Malebranche were based because it undermined the foundations of morality by implying that the soul bore no responsibility for the sins of the flesh, which it was powerless to prevent.

A theory of the origins of religion resembling that of Anichkov was put forward by Semyon Desnitsky (d. 1789) in his succinct *Legal Discourses on Holy Matters* (1772). In it he traced religion back to terror, ignorance, and anthropomorphism, although he naturally made an exception for Christianity. Desnitsky, who was the first theoretical jurist in Russia, and who published an annotated translation of the first three volumes of Blackstone’s *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, was probably the most outstanding and perhaps also the most original Enlightenment thinker of his generation. He came from a merchant family in the Ukraine and was educated at the University of Moscow and then in Glasgow, where he studied under Adam Smith. After returning to Russia in 1767, he advanced to the chair of jurisprudence at Moscow University. The most important formative influence in his intellectual development was undoubtedly his stay in Scotland, which led him to view Britain rather than France as the home of philosophy. In his work *On the Direct and Simplest Method of Teaching Jurisprudence* (1768), he referred to Hobbes, Sidney, Locke, Berkeley, Mandeville, Bolingbroke, Harrington, Hutcheson, and, above all, the great Scottish scholars David Hume and Adam Smith. It is tempting to add the name of Adam Ferguson to this list, for it seems likely that his influence was responsible for the most characteristic and valuable aspect of Desnitsky’s social philosophy, namely his ability to perceive social phenomena as part of a historical, evolutionary process.

Using Pufendorf as an example, Desnitsky criticized the traditional, abstract theory of natural law and suggested that instead of being preoccupied with “imaginary conditions of the human race,” one might more appropriately study the historical genesis and evolution of ownership, property, and inheritance. He developed this line of thought in his *Juridical Discourse on the Views of Various Nations Concerning Property and Various Forms of Social Relationships*

(1781). In this work he distinguished four stages of social evolution based on economic criteria: the hunting, pastoral, agricultural, and (highest in the evolutionary scale) commercial stages. Each of these stages, Desnitsky wrote, is associated with a specific form of ownership; private property only emerges during the agricultural stage, and ownership in the full meaning of the word (i.e. the right to dispose freely of a given thing and to take it away from anyone who has taken illegal possession of it) does not develop fully until the commercial stage, when it replaces other forms of ownership. Laws and forms of government depend on the social relationships obtaining in a given community and on the forms of ownership appropriate to them.

Desnitsky believed that the evolution of the family was subject to similar laws. In his *Juridical Discourses on the Principles and Origins of Marriage* (1775), he argued that sexual relationships were closely related to the phases of social evolution: in the hunting stage there were no institutionalized forms of marriage; in the pastoral stage there emerged polygamy; in the agricultural stage patriarchal monogamy rose to prominence; and in the commercial stage (though the principle of monogamy still survived) conditions were now ripe for the granting of equal rights to women, a step that Desnitsky warmly supported.

Desnitsky's views on the origins of the authority of the state are also worth examining. He avoided the concept of the "social contract" and regarded the state as a product of historical development arising out of men's natural inequality.<sup>49</sup> For primitive people physical strength was of primary importance, and their leaders were therefore chosen from among those who excelled in this respect. At later historical stages intellectual inequality took on growing significance, so that cunning, intelligence, and foresight came to be in greater demand. During the commercial phase wealth became the decisive factor, and it was this that now determined the influence of the ruling elite and access to it. Desnitsky thought that this was responsible for certain negative features of the social system in the commercial phase, and in his annotations to Blackstone stressed that the millionaire lobby had a harmful influence on the English government and judiciary.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, he was confident that the commercial stage represented an evolutionary peak, since no one contributed more than the merchant class to the power, wealth, and unity of the State, and to the victory of centralizing over decentralizing tendencies.

This brief survey makes it clear that Desnitsky's social philosophy was essentially bourgeois in character. This became even more apparent when he

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49 See S. V. Utechin, *Russian Political Thought. A Concise History* (New York and London 1964), p. 55.

50 See *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 1, pp. 290-91.

attempted to give it practical application. In 1768, in connection with the setting up of the Legislative Commission, Desnitsky presented Catherine with a draft plan entitled *A Letter Concerning the Establishment of the Legislature, Judiciary, and Executive Authorities in the Russian Empire*. His plan proposed that a permanent representative body known as the Senate should be elected every five years; formally this body was to have only advisory capacity, but there is no doubt that Desnitsky wanted to ensure some form of control and restriction of absolutism. The Senate was to consist of 600 to 800 persons elected not only by nobles (including the poor, landless gentry) but also by merchants, artisans, clergy, and university teachers. If this plan had been implemented, delegates of the middle classes and the *raznochintsy*<sup>51</sup> would have played a prominent if not leading role in the representative body.

Desnitsky's plan also called for the reorganization of fiscal policy, the administration, and the judiciary (among other things by the introduction of open trials). He also touched on the peasant question, but confined himself to putting forward various timid suggestions such as that the sale of peasants without land should be prohibited and that families should not be split up against their will merely in order to provide domestic servants for the manor.

The names of Kozelsky, Anichkov, and Desnitsky were soon forgotten and have only been rediscovered by Soviet scholars. On the whole this neglect has been unjust: they were not, perhaps, outstanding intellects or great literary talents, but in the Russia of their time they were nevertheless pioneers, men who stood for the introduction of new and forward-looking philosophical and social ideas.

## Nikolai Novikov and Freemasonry

In keeping with the spirit of the Age of Reason, which was fond of using popular literary forms to propagate its ideas, the chief representative of humanitarian ideas in 18<sup>th</sup> century Russia was not a professional philosopher or university teacher, but the writer and satirist Nikolai Novikov (1744-1818).

Novikov's family belonged to the impoverished provincial gentry. He attended a secondary school attached to Moscow University but for some reason was not able to complete his studies. All his life he regretted various gaps in his education, especially his poor knowledge of foreign languages. In 1767 and

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51 The term *raznochinets* was applied to educated men of varying social origins who had to support themselves by their own work. It is worth noting that this term was already used by Desnitsky.

1768 he was one of the secretaries of the Legislative Commission: he kept the minutes of the special committee set up to consider “members of the middle estate” and at times also those of the chief Commission. This work allowed him to gain wide insight into the social problems of the time, especially as they affected the “middle estate” and even the peasants. It seems likely that this experience influenced the entirety of his future activity. After the Commission had been disbanded, Novikov threw himself with great energy into the publication of satirical journals – not only as publisher, but also as editor and main contributor.<sup>52</sup>

The first Russian satirical journal, *All Sorts of Everything* [*Vsiakaia vsiachina*], was published on the initiative of Catherine herself. By this gesture she wished to show that in spite of disbanding the Commission she had no intention of giving up her enlightened liberalism. The journal was officially published by the Empress’s private secretary, Kozitsky, but it was well known in literary circles that the real editor was Catherine herself. In the first number she set out to encourage men of letters in Russia to follow her example. This was intended to stimulate social initiatives that could be exploited in support of the policies of the government. Her encouragement met with considerable success – rather more, probably, than was to her taste. Soon there emerged a prolific crop of satirical journals. Catherine’s journal tried to play the role of a “grandmother” who would hold the others on leading strings and make sure that criticism did not exceed certain well-defined bounds, but this task proved by no means easy.

The most interesting and boldest of the ungrateful “grandsons” was Novikov’s *Drone* [*Truten*], which appeared as a weekly in 1769-70. Right from the first number Novikov disputed Catherine’s advice that satire should be “cheerful and good-natured, that the satirist should not forget the injunction to love his fellowmen, and that criticism of reality was permissible only if attention was also drawn to its positive aspects.” To the threats that appeared on the pages of *All Sorts* he reacted with witty reminders to Catherine of the rules of the literary game she had herself laid down, including several malicious allusions to the Empress herself. This sharp (though only indirect) criticism of Catherine, as the editor, alternated in the *Drone* with panegyrics to Catherine as Empress. For some time these tactics enabled Novikov to continue his pointed social satire and relentless attacks on *All Sorts*. Finally, Catherine had heard enough and took recourse to administrative measures. First she imposed strict censorship, and later she decided to close satirical journals down altogether. *All Sorts* itself

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52 Novikov’s satirical writings are discussed in detail in D. Blagoy, *Istoriia russkoi literatury XVIII veka* (M, 1946).

ceased to appear, and not long afterward the *Drone* informed its readers that it must take its leave of them, though not of its own volition.

Novikov was given another chance when Catherine's comedy *Oh, Our Times!*, ridiculing the conservative aristocratic opposition, was performed in St. Petersburg in 1772. Novikov knew how to flatter Catherine's vanity, and by claiming the patronage not only of the Empress but also of the author of the new comedy he was granted permission to publish another periodical, *The Artist* [*Zhivopisets*].

The chief targets of Novikov's satire were bad and foolish landowners: men boastful of their noble birth but cruel toward their peasants and of no use to society. The most remarkable of his satirical pieces is the "Fragment of a Journey to ...," printed in one of the early numbers of *The Artist*. This contains a striking description of a "ruined village," the "abode of weeping," groaning under the yoke of a "cruel tyrant." No other condemnation of serfdom published in Russia before Radishchev was as emphatic as this. It is not surprising, therefore, that many scholars later ascribed the authorship of the "Fragment" to the young Radishchev.

The main difference between the "Fragment of a Journey to..." and the "Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow" is that Radishchev's peasants are shown to be capable of protest and even rebellion, whereas Novikov's are cowed and humble. There was nothing in Novikov's appeal to the public conscience that could be construed as an attack on the nobility as a class, but nevertheless the "Fragment" aroused the utmost indignation in influential circles and *The Artist* ceased to appear in July of 1773, after only a year.

What sort of social vision did Novikov have in mind when he was writing his searching criticism of Russian conditions? His ideal model was clearly a patriarchal monarchy rising above all particular interests and uniting all estates in harmonious activity for the common good. In this system the nobility would not own the peasants or rule over them, but would be responsible for mediating between the peasantry and the supreme authorities. In fulfilling their supervisory functions, Novikov suggested, the nobility ought to act in a "paternal" manner, looking after their peasants and lending a helping hand in times of floods, fires, bad harvests, or other natural disasters. Although he was aware how far removed his patriarchal idyll was from Russian reality, he retained his faith in this idealized vision of a good landlord who would be a father to his peasants, and a good Tsar who would be a father to the whole nation.<sup>53</sup>

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53 See Makogonenko, *Novikov*, pp. 202-5.

This patriarchal utopia had little in common with the bourgeois ideologies of the Age of Reason, which advocated replacing personal dependence by relations based on impersonal, rational legislation. Novikov believed that national wealth was founded on agriculture, and he disliked capitalist tendencies. Though he felt respect and even sympathy for the merchant class, he could not see the need for industrial capital and detested all financial machinations. If we take a closer look at his social ideal, we find that it is an idealized picture of certain aspects of the social relationships prevailing in pre-Petrine Russia.

The main readership of Novikov's periodicals was to be found among the minor gentry and the middle and merchant classes. There are good grounds, in fact, for calling him the Russian ideologist of the "third estate." It must be remembered, however, that this third estate in Russia was not a revolutionary force capable of overthrowing the feudal system.

A characteristic element in the ideology of the "Russian third estate" was its Francophobia, directed chiefly against the aristocracy and wealthy nobility, who were increasingly given to uncritical imitation of everything French. Although he was not extreme in his condemnation, Novikov shared this dislike and in the *Drone* also attacked the prevalent contempt for the vernacular, the uncritical pursuit of the latest Paris fashions, and other defects of the "young aristocratic hogs" drilled in the French manner.

As was mentioned earlier, Catherine too became interested in upholding national traditions after the fiasco of her contacts with the encyclopedists. Novikov, who enjoyed enormous popularity, looked like a potential ally in this campaign. Hence Catherine subsidized his *Ancient Russian Library*, a serial publication in which he published various texts of historical interest. Taking advantage of Catherine's support, Novikov made another attempt in 1774 (his last) to publish a satirical journal. The symbolic title of this periodical – *Bag-wig* [*Koshelek*] – referred to the silk bag holding the back hair in the wigs worn by fashionable men of the day, and was in itself an indication that the journal would fight the cult for foreign fashions.

Novikov gave vent to his Francophobia in a satire on a certain Chevalier de Mensonge [*mensonge* – "lie"], who was a master of the art of hairdressing in France but in Russia made a career as a teacher of aristocratic offspring, in whom he inculcated hatred of their native land. His opponent is a likable German who defends the Russians and contrasts those true jewels "the great and ancient Russian virtues" with the synthetic glitter of French gallantry. This is how the German concludes the discussion:

Ah, if only some human force could give back to the Russians their former morals that have been destroyed by the introduction of bag-wigs; then they would become a model to the rest of humanity. It seems to me that earlier, wise Russian tsars

foresaw, as it were, that as a result of the introduction of the arts and sciences into Russia the Russian people's greatest treasure, their morals, would disappear forever; that is why they preferred their subjects to be ignorant of many things but to remain virtuous and faithful to God, the Tsar, and the motherland.<sup>54</sup>

This would seem to close the argument, but Novikov apparently had some doubts and in the next number of his journal published a letter purporting to be from an “unknown” defender of the French, who had this to say to the lover of ancient Russian virtues:

Why don't you stop spoiling paper to no avail? Today's young people are lively, witty, flighty, and irreverent and scoff at your ancient love of the motherland. You ought to have been born long ago, in the days when the Russian tsars smeared their hair with honey on their wedding-day and the following morning visited the bathhouse with their brides and ate a meal there; in the days when the whole of learning was contained in the pages of the church calendar; when mead and wine were drunk by the jugful; when young men were married to brides they did not know; when a long beard was synonymous with all virtues; when people were burnt at the stake or, by a peculiar kind of piety, buried alive for a deviation in their way of making the sign of the cross.<sup>55</sup>

Novikov promised his readers an answer to this defense of French manners. In the second part of the letter he tried to make his “correspondent” look ridiculous by putting into his mouth various exaggerations – that Russians could not be considered human, for instance, unless they learned to dance and greet each other in the French manner. Nevertheless, it seemed that he was unable to find new arguments in defense of “ancient Russian virtues,” and the readers of the *Bag-wig* waited in vain for the promised reply.<sup>56</sup>

During the years he was engaged in editing these satirical journals, Novikov was, in his own words, “halfway between religion and Voltairianism.” One might add that he was also torn between patriotic feelings, which in the circumstances of his day meant traditionalism, and the progressive but cosmopolitan ideas of the Enlightenment, in whose name he criticized Russian reality. In 1774, when he was editing the *Bag-wig*, he experienced a serious crisis that was deepened by the shock of the recent Pugachev rebellion. The solution to this crisis for Novikov was provided by the Masonic movement, which he joined in 1775. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that he was received into a lodge rather than that he joined it, for his sponsors were willing

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54 N. I. Novikov, *Izbrannye sochineniia*, Moscow and Leningrad, 1951, p. 85.

55 *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.

56 See Plekhanov, *Istoriia russkoi... mysli*, p. 307.

even to do without the official initiation ceremony in order not to discourage their new recruit.<sup>57</sup>

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Masonic movement was a most powerful and influential set of secret or (depending on the circumstances) semi-secret societies transcending national boundaries. The ideology of Freemasonry has never been clearly formulated; of course any unequivocal statement would not have been in keeping with the conspiratorial nature of the movement and its esoteric doctrines. Different systems and even different individual lodge members could represent the most varied social and political beliefs, from radical liberalism to out-and-out reaction. What was common to all Masons was a belief in the universal brotherhood of man, in the goal of moral self-perfection and the coming golden age. This belief was not, however, linked to any systematic program of political action.

Basically, Freemasonry was a specific secularized form of religious life, the product of the disintegration of feudal society and the authority of the Church, as well as of the total or partial loss of faith in traditional religious beliefs. For men who, like Novikov, stood halfway between traditional religious faith and rationalism, Freemasonry became a surrogate for religion, while the Masonic lodges, with their hierarchic order and elaborate cult, became a kind of surrogate for the Church.

In relation to traditional religion, Freemasonry had a dual function: on the one hand, it could draw people away from the official Church and, by rationalizing religious experience, could contribute to the gradual secularization of their world view; on the other hand, it could attract people back to religion and draw them away from the secular and rationalistic philosophy of the Enlightenment. The first function was fulfilled most effectively by the rationalistic and deistic wing of the movement, which set the authority of reason against that of the Church and stood for tolerance and the freedom of the individual. The deistic variety of Freemasonry flourished above all in England, where it had links with the liberal movement, and in France, where it was often in alliance with the encyclopedists. The second function was most often fulfilled by the mystical trend, although this too could represent a modernization of religious faith, since the model of belief it put forward was fundamentally anti-ecclesiastical and postulated a far-reaching internalization of faith founded on the soul's immediate contact with God.

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57 See Makogonenko, *Novikov*, pp. 299-300. To this day, the primary record of Novikov's period of Masonic activities remains the book of M. Longynov, *Novikov i moskovskye marinisty*, Moscow 1867.



Mystical Freemasonry had its adherents mainly in the economically backward states of Germany, although Germany also gave birth to the Illuminati, an extreme rationalist branch of Freemasonry that did not shrink from political action. Masonic mysticism drew its inspiration largely from the writings of Jakob Boehme and Saint-Martin, which had been translated into Russian. Saint-Martin especially enjoyed great popularity in Russia, particularly among the “Martinists,” with whom Novikov was connected (the term “Martinist,” however, derived not from the name Saint-Martin but from that of his teacher, the Portuguese mystic Martines Pasqually).<sup>58</sup>

The first Masonic lodges appeared in Russia in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, during the reign of the Empress Elizabeth. From the memoirs of the eminent Freemason I. P. Elagin, it seems clear, however, that these early lodges were more like social clubs for polite society and offered little in the way of intellectual or spiritual stimulus. The movement became prominent only in the reign of Catherine II, who showed herself hostile to Freemasonry. It counted among its members some of the most prominent representatives of the ancient nobility, including the Panin brothers and Prince Shcherbatov (leaders of the aristocratic opposition), and such eminent writers as Sumarokov, Kheraskov, and Karamzin. Even Radishchev belonged to the “Urania” lodge. According to popular legend, the first Russian Freemason was Peter I himself.<sup>59</sup>

The majority of Freemasons came from the nobility, but non-noble members of the intelligentsia or even servants could also occasionally be found as members.

Masonic lodges began to multiply rapidly in the second half of the 1770s, after the Pugachev rising. At this time the more enlightened younger members of the nobility were faced by a disturbing dilemma: the peasant uprising represented a terrible warning and an inducement to abandon their enlightened liberal ideas; but at the same time they could not contemplate a return to the previous matter-of-course acceptance of the exploitation of the peasantry by the upper classes. What remained was flight into the realm of individualistic self-perfection, the “inner life of the soul,” or, in other words, the Masonic lodge.

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58 As confirmed by P.N. Sakulin in his fundamental work on Prince V.F. Odoevsky (P.N. Sakulin, *Iz istorii russkogo idealizma*, Moscow, 1913). Wiktor Weintraub questions this view, arguing that the source of the word “Martinist” was the name of L.C. Saint-Martin (W. Weintraub, *Poeta i prorok. Rzecz o profetyzmie Mickiewicza*, Warsaw, 1982, p. 124).

59 See V.I. Novikov’s introduction to the anthology *Masonstvo i russkaya kultura* (ed. by V.I. Novikov, Moscow 1998), p. 6.

This was the climate that also gave rise to Russian sentimentalism and other pre-romantic trends.

Unlike much of Western European Freemasonry, the Masonic movement in Russia played a negligible role in the process of secularization. From the time of Peter the Great, Orthodoxy had almost entirely lost its hold on the educated elite, and the heads of state (with the possible exception of the Empress Elizabeth) gave it very little respect. In these circumstances, Freemasonry was primarily a reaction against the “Voltaireism” of enlightened society. Hence the Moscow Metropolitan Platon was favorably inclined toward the movement in spite of Catherine’s undoubted hostility.

One of the most eminent Freemasons of the day, Ivan Lopukhin (1756-1816), had been a warm adherent of the encyclopedists in his youth. He was so impressed by Holbach’s *System of Nature* that he translated the last chapter, entitled “The Code of Nature,” which recapitulates the earlier arguments of the book. Lopukhin was delighted with his translation and toyed with the idea of distributing it to a wider circle. But, as he tells us, as soon as the first copy was ready he was overcome by disquiet and pangs of conscience; he was unable to fall asleep until he had consigned his impious manuscript to the fire, and only regained his peace of mind when he had written a special essay on the “abuses of reason.” Since he could not, however, go back to the traditional Orthodox faith, he found consolation in Masonic mysticism.<sup>60</sup>

A usual consequence of interest in mysticism was the gradual abandonment of interest in social and political reform. Lopukhin was a man of warm humanitarian impulses widely known for his philanthropy, but at the same time he was a decided opponent of radical social change. In a work entitled *Outpourings of a Heart Revering the Benefits of Autocracy and Full of Misgivings When It Sees the Pernicious Fantasies of Equality and Liberty Run Riot* (1794) he put forward a theory justifying social inequality as one of the laws of nature: nature herself, he declared, exemplifies the principle of differentiation and hierarchy; if there were no inequalities, the world would lose its diversity, harmony, and beauty.

Another outstanding Freemason was the *raznochinets* Semyon Gamaleia (1743-1822), a close friend and collaborator of Novikov. He had the reputation of being a saintly man who despised material comforts; on being offered the gift of 300 peasant “souls” in return for government service in Belorussia, he is said to have refused on the grounds that he found it difficult to cope with one soul – his own. According to another anecdote he was attacked by bandits, gave up his

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60 See Miliukov, *Ocherki*, vol. 3, p. 162.

watch and money without offering resistance, and on returning home prayed that the stolen property might not be put to misuse. Another time he was robbed by one of his own servants. When the servant was caught, Gamaleia made him a present of the stolen money and told him to “go with God.”<sup>61</sup>

These anecdotes show that Gamaleia subscribed both in theory and in practice to the Tolstoyan principle of nonviolent resistance to evil. This emphasis on individual morality – the conviction that evil could only be overcome by perfection of the self and moral rebirth – was very characteristic of the ideology of Russian Freemasonry and led Miliukov to call it the “Tolstoyism” of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>62</sup> Although this comparison rightly draws attention to one particular aspect of Masonic beliefs, it is nevertheless misleading in that it ignores the fact that even the evangelical ethics professed by Gamaleia were far removed from the social radicalism that was so characteristic of Tolstoy.

From a purely philosophical point of view, the most interesting individual among the Russian Freemasons was a Russified German from Transylvania, Johann Georg Schwarz (1751–84). Schwarz came to Russia as a tutor, and in 1779 was appointed professor at Moscow University. Shortly afterward he met Novikov, with whom he founded the Scholarly Society of Friends. In the early 1780s the two men published two periodicals: the *Moscow Press* [*Moskovskoe Izdanie*] and the *Evening Glow* [*Vecherniaia Zaria*].

Apart from his two special qualities of enthusiasm and idealism, Schwarz also had a considerable talent for teaching. He used his entire fortune, which he had worked hard to acquire, to found a “pedagogical seminar” attached to Moscow University where he trained future teachers by means of a critical study of Spinoza, Rousseau, and the French materialists. With his students’ help he also set up a “translation seminar” where the works of Western European philosophers, mystics, and moral philosophers were translated into Russian. When a quarrel with university authorities forced him to hand in his resignation, he continued to lecture in his own home. He played an important part in the history of Russian Freemasonry not only as an ideologist but also as an organizer, establishing a Russian branch of the Order of Rosicrucians, with whom he had come into contact during a journey to Germany in 1781. The Moscow Rosicrucians formed a conspiratorial elite within the main body of Russian Freemasonry.

Schwarz was not only a mystic and theosophist – and an ardent disciple of Jakob Boehme – but also an enthusiastic believer in the “occult sciences.” He

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61 See Plekhanov, *Istoriia russkoi ... mysli*, p. 279.

62 See Miliukov, *Ocherki*, vol. 3, p. 345.

practiced alchemy and believed that it was possible to gain magical insight into the secrets of nature and be granted a vision of its true uncorrupted face as it was before the fall of man. To some extent he may be said to have prepared the way in Russia for the Schellingian philosophy of nature.<sup>63</sup>

Schwarz expounded his ideas in articles in the *Evening Glow*.<sup>64</sup> His philosophy was primarily concerned with the nature of man. Schwarz distinguished between the body, the spirit, and the soul, the last being in his view a product of the chemical fusion of the corporeal and spiritual elements. He believed that animals, too, have souls and that man is an intermediate link in the chain of beings connecting the world of animals and the world of pure spirits. The body is governed by the senses, the soul by the intellect, and the spirit by “reason.” The intellect – or in other words the faculty that the Enlightenment philosophers called “reason” – can only function by means of the senses, whereas true reason is capable of transcendental cognition, can comprehend divine truths that are beyond the grasp of ordinary experience. True knowledge is synonymous with morality. With the attainment of absolute knowledge man will also attain absolute morality; he will be reborn, “rise after the fall,” and this will usher in a new golden age.

Let us now return to the views and activities of Novikov, who after Schwarz’s premature death became the leading figure among Moscow Rosicrucians. For Novikov the Masonic movement represented a compromise between rationalism and religious faith and therefore not a complete renunciation of his previous beliefs. Unlike Schwarz, Novikov was not interested in the occult and was only to a minor degree affected by mysticism; in short, he largely represented the rationalistic trend in Freemasonry.

Novikov brought out the first Russian philosophical and moralistic journal in 1777, the *Morning Light* [*Utrennii Svet*]. Unlike the later *Evening Glow*, which was published by Novikov but in reality edited by Schwarz, the *Morning Light* was entirely the work of Novikov. One of the most significant articles published in this journal was his essay “On the Dignity of Man in His Relations to God and the World.”<sup>65</sup> This was an attack by implication on the popular mystical view of man as a fallen creature who in the sight of God was a mere speck of dust, a “rotten and putrid vessel of original sin.” In its place, Novikov proposed a truly renaissance vision of man as the “lord of the universe.” Man and the smallest grub, he argued, were created by God out of dust, but man

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63 See V.V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, trans. George L. Kline (2 vols.; London 1953), vol. 1, pp. 97-98.

64 Discussed in Miliukov, *Ocherki*, vol. 3, pp. 360-63.

65 See Novikov, *Izbrannye sochineniia*, pp. 387-93.

alone was created in the likeness of God and endowed with reason; his nature alone contains an element of the divine. Man is therefore a connecting link between the world of matter and the world of the spirit. The nature of humanity is contradictory: man is a worm and at the same time divine; a slave and at the same time a ruler. He must be humble toward the Creator but has the right to be proud as the proper representative of God on earth.<sup>66</sup>

Several practical conclusions could be drawn from this theory. Novikov praised human reason for its divine attributes, and suggested, for instance, that the conquest of the world by reason was the most appropriate tribute that could be paid to God. Moreover, since human nature was divine, it followed that every human being deserved respect, irrespective of his or her origins or social status. In the name of human dignity, he also called for active participation in working for the common welfare. Man is in himself both end and means, he wrote in the conclusion to the article: an end, since no one is entitled to treat another man as a means, and a means, since every individual ought to devote himself to work for the common good. Whoever regards his own person as an end in itself, he concluded, is no better than a parasite, a useless drone.

Novikov was not an original thinker, but his important place in the history of Russian ideas does not depend on originality. Essentially he was a great popularizer. He may be called a central figure of his age largely because he represented aspects of all the leading (often mutually contradictory) intellectual trends of the day: both Enlightenment universalism and the defense of traditionally conceived national values; both rationalism and religious reaction against rationalism. First and foremost, however, he was an untiring reformer, a man who proved through his own life that there could be no going back to the period when the dissemination of education was the monopoly of autocracy.

The Masonic movement in Russia had a wealthy and influential membership and was at that time the only powerful organization independent of the government. It is hardly surprising that Novikov thought it could play a role in bringing about social reforms. As early as 1777, he used the revenues from sales

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66 This same idea – that man is an intermediate link in the chain of being, both a worm and divine – is to be found in Derzhavin’s famous “Ode to God.” Makogonenko (Novikov, pp. 334-35) concludes from this that Derzhavin was influenced by Novikov and calls Novikov’s philosophy of man a “generalization of the historical path of the Russian nation.” It is worth noting, therefore, that Novikov took up what was then a generally accepted interpretation of the “great chain of being.” He could have come across it in the *Night Thoughts* of the English poet Edward Young, which he certainly knew well. One of the poems in this cycle (“Man”) also conceives of man as halfway between nothingness and divinity, someone who combines the nature of the worm with the nature of God.

of *Morning Light* to open two schools in St. Petersburg for children of the middle classes. In the capital, however, under the eyes of the Empress herself, his plans had little hope of success. He therefore moved to Moscow in 1779, where he leased the university press and became active in the field of education. He took advantage of the decree permitting the setting up of private printing presses to found his famous Typographical Company in 1784 (using the capital of wealthy Freemasons from the Scholarly Society of Friends). His publishing activities were on a scale unprecedented in Russia. He was not only editor but also distributor, seeing to it that his books reached the most distant parts of the empire, including Siberia. Thanks to Novikov, the middle class – and some peasants, as well – gained access to new ideas reaching Russia. Some 28 percent of all books published in 1781-90 (749 out of 2,585) were printed by his press.<sup>67</sup> Of these, only a relatively small number were devoted to orthodox Masonic ideas, occultism, or mysticism. Indeed, Novikov was reluctant to publish works of this kind and was often accused by Schwarz of a lack of proper enthusiasm for Masonic matters. There was even an open quarrel with his wealthy Rosicrucian backers, who threatened to withdraw their capital. Most of his publications were historical or educational works (including the first Russian reader for children), and his list of leading authors and scholars included Milton, Shakespeare, Young, Lessing, Klopstock, Fielding, Sterne, Corneille, Racine, Bacon, Locke, Mendelssohn, Rousseau, and even Voltaire and Diderot. There was also a separate, carefully edited series of selected works of Russian writers. Novikov still found the energy to undertake other activities during these busy years. After the bad harvest of 1787, he used his great organizational talents to arrange help for the starving peasants on a large scale.

Novikov's activities could hardly meet with Catherine's approval. She was uneasy about educational and civic operations undertaken on such a scale and without her supervision. In her battle with her former opponent she made skillful use of his association with the Rosicrucians in order to discredit him in the eyes of the public as an obscurantist mystic, while she herself assumed the mantle of defender of the rational ideals of the Enlightenment. In the 1780s she initiated an all-out campaign against Freemasonry and herself wrote comedies ridiculing the movement (*The Siberian Shaman*, *The Swindler*, etc.). She also issued an anonymous brochure with the significant title *Secrets of a Preposterous Society* and tried to persuade the Metropolitan Platon to accuse Novikov of heresy. These measures were dictated not only by dislike of Novikov's zeal, but also by

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67 See Novikov, *Izbrannye sochineniia*, pp. 387-93.

the fear that the Masonic lodges were engaged in a plot to overthrow her and replace her with the heir to the throne, Crown Prince Paul.

The French Revolution persuaded Catherine that it was time to apply more drastic sanctions. In 1792 she had Novikov arrested and condemned without trial to fifteen years imprisonment in the Schlüsselburg Fortress. The Typographical Company was dissolved, and many books and periodicals printed there were burned. Novikov was released four years later, during the reign of Emperor Paul. In poor health and reduced circumstances, he now more than ever looked for comfort in religious mysticism. Together with Gamaleia, he spent the last years of his life preparing a vast anthology of theosophical, magical, and cabalistic writings.

In the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Freemasonry experienced a short-lived revival. Its sudden decline was largely due to the accession to the throne of the Emperor Nicholas I, who would not tolerate any secret or semi-secret societies, and who regarded the Freemasons with particular abhorrence. Russian Freemasonry saw yet another rebirth at the end of the century, under the reign of Alexander III.

It is worth noting that Russian literature reinforced the positive image of the masons in the time of Catherine II and Alexander I; the works of Lev Tolstoy have obviously been the major contribution.<sup>68</sup>

## **Mikhail Shcherbatov and the Aristocratic Opposition**

Although Catherine's domestic and foreign policies undoubtedly served the best interests of the nobility, the most outspoken aristocratic opposition to absolutism came to a climax in her reign. At times this opposition claimed to be rooted in the ancient boyar traditions of the pre-Petrine age – the traditions of the Land Assemblies and the Boyar Duma – but basically it was the product of Westernization. What its leaders wanted in principle was to replace autocracy by a monarchical system of the Western European type. Their ideas stemmed from the political philosophy of Montesquieu, with its emphasis on the importance of uninterrupted historical continuity, and their outlook is well summed up in his phrase “no monarch no nobility, no nobility no monarch, but there may be a despotic prince.”<sup>69</sup>

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68 Apart from Tolstoy, important roles were also played by I.A. Goncharov, S.T. Aksakov, and A.T. Pisemski (author of the novel *The Masons*, 1880). Cf. V.I. Novikov, *Masonstvo i russkaya kultura*, p. 36.

69 Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws*, trans. by Thomas Nugent (n.d.), vol. 2, p. 14.

The ideological representative of the extreme right wing of the opposition was Prince Mikhail Shcherbatov (1733–90). During the meetings of the Legislative Commission he had shown himself to be an excellent orator and an ardent defender of the traditional rights of the ancient nobility, which felt its very existence threatened by Peter's Table of Ranks. Only the monarch should have the right to confer nobility, Shcherbatov argued. Ennoblement as an automatic privilege attached to a given military or bureaucratic rank led to careerism and servility and transformed the monarchy into a despotic bureaucracy. Shcherbatov also opposed all concessions to the peasantry (e.g., legal limitations of serfdom) or to the merchants (e.g., the establishment of merchant manufactories) – opposed anything, in fact, that might help to undermine the traditional privileges of the aristocracy and hereditary nobility, who were, to him, the mainstay of honor and liberty, the only section of society capable of maintaining its independence without recourse to servility or flattery. In his unpublished articles Shcherbatov stated openly that the political system in Russia was not monarchy but despotism, the worst form of government, or rather misgovernment, “a tyranny where there are no laws but the crazy whims of the despot.”

As a historian (he was the author of a seven-volume *History of Russia* up to the year 1610), Shcherbatov propounded the view that despotism was not a form of government native to Russia. The former Russian princes and tsars had shared their power with the boyars, and the alliance of tsar and boyars, which was strictly adhered to by both sides, was the main factor in the uninterrupted growth of Russian strength. In order to reconcile this conception with the despotic but politically successful reign of Ivan the Terrible, Shcherbatov was forced to divide Ivan's reign into two periods. The first period was beneficial to Russia, for the tsar still restrained his passions and took the advice of his Boyar Duma; in the second period he became a bloody tyrant, murdered his advisers, and brought ruin upon his country.

The reign of Peter the Great presented Shcherbatov with even greater difficulties. In spite of his brutal treatment of the boyars and his introduction of the Table of Ranks,<sup>70</sup> Peter had consolidated and greatly increased Russia's strength. Shcherbatov did not deny this, but set out to show that these were merely superficial successes for which too high a price had been paid. He developed these ideas in an interesting essay entitled *A Discourse on the Corruption of Morals in Russia*. This essay could not possibly have passed the

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70 The Table of Ranks, introduced in 1722, established a hierarchy of 14 civil ranks and their military counterparts. Noble rank (for life or hereditary) was automatically linked to a certain grade in the civil or military service.



editor and was clearly not written for publication. It only became available when Herzen published it abroad in 1858.

As his starting point for the *Discourse*, Shcherbatov took the contradiction inherent in the notion of progress obtained at the cost of moral retrogression. In order to prove his thesis he drew an idealized picture of primitive tribal life and contrasted its simplicity with the temptations of civilization. He even praised the primitive egalitarianism of such tribal societies (including the communal ownership of property), although he pointed out that it could not possibly survive, since the advance of civilization implied social differentiation.

In many respects Shcherbatov's ideas differed widely from the popular Enlightenment stereotype. Tribal life, as he saw it, was not a carefree existence in a "state of nature" – on the contrary, its most noteworthy feature was strong social cohesion, and it was this rather than "natural freedom" that he contrasted with the inner laxity, egoism, and moral anarchy typical of the state of civilization. Primitive tribes, he argued, had no conception of "voluptuousness" [*slastoliubie*] – that is, the unrestrained urge to satisfy all sensual appetites, the constant proliferation of sophisticated and artificially induced needs that go hand in hand with unhealthy ambition and the desire to impress others. The originality of these views lies in the fact that Shcherbatov placed this pre-civilized state in the comparatively recent past rather than in remote prehistoric times, so that the antithesis of primitive tribes and civilized nations in his interpretation largely coincides with the antithesis of pre- and post-Petrine Russia.

In olden times, Shcherbatov pointed out, life in Russia was simple and untouched by excessive luxury. The upbringing of children was completely subordinated to religion, and although this encouraged some irrational and superstitious beliefs, it also inculcated a healthy fear of "God's law." Noble status was not attached to rank in government service but, on the contrary, rank was decided by the prestige and traditions of the noble family. This principle favored the flowering of civic virtues, for it restrained the personal ambitions of individuals, subordinating them to the interests of family and estate.

Shcherbatov's assertion that Peter's reforms introduced a formerly unknown "voluptuousness" into Russian life has some authority, for he personally knew many people who still remembered Peter's reign. In many respects, therefore, his *Discourse* has the weight of a historical document and gives us an insight into how much Peter's reforms did for the emancipation of the individual from the domination of tradition and religious ritual. Ruthless absolutist power, state centralization, and bureaucratic regimentation were far less of a burden on the individual than the rigorous discipline of religious ceremonies, continual fasts, and traditional conventions idealized by Shcherbatov. The "voluptuousness" of the *Discourse* is nothing other than individualism, whose first primitive stirrings

are sometimes repellent as well as naive, as Shcherbatov's long list of examples of demoralization, careerism, and profligacy (largely taken from the life of the court and the newly created court aristocracy) bears witness.

Shcherbatov drew special attention to the individualization of personal relations and to the consequent changes in the attitude to women. In Peter's reign it became customary for the bride and bridegroom to meet before the wedding, joint "assemblies" were organized for men and women, and more attention was paid to personal appearance. "Passionate love, unknown in earlier primitive conditions, began to hold sway over sensitive hearts."<sup>71</sup> The only hairdresser in Moscow was besieged by her clients – for feast days some of them came to her three days in advance and had to sleep sitting upright for three nights in order not to spoil their coiffure. Dandies of both capitals vied with each other in extravagance and fashionable dress. Peter, Shcherbatov admitted, had no great love of luxury himself, but he encouraged excess in others in order to stimulate industry, handicrafts, and trade.

Another cause of the corruption of morals was the bureaucratic hierarchy established by Peter, which encouraged personal ambition and placed government officials above the nobility. "Is it possible," Shcherbatov asked, "for people who from early youth tremble at the stick in the hands of their superiors to preserve virtue and strength of character?"<sup>72</sup> The brutal suddenness of the reforms had been injurious to the nation's morals: Peter had waged too radical a war on superstition; Shcherbatov compared him to an inexperienced gardener who prunes his trees too far. "There was less superstition, but also less faith; the former servile fear of hell disappeared, but so did love of God and His holy laws."<sup>73</sup>

In his criticism of the Petrine reforms and his unusually acute and comprehensive treatment of the issue of "ancient and modern Russia," Shcherbatov was to some extent a precursor of the Slavophiles, as Herzen was to point out. It is significant that Shcherbatov, like the Slavophiles, was strongly critical of the transfer of the capital from the old boyar stronghold of Moscow to the newly built St. Petersburg, which personified the supremacy of bureaucratic absolutism.

The analogy between Shcherbatov and Slavophilism is, however, largely superficial and even unreliable. In his *Discourse* there is no antithesis between Russia and Europe; and his views on juridical questions, social systems, and the

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71 See M. Shcherbatov, *O provrezhdenii nraov v Rossii, s predisloviem Iskandera* (London, 1858), p. 17.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

73 *Ibid.*, p. 2g.

significance of political rights clearly derived from Western European (especially Enlightenment) sources and were therefore far removed from the romanticism of the Slavophiles and their idealization of the common people. His faith in the role of the aristocracy was equally “occidental”; the Slavophiles, as we shall see later, viewed “aristocratism” as a negative phenomenon that was fortunately quite alien to the “truly Christian” principles of ancient Russia.

An interesting light is cast on Shcherbatov’s political ideals by his utopian tale *Journey to the Land of Ophir* (1784). In the apt description of a contemporary scholar, this presents an idealized version of the “orderly police state.”<sup>74</sup> This work would not have been to the taste of either the Slavophiles or Montesquieu, from whose writings Shcherbatov drew arguments in support of his critique of despotism.

The population of Ophir is divided into hermetically sealed-off free estates and serfs, whom the author quite simply calls “slaves.” The daily life of every inhabitant is subject to the most detailed control, and excessive luxury or the relaxation of morals is severely punished. Strict regulations lay down what clothes a citizen of each class may wear, how large a house he may live in, how many servants he may have, what utensils he may use, and even what gratuities he may dispense. In his ideal state the opponent of bureaucracy and despotism carried the despotic and bureaucratic regimentation of life to extremes. For Shcherbatov himself there was no contradiction in this, since he did not consider the strict control of morals to be inconsistent with political liberty. In the state of Ophir there were, after all, such guarantees against despotism as “fundamental rights,” representation of the estates, the abolition of the household guard, and so on. One of the important guarantees of liberty was to be the law forbidding peasants to lay complaint against their masters to the sovereign. In Shcherbatov’s eyes the right to petition the emperor was only likely to reinforce the uncouth peasantry’s belief in the “good tsar,” whereas rulers, made aware of the people’s support, might become presumptuous and turn into despots.

Some of the features of Shcherbatov’s utopia can be traced to his Freemasonry and the Masonic cult of formalism, hierarchy, and outward distinctions. This influence is most obvious in the sections devoted to education and religion. Education in Ophir is free and compulsory for every citizen, although its extent differs for every estate. Religion is reduced to a rationalistic cult of the Supreme Being, and there is no separate priesthood that gains a livelihood from religious practices. Sacraments, offerings, and all mysteries are discarded, prayers are short and few, and communal prayers resemble Masonic

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74 M. Raeff, “State and Nobility in the Ideology of M. M. Shcherbatov,” *The American Slavic and East European Review* (Oct. 1960), p. 374.

ritual. Atheism, however, is forbidden, and attendance at church is compulsory, on pain of punishment.

The Masonic provenance of certain elements of the utopia does not account for it altogether. The best key to an understanding of Shcherbatov's tale is probably to be found in his views on "ancient and modern Russia." Attention has been drawn to the fact that the detailed bureaucratic system of the state of Ophir reflects certain features of post-Petrine Russia.<sup>75</sup> However, a comparison between Ophir and the picture of pre-Petrine Russia drawn in the *Discourse* would seem to offer an even more fruitful approach. In both cases private life is governed by strict regulations and norms – in one by legal decrees, and in the other by hallowed traditions and religion. In both cases the division into estates and the hermetic isolation of those estates – especially the isolation of the nobility – are guarantees of social cohesion and the flowering of civic virtues. Finally, in both cases strict morals and moderate requirements prevent the spread of the insidious "voluptuousness." It is important to note that his examination of the differences between ancient and modern Russia had convinced Shcherbatov that strict control and regimentation of morals should not be confused with despotism. Ancient Russia, he claimed, had not on the whole been a despotic society, largely because it had remained faithful to a traditional way of life that set out appropriate spheres of activity for everyone – including the Tsar – and thus precluded arbitrary rule. In modern Russia, on the other hand, despotism had spawned "the corruption of morals that was to become its most faithful ally."

Shcherbatov was without a doubt the most interesting figure in the aristocratic opposition, but he was a theorist rather than an active politician. The men who were generally acknowledged to be the leaders of the opposition (with supporters in the diplomatic corps and the army) were the Panin brothers – Count Nikita Panin (1718-83), for many years Russian ambassador to Sweden and during Catherine's reign the first councilor to the Foreign Affairs Commission and tutor to the heir to the throne, Crown Prince Paul, and Petr Panin (1721-89). Toward the end of his life, Nikita Panin employed as his private secretary Denis Fonvizin (1744-92), the outstanding satirist and playwright of the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, author of the comedies *The Brigadier* [*Brigadir*] and *The Minor* [*Nedorosl*].

The Panin brothers' program was far more liberal than Shcherbatov's and more obviously modeled on modern constitutional theories. Though it aimed at extending the political privileges of the gentry, it also envisaged some limitation

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75 Ibid., p. 375.

of serfdom and the granting of certain legal rights to the peasantry. Nikita Panin took part in the coup that brought Catherine to the throne. At the beginning of her reign he presented her with a plan for the limitation of her sovereignty by specific laws and for an extension of the role of the Senate (a representative body of the nobility).<sup>76</sup> Despite her promises, Catherine did not put this plan into effect, preferring instead to rely on the support of the middle and small gentry, who feared a government takeover by the aristocratic oligarchy.

The Panin brothers did not, however, give up their plans. They engaged in a plot to put the crown prince on the throne in place of his mother. But Catherine quickly found out about their intentions and was able to forestall the scheme. The plotters were magnanimously forgiven, and indeed the only sanction applied was that Nikita Panin ceased to be the crown prince's tutor. The Pugachev rebellion, which broke out shortly afterward, made the disagreements between Catherine and the aristocratic opposition seem trivial. General Petr Panin was to play a leading role in the suppression of the peasant revolt.

After Nikita Panin's death, an interesting document was found among his papers that is known under the title *A Discourse on the Disappearance in Russia of All Forms of Government and Likewise on the Unstable Position of the Empire and Sovereigns Arising Therefrom*. This was Panin's political testament, intended for his former pupil, Crown Prince Paul, who – as is well known – realized not one iota of the hopes placed in him. The *Discourse* was given literary polish by Fonvizin.

Panin's *Discourse* is undoubtedly one of the most penetrating documents of 18<sup>th</sup> century Russian political thought. It contains a bold demand for constitutional reforms and a warning that rebellion will break out if these are denied. There is a graphic description of the disappearance of all forms of social bonds in the despotic state, "that giant upheld only by chains." "Where the arbitrary rule of one man is the highest law," Panin warns, "there can be no lasting or unifying bonds; there is a state, but no fatherland; there are subjects, but no citizens; there is no body politic whose members are linked to each other by a network of duties and privileges."

The warning contained in the title of the *Discourse* is justified by the author's description of a "certain state that is unlike any other": a state that may soon be brought to the abyss by its peasants, "whose human faces are the only thing that distinguishes them from cattle" (an allusion to the Pugachev uprising);

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76 See D. Ransel, "Nikita Panin's Imperial Council Project and the Struggle of Hierarchy Groups at the Court of Catherine II," in *Canadian Slavic Studies*, 4:3, Fall 1970. Reprinted in *Imperial Russian History*, I, pp. 157–177. According to Ransel, the Panin brothers sought to principally strengthen their own position among power elites.

a state where the throne is dependent on a “band of rioters” (i.e. on the royal guard that was responsible for palace revolutions). In this state men are owned by men, almost everyone is both tyrant and victim; it is

a state where the most venerable of the estates, motivated by honor alone, exists in name only, and the right to call himself a member is sold to every scoundrel who plunders his native land; where nobility – the only goal of noble souls, the just reward for services rendered to one’s country by one’s ancestors from time immemorial – is obscured by backstairs patronage. [...] A state that is not despotic, for the nation has never confided itself to the sovereign’s arbitrary rule [...], nor a monarchy, for it has not been granted fundamental legislation, nor aristocratic, for its supreme authority is a soulless machine set in motion by the arbitrary will of the sovereign. Nor can you speak of democracy in a country where the common people, steeped in abysmal ignorance, drag without complaint the cruel yoke of slavery.<sup>77</sup>

The constitution envisaged by the *Discourse* was intended to protect the inviolability of freedom and property. The most obvious guardian of these constitutional freedoms was clearly that estate whose material and social status ensured its complete independence from the reigning sovereign – i.e. the wealthy aristocracy.

The *Discourse* could only be published in Russia after the 1905 Revolution (although Herzen published it in London in 1861). It was not, however, entirely unknown in Russia before that time. A copy even fell into the hands of Catherine, who made the ironic comment: “Dear me! Now even Monsieur Fonvizin wants to teach me how to govern.”

The *Discourse* had a considerable influence on the political evolution of the Decembrists. It was known in the Northern Union thanks to General M. A. Fonvizin, a relative of Denis Fonvizin and a member of the Decembrist movement. Nikita Muraviev rewrote it as a political pamphlet, adapting it to the reign of Alexander I.

For the sake of accuracy it should be pointed out that Denis Fonvizin’s ideas differed to some extent from Panin’s, and that the aristocratic bias of the latter’s constitutionalism was in fact alien to the former. Fonvizin’s own views were closer to those of the provincial gentry. This is shown, for instance, by the nationalistic note in his letters to General Petr Panin written from France and Germany in 1777-78; the aristocracy, to which the Panins belonged, tended to be rather cosmopolitan in their outlook. Fonvizin was far more critical of Western Europe than the Panins and made a distinction between legal and “actual” freedom; in spite of his freedom in the eyes of the law, the French peasant, Fonvizin wrote, has no “actual freedom” and is worse off than the peasant in

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77 See D. I. Fonvizin, *Sobranie sochinenii* (M – L, 1956), vol. 2, pp. 255, 258, 266.

Russia. Observations of this kind show that Fonvizin was capable of some insight but also tended (as Plekhanov pointed out) to confuse patriotism with the defense of native backwardness, which led him to the reassuring thought that serfdom was not in fact such a great evil.

After Count Nikita Panin's death, Fonvizin experienced an ideological crisis and not only gave up writing satires but also renounced his former independent views on politics and religion. In this his intellectual biography resembles that of Gogol.





## Chapter 2

# The Culmination of the Enlightenment in Russia: Aleksandr Radishchev

Historians who use the term “Enlightenment” have in mind either a specific period in the history of philosophy and social thought – the Age of Reason as a whole – or a particular ideology associated with this period. In the latter, more narrow sense, the term describes an ideology that stood for a rationalistic universalism, that was anti-feudal and freethinking by definition, and that set out to liberate the individual from the confines of the feudal estates by using arguments based on “reason” and “human nature,” which were thought to be common to all men and therefore superior to privileges and superstitions sanctified by custom. It is clear that if we accept this particular narrow definition of the term we must distinguish between degrees of “Enlightenment,” and that not all thinkers belonging to the Age of Reason were “enlightened” in the sense of the structural model outlined above. Shcherbatov, for instance, as a defender of feudalism, was certainly a less “enlightened” thinker than Novikov, who was himself a far from ideal representative of the age. Without a doubt the Enlightenment thinker par excellence was Aleksandr Radishchev, the most radical and consistent representative of the Age of Reason in Russia.<sup>1</sup>

### Radishchev’s Life

The author of *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* was born in 1749 on the family estate in the village of Verkhneye Ablazovo (in Moscow according to other accounts), the son of a prosperous landowner. His parents were both

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1 Soviet studies on the philosophy of Radishchev are, regrettably, tendentious and simplified. An objective and favourable approach to his works has been proposed, for a change, by the emigrant historian of Russian philosophy, Vasily Zenkovsky (V.V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, vol. 1, London 1953, pp. 83–90. Two monographs in English on the philosophical ideas of Radishchev are: Jesse V. Clardy, *The Philosophical Ideas of A. Radishchev* (New York 1964); and Allen McConnel, *A Russian Philosopher, Alexander Radishchev* (The Hague 1964).

educated and humane people, in contrast to the neighboring gentry. A certain Zubov, for instance, a nearby landowner, was a sadist who kept his peasants chained up in a special prison and forced them to eat from a trough like cattle. The peasants on the Radishchev estate valued the good treatment they received at the hands of their landlord and during the Pugachev rebellion hid some members of the family in the forest. Radishchev's younger brothers and sisters were taken into the villagers' own homes after having their faces smeared with soot to make them look more like peasant children.

The young Aleksandr was educated in the Corp des Pages in St. Petersburg. He graduated with distinction, and together with other pages was sent by Catherine to study law at the University of Leipzig. While in Leipzig he also studied the works of Leibniz and Wolff, as well as French Enlightenment philosophy; he was especially interested in Helvetius, Rousseau, and Mably. At this time he became deeply attached to two of his fellow-students: Fedor Ushakov and Aleksei Kutuzov. Some years later he wrote a very sympathetic biographical sketch of Ushakov after his premature death, and to Kutuzov he dedicated the *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*.

In his *Life of Fedor Ushakov* (1789), Radishchev relates a dramatic incident from their student years. The Russian students were sent to Leipzig in the care of a steward, a Major Bokum, who appropriated the funds intended for their upkeep but at the same time insisted on supervising their lives in petty detail and treated them with the utmost brutality, even to the extent of using corporal punishment. His victims appealed to Ushakov, as the eldest of the students and the one who enjoyed the greatest authority, and determined to defend themselves. At one point there was an open revolt: a student who had been slapped in the face challenged Bokum to a duel and, on being refused, returned the insult. Bokum was forced to run away and ask for help from the local military authorities, who put the rebels under house arrest. The affair was smoothed over by the Russian Consul in Dresden, who by and large settled it in the students' favor. For the young Radishchev this personal experience of collective protest against a "tyrant" was an event of enormous significance that was to play its part in the formation of his world view.

After his return to Russia, Radishchev was introduced to Novikov and in 1773 produced his first published work: a translation, with introduction and notes, of Mably's *Observations sur l'histoire de la Grèce*. He also entered government service, first as clerk to the Senate and later as military prosecutor on the General Staff in St. Petersburg. In 1775 he asked for his discharge in protest against the cruelty with which the last survivors of Pugachev's defeated rebel army were being treated. A year later he returned to government service in the Department of Commerce, which was then headed by Count Aleksandr

Vorontsov, an educated man of liberal views who recognized Radishchev's unusual qualities and took a personal interest in his career. Radishchev, for his part, devoted himself to his new profession with enthusiasm and used every opportunity to study economic developments in Russia.

After the publication of his translation of Mably, Radishchev wrote a number of original works, including an "Ode to Liberty" and a *Letter to a Friend Living in Tobolsk* (1782), but for various reasons he decided against publishing them. In 1789 he produced the remarkable *Conversation on What It Means to Be a Son of the Fatherland*, which was printed anonymously in the periodical *The Storyteller* [*Beseduiushchii Grazhdanin*]. A year later he published the *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, one of the most outstanding literary fruits of the European Enlightenment. This work was so outspoken that, although by some strange oversight it secured the stamp of approval of the St. Petersburg police, no printer was willing to accept responsibility for its publication. Radishchev was therefore forced to print the work on a press he had bought himself.

The appearance of the book caused a sensation, even though Radishchev had decided to sell only a tiny part of the whole edition. Fantastic sums were paid for even a short-term loan of the *Journey*. Catherine, too, found occasion to read it and called the author "a rebel worse than Pugachev." As soon as she discovered the true identity of the author (the *Journey* was published anonymously), Radishchev was immediately placed under arrest and imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress. The investigation was entrusted to the same Sheshkovsky who had interrogated Pugachev, and whom Pushkin later christened Catherine's "household executioner." Radishchev was only saved from physical torture by the jewels of his deceased wife's sister, Elizaveta Rubanovskaia, who married him and followed him into exile (as the wives of the Decembrists were to do later). Radishchev was condemned to death by beheading, but the Empress graciously commuted the sentence to banishment for ten years to Ilimsk in eastern Siberia. While he was in prison Radishchev had known moments of weakness, but after sentence was passed he regained his peace of mind, supported by feelings of duty accomplished and readiness to accept responsibility for his actions. In a poem written on the way to his place of exile he movingly reaffirms his commitment to the path he had chosen:

You ask who I am and where I am going?

I am as I was and shall be forever:

Neither beast, nor log, nor slave – but a man!

Radishchev's banishment in Siberia was made bearable by the influence of his former chief and faithful friend Vorontsov. He was allowed to have books and to study geology, geography, and history. Only a few days after his arrival in Ilimsk he started on his next work, a philosophic essay *On Man, His Mortality and Immortality* (published in 1809). His other writings at this time include the *Concise Statement on the Annexation of Siberia* and the *Letters on Chinese Trade*, an economic study prepared at the request of Count Vorontsov.

After Catherine's death the new emperor, Paul I, permitted Radishchev to return to European Russia and live on his estate under police supervision. When Alexander I succeeded to the throne after Paul's assassination, Vorontsov, who was one of the young Emperor's liberal advisers, persuaded him to grant Radishchev a complete amnesty. Radishchev returned to St. Petersburg in September of 1801, and shortly afterward he was appointed a member of the commission working on a revision of the laws. He threw himself into his new task with unabated enthusiasm, but all his proposals were rejected as too radical. Pushkin relates that the chairman of the commission, Count Zavadovsky, was astonished "at the youthfulness of his grey hairs" and said to him: "Eh, Aleksandr Nikolaevich, so you really want to talk the same old nonsense? Didn't you have enough of Siberia?"

Radishchev committed suicide on September 11, 1802. There are grounds for assuming that this act was not the result of a temporary fit of depression. Suicide had never been far from his thoughts. In the *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow* he wrote:

If outrageous fortune hurl upon you all its slings and arrows, if there is no refuge left on earth for your virtue, if, driven to extremes, you find no sanctuary from oppression, then remember that you are a man, call to mind your greatness and seize the crown of bliss which they are trying to take from you. Die.<sup>2</sup>

A similar thought is to be found in the essay *On Man*, where he wrote:

Torment, sickness, banishment – everything has its limits beyond which temporal authority means nothing. No sooner has the vital spirit left the wracked and wounded body than the might of tyrants is seen to be vain, their power vanishes, their strength crumbles, their fury is ineffective, their cruelty foiled, their pride absurd. When the unhappy mortal man ends his days, so does the tormentors' spite come to an end, while their barbarity arouses only derision.

In the light of these quotations, Radishchev's suicide appears to have been a considered act of political defiance. This seems to be confirmed by a piece of

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2 A. N. Radishchev, *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, trans. by Leo Wiener, ed. by Roderick Page Thaler (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), p. 123.

paper found among his documents after his death, on which he had written the words “Posterity will avenge me.”

## Radishchev’s Social Philosophy

The outlook of the leading figures of the Enlightenment, or more accurately of the Enlightenment’s radical wing, was well summed up by Engels in the phrase “juridical world view.”<sup>3</sup> Helvetius wrote “*la legislation fait tout*,” thus expressing the conviction that society was mainly shaped by law and that social ties depended – or at least ought to depend – on specific juridical relations. According to this view, society itself and the authority of the ruler are derived from the “social contract,” the agreement whereby the individual relinquishes part of his innate freedom for the sake of his own safety and the universal good. However this contract was understood (and it was hardly ever taken literally), it was undoubtedly an idealistic conception that reversed the real relationship between society and legislation. It was, moreover, an abstract approach that set up the conscious and rational decisions of the individual as the guiding principle of society and attempted to reduce the complicated network of social relationships to a simple mechanism of rationalized, contractual bonds.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, it was also a truly revolutionary conception that was directed not only against arbitrary and despotic government but also against all forms of traditionalism. The argument that society was founded on reason and self-interest could of course be used to sanction rebellion against any forms of social relations that could not prove their rationality or utility.

Not all aspects of the “juridical world view” were represented equally clearly in Radishchev’s work. Like other radical Enlightenment thinkers (Rousseau, and Kozelsky in Russia) Radishchev tended to reject the extreme rationalization of morals. In his dissertation on legislation, for instance, he emphasized that the mainstay of collective morality was custom, and in the “Ode to Liberty” he even called the law an “unfeeling deity.” Nevertheless, in his social philosophy he made use of such basic categories of the juridical world view as “natural law” and the “social contract” and drew political conclusions from them.

Radishchev thought of the original pre-social state of mankind as a form of isolated existence in which men were not subject to any hierarchical pressures. Human imperfections, however, made it impossible for this state to continue;

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3 K. Marx and F. Engels, *Sochineniia* (M, 1937), vol. 16, p. 296.

4 See B. Baczko, *Filozofia francuskiego Oświecenia* [*The Philosophy of the French Enlightenment*] (Warsaw, 1961), pp. 51-52.

men formed nations and thus entered the social state. Radishchev had a wholly rationalist and nominalist view of the nation as “a collection of citizens”<sup>5</sup> rather than a supra-individual whole endowed with a “collective soul.” A nation, as he put it, is a “collection of individuals,” a political society composed of men who “have come together in order to safeguard their own interests and security by their collective efforts; it is a society submitting to authority. Since all men, however, are by nature free, and no one has the right to deprive them of this freedom, the setting up of a society always assumes real or tacit agreement.”<sup>6</sup> As this quotation shows, “nation” for Radishchev was a juridico-political concept indistinguishable from society, which in its turn was inseparably bound up with state organization. Radishchev even attempted to make a legal definition of “fatherland” as a set of people linked together by mutually binding laws and civic duties. The essay *On What It Means to Be a Son of the Fatherland* is an excellent illustration of this. Only a man who enjoys civic rights can be a son of his fatherland, Radishchev argues. Peasants cannot claim this privilege since they bear “the yoke of serfdom;” they are not “members of the state,” or even people, but “machines driven by their tormentors, lifeless corpses, draft oxen.” In order to be a son of the fatherland it is not enough, however, to possess civic rights; it is equally important to show civic virtue by doing one’s best to fulfill one’s duties. Men who are without nobility or honor, who make no contribution to the general good, and who do not respect prevailing laws cannot therefore claim to be sons of the fatherland.<sup>7</sup>

In keeping with current thinking, Radishchev distinguished between natural law and civil law, the first being an unwritten, innate right, an inalienable attribute of humanity, the second being a written code that only comes into being after the establishment of the social contract. The worst political system is despotism, since in it the arbitrary will of the ruler is placed above the law. Even in his first work – the notes to his translation of Mably’s *Observations sur l’histoire de la Grèce* – Radishchev gives the following definition of autocracy:

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5 A. N. Radishchev, *Opyt o zakonodavstve*, in *Izbrannye sochineniia* (M – L, 1949), p. 619.

6 A. N. Radishchev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (M – L, 1938-52), vol. 1, p. 188.

7 An interesting book by Wojciech Peltz (*Oświeceniowa myśl narodowa w Rosji na przełomie XVIII-XIX wieku*, Zielona Góra 1980) claims that Radishchev went beyond the formal-legal recognition of the notion of nation, interpreting nation in terms of ethics (pp. 15–16). While this observation is correct given a strictly formal approach to law, the point is that through the concept of civic virtue, Radishchev obliterated the contrast between ethical and legal understandings of nation. Moreover, the concept certainly interfered with the understanding of nation as an ethnic community.

Autocracy is the system most repugnant to human nature. [...] If we relinquish part of our rights and our inborn sovereignty in favor of an all-embracing law, it is in order that it might be used to our advantage; to this end we conclude a tacit agreement with society. If this is infringed, then we too are released from our obligations. The injustice of the sovereign gives the people, who are his judges, the same or an even greater right over him than the law gives him to judge criminals. The sovereign is the first citizen of the people's commonwealth.<sup>8</sup>

A poetic illustration of these words is to be found in the "Ode to Liberty," which contains a sublime defense of tyrannicide.

In the *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, a nobleman tells his sons who are about to enter government service: "The law, however bad it is, is the bond that holds society together."<sup>9</sup> In keeping with this assumption, Radishchev regarded legality – i.e. respect for civil law by all, including the sovereign – as the basic requirement for the proper functioning of society. But it is not enough to replace arbitrary rule by the rule of law; civil law cannot be contrary to natural law and must be founded on the agreement of the entire nation. Where natural law conflicted with civil law, Radishchev gave priority to the former. In the *Journey* he wrote:

Every man is born into the world equal to all others. All have the same bodily parts, all have reason and will. Consequently, apart from his relation to society, man is a being that depends on no one in his actions. But he puts limits to his own freedom of action, he agrees not to follow his own will in everything, he subjects himself to the commands of his equals; in a word, he becomes a citizen. For what reason does he control his passions? Why does he set up a governing authority over himself? Why, though free to see fulfillment of his will, does he confine himself within the bounds of obedience? For his own advantage, reason will say; for his own advantage, inner feeling will say; for his own advantage, wise legislation will say. Consequently, wherever being a citizen is not to his advantage, he is not a citizen [...]. If the law is unable or unwilling to protect him, or if its power cannot furnish him immediate aid in the face of clear and present danger, then the citizen has recourse to the natural law of self-defense, self-preservation, and well-being. [...] No matter in what estate heaven may have decreed a citizen's birth, he is and will always remain a man; and so long as he is a man, the law of nature, as an abundant wellspring of goodness, will never run dry in him, and whosoever dares wound him in his natural and inviolable right is a criminal.<sup>10</sup>

This quotation comes from the chapter headed "Zaitsevo," in which Radishchev tells the story of a cruel landowner (the assessor) who was killed by his

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8 Quoted in Blagoy, *Istoriia russkoi literatury XVIII veka* (M, 1951), p. 539.

9 Radishchev, *Journey*, p. 120.

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 102-3.

peasants. The narrator comments as follows on this incident: “[...] The peasants who killed the beastly assessor are not guilty before the law. On rational grounds my heart finds them not guilty and the death of the assessor, although violent, is just.”<sup>11</sup>

Among the natural and inviolable rights of man Radishchev included freedom of conscience and total freedom of speech, which is dealt with in the *Journey* in the chapter entitled “Torzhok.” Censorship, Radishchev suggested, sprang from the same source as the Inquisition and was thought up by priests, who “have always been the inventors of fetters with which they have at various times burdened the human mind, [...] [and] clipped its wings lest it should soar aloft to greatness and freedom.”<sup>12</sup> Truth and virtue have no need of censorship, for they are capable of undertaking their own defense. Freedom of thought is only terrifying to a ruler whose “rapacity makes him break the law” and betray the general good, whom flattery has deprived of the power to distinguish between good and evil. “In the province of truth, in the kingdom of thought and spirit, no earthly power can or should pass judgment.”<sup>13</sup> Censorship had been appointed nursemaid to reason and imagination, “but where there are nurses, there are babies and leading strings that often lead to crooked legs; where there are guardians, there are minors and immature minds unable to take care of themselves. If there are always to be nurses and guardians, then the child will walk with leading strings for a long time and will grow up to be a cripple.”<sup>14</sup> Radishchev’s conclusion was explicit: “Let anyone print anything that enters his head. If anyone finds himself insulted in print, let him get his redress at law.”<sup>15</sup>

Radishchev’s ideal political system was a republic. He disagreed sharply with Rousseau’s view that republics are only feasible in small countries and that large states must inevitably be governed by a monarch. He was inclined to idealize ancient Rome and, like the Decembrists, the “merchant republics” of Novgorod and Pskov. “It is known from the *Chronicles*,” he wrote in the *Journey*, “that Novgorod had a popular government. They had princes, but these had little power. All the power of government was vested in the civil and military officials [*posadniki* and *tysiatskie*]. The people in its assembly, the *veche*, was the real sovereign.”<sup>16</sup> This was proof that Russians possessed an innate love of liberty and that only brute force had brought absolutism to power.

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11 Ibid., p. 103.

12 Ibid., p. 172.

13 Ibid., p. 103.

14 Ibid., p. 165.

15 Ibid., p. 167.

16 Ibid., p. 83.



Because of his dislike of absolutism, Radishchev was also critical of Peter the Great (although he appreciated his greatness and fully approved of his reforms). In the *Letter to a Friend Living in Tobolsk* he says that Peter would have deserved greater praise if he had established safeguards for individual liberty. Not that there had ever been a monarch who had voluntarily restricted his authority, he could not help adding.

Radishchev's criticism of Peter has nothing in common, of course, with Shcherbatov's earlier attack. Far from idealizing ancient boyar freedom, Radishchev makes it clear that he fully approves of Peter's measures against the hereditary nobility, whom he refers to as "superannuated and fallen into contempt."<sup>17</sup> At the beginning of the *Journey*, he holds up to ridicule a defender of the ancient nobility who complains that through the Table of Ranks Peter "opened the way for everyone to obtain a noble title, and, so to speak, trampled the old nobility into the mud."<sup>18</sup> Radishchev advises him to sell his genealogical tables to peddlers as wrapping paper and concludes that "boasting of one's ancient lineage" is an evil fortunately almost eradicated in Russia.

The two countries Radishchev approved of most warmly were England and the United States, both of which he praised for assuring their citizens the widest range of civil rights and political freedoms. This preference even led him to make the unusual suggestion that the first foreign language taught to children should not be French but English, since English shows "the elasticity of the spirit of freedom."<sup>19</sup> In his defense of freedom of speech there are echoes of Milton, and in the "Ode to Liberty" we find praise of the English Revolution. Like Raynal, he was severe in his condemnation of slavery, but this did not dampen his enthusiasm for the American Revolution and the American Constitution. George Washington was one of his great heroes.

Radishchev's attitude toward the French Revolution, on the other hand, was somewhat ambivalent. He approved of its aims, but in the *Journey* expressed regret that "the National Assembly, proceeding just as autocratically as the King before it," had violated the principle of freedom of speech."<sup>20</sup>

Radishchev's philosophy of history is well summed up in the aphorism "This is the law of nature: from tyranny, freedom is born, from freedom, slavery."<sup>21</sup> This formulation shows the influence of the cyclical theory of history and the characteristic identification of the laws of history with the laws of an

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17 Ibid., p. 144.

18 Ibid., p. 45.

19 Ibid., p. 115.

20 Ibid., p. 186.

21 Ibid., p. 200.

essentially unchanging Nature. Throughout Radishchev's work we find evidence of this typically 18<sup>th</sup> century belief in the immutable laws of nature, in an abstract human nature, an abstract reason, and an abstract virtue. Although attempts have been made to discover elements of historicism in his world view, these do not seem convincing. Radishchev boldly pitted an idealized Reason and Virtue against real history; his moral absolutism permitted no historical justification for stupidity or crime, no understanding of historical relativity. This lack of historical perspective was of course closely bound up with the revolutionary boldness of his ideas, as tended to be the rule in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Liberal conservatives such as Montesquieu might have a sense of historical relativity, but there was no trace of it in the ideology of the Jacobins. Radishchev condemned Robespierre for his use of terror, but shared with the Jacobins something that post-revolutionary conservative thinkers were to call "intellectual terrorism" – an uncompromising adherence to principle and unbending negation.

## Radishchev's Views on Ethics and Education

Radishchev's conception of society might be called nominalism or sociological individualism; he saw society not as a supra-individual, organic, and ordered whole but as a collection of individuals whose welfare was its greatest concern. Some of his statements seem almost to anticipate Chemyshevsky's belief that national wealth cannot be considered apart from the welfare of the common people. In the *Journey* he wrote: "What good does it do the country if every year a few thousand more bushels of grain are grown, when those who produce it are valued on a par with the ox whose job it is to break the heavy furrow? Or do we think our citizens happy because our granaries are full and their stomachs empty?"<sup>22</sup>

Such "sociological individualism" (which was in fact one of the characteristic features of Enlightenment thought) was not inevitably accompanied by individualism in the sphere of ethics or education. Quite the contrary: it often went hand in hand with a heroic belief in an abstract "virtue" and a sense of man's social commitment. Radishchev was one of the Enlightenment thinkers who put special stress on this aspect.

It is particularly interesting, in this context, to examine Radishchev's criticism of the educational views of Rousseau's *Emile*. In his autobiographical *Journal of a Single Week*, Radishchev criticizes Rousseau's notion that man is

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22 Ibid., p. 159.

by nature a recluse and prizes nothing so much as complete independence of other people. The *Journal* is an account of the sufferings of loneliness: the hero tries to follow Rousseau's advice to seek consolation "within himself" but concludes that the advice is bad, that consolation and oblivion must be sought among men, and that loneliness is not joy, but "ruin, death, and inferno." Although the *Journal* is a product of sentimentalism, it is also critical of exaggerated sensibility. Radishchev rejects the excesses of self-analysis, the individualistic apotheosis of loneliness, and the "poetry of the tomb," though he accepts the sentimental cult of friendship and the ideal of the "tender heart" sympathetic to the sufferings of humanity – in a word, the social aspect of the cult of sentimentality.

18<sup>th</sup> century historical idealism assumed that the world was ruled by ideas and that its future thus depended largely on the type of education provided for the younger generation. In keeping with these assumptions, educational problems have an important place in Radishchev's work.

In the *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, Radishchev sets out his educational views in a farewell speech made by a nobleman from Kresttsy to his two sons. Following Rousseau, he recommends simplicity, avoidance of luxury, physical labor in the household and on the land, and disdain for "high society." He recommends moderation in the passions, but, like Helvetius, opposes their repression; for though "excess in passion is destructive, absence of passion is moral death."<sup>23</sup> "The highest end of human action," he insists, is virtue; virtue, however, has a social as well as a personal aspect, and since social virtue is often associated with vanity and ambition, a truly virtuous man is one in whom both aspects are fused. It is interesting to note that the nobleman's advice makes no mention of religion. Radishchev's ethic is the secular ideal of the autonomous individual motivated by virtue, personally responsible for his actions, and ready to die rather than capitulate.

It should be stressed that this ethic was not one-sidedly rationalistic. In contrast to the mechanical materialists of the Enlightenment – philosophers such as Helvetius, Holbach, or La Mettrie – Radishchev did not base his moral philosophy on rational self-interest and calculated advantage. In fact, he appealed to unselfish motives and accepted the existence of an inner voice of conscience, an autonomous moral element inseparable from man's humanity. In the *Journey* he wrote: "Oh if man would but look into his soul more frequently, and confess his deeds to his implacable judge, his conscience! Transformed by

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23 Ibid., p. 118.

its thunderous voice into an immovable pillar, he would no longer dare to commit secret crimes; destruction and devastation would become rare [...].”<sup>24</sup>

It is clear, therefore, that the abstract rationalism which was the dominant feature of Radishchev’s views on society and history became modified in his views on ethics. In his conception of man he allowed a place to the heart as well as the head. He was in fact closer to Rousseau than to the encyclopedists: no doubt that is why he was at one time attracted to the Masonic movement,<sup>25</sup> and why his writings reveal many of the features we normally associate with sentimentalism.

## Radical Reform or Revolution?

Radishchev was perhaps most original in his treatment of Russia’s foremost social problem – the condition of the peasants – which is the main theme of the *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*. That is why the book seemed to represent such a serious threat to Catherine II, for whom the Pugachev rebellion was still a vivid memory.

Radishchev called the peasants “dead to the law.” In a series of unbearably moving scenes of peasant life he drew a gloomy picture of what it meant to be a serf. His burning indignation reaches its climax in his bitter indictment of the gentry:

Ravening beasts, insatiable leeches, what do we leave for the peasants? What we cannot take from them, the air. We frequently take from them not only the gifts of the earth, bread and water, but also the very light. The law forbids us to take their life – that is, to take it suddenly. But there are so many ways to take it from them by degrees! On one side there is almost unlimited power; on the other, helpless impotence. For the landlord is to the peasant at once legislator, judge, executor of his own judgment, and, if he so desires, a plaintiff against whom the defendant dare say nothing. It is the lot of one cast into fetters, of one thrown into a dismal dungeon: the lot of the ox under the yoke.<sup>26</sup>

In the *Journey*, Radishchev describes two possible variants of a solution to the peasant question. The first is a reformist solution presented in the chapter called “Khotilov.” In a bundle of papers left behind by another, earlier traveler, Radishchev finds drafts of laws referring to the gradual abolition of serfdom.

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24 Ibid., p. 221.

25 We know very little about Radishchev’s links with the Masonic movement except that he attended the “Urania” lodge, which included atheists among its members, and that he was hostile to Masonic mysticism.

26 Radishchev, *Journey*, pp. 220-21. 27. Ibid., p. 160.

According to these drafts the first thing to be abolished would be “domestic serfdom” – i.e., the sale of peasants without dwelling or land, frequently on their own, into domestic service. Instead, a peasant who was taken into the landlord’s house as a servant or artisan would at once become free. Another law would ensure the legal protection of the peasants and their property by allowing them to own the plots they cultivated for their own maintenance. Landlords would no longer have unlimited jurisdiction over their serfs, who would enjoy the right to be judged by their peers, that is in courts in which manorial peasants would also be chosen to serve. These preliminary measures were to be followed by the complete abolition of serfdom.

As this summary of his views shows, Radishchev’s plans (in contrast to 19<sup>th</sup> century land reform proposals) envisaged the granting of land to peasants even before the abolition of serfdom. He was, of course, equally opposed to the extortion of labor dues and urged – on humanitarian as well as economic grounds – that they be replaced by rents.

Radishchev was not convinced that this solution had any real hope of success. Freedom, he wrote, is to be expected not from the counsels of the great landed proprietors, but rather “from the heavy burden of slavery itself.”<sup>27</sup> After outlining the proposals for gradual reforms, he relates the story of a certain “famous landowner” who owed his successes to his cruel exploitation of his peasants, and concludes by calling on the peasants to revenge themselves on their landlord: “Destroy the tools of his agriculture, burn his barns, silos, and granaries, and scatter their ashes over the fields where he practiced his tortures.”<sup>28</sup> The time might come, he even suggested, when a victorious peasant uprising would lead to the emergence of a new intellectual elite from among the masses to replace the old elite destroyed during the revolution:

Oh, if the slaves weighted down with fetters, raging in their despair, would, with the iron that bars their freedom, crush our heads, the heads of their inhuman masters, and redden their fields with our blood! What would the country lose by that? Soon great men would arise from among them, to take the place of the murdered generations; but they would be of another mind and without the right to oppress others. This is no dream; my vision penetrates the dense curtain of time that veils the future from our eyes. I look through the space of a whole century.<sup>29</sup>

Some scholars feel that there is a contradiction between the proposals in the *Journey* for a reformist solution to the peasant problem and Radishchev’s expectation and indeed moral justification of revolution. Makogonenko, for

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27 Ibid., p. 191.

28 Ibid., p. 160.

29 Ibid., p. 209.

instance, suggests that the plans outlined in the “Khotilov” chapter do not have the support of the author but are only one of the illusions of which the narrator is cured in later chapters.<sup>30</sup> Although in recent years this point of view has found many energetic supporters,<sup>31</sup> it does not seem entirely convincing. There is perhaps more to be said for the standpoint adopted by another outstanding authority on 18<sup>th</sup> century Russian literature, Dmitry Blagoy, who, while allowing that Radishchev was skeptical about the chances of reform, nevertheless does not present him as an absolutely consistent and unswerving revolutionary. A careful reading of the *Journey* shows that its author expected and justified revolution, but certainly would have preferred to avoid bloodshed; that he foresaw a victorious revolution *in the future*, but knowing that there was no immediate hope of a successful uprising, wished to ease the peasants’ suffering right away. Radishchev perhaps doubted whether the ruling elite was capable of undertaking the necessary reforms, but at the same time he realized that no one else could do so. The *Journey* was therefore conceived as an appeal to the sovereign and to the nobility, an appeal rendered more urgent by its description of the threat of a popular rebellion. The appearance of the book coincided with the French Revolution, and this made the threat even more real. The literary form chosen by Radishchev was very convenient, since it enabled him to present specific issues from various points of view without necessarily expressing his own standpoint. It should also be stressed that the plans outlined in “Khotilov” were extremely radical for those years – far more radical than the reforms suggested by the Decembrists, and more generous than the land reform of 1861, which did not grant the peasants all the land they had cultivated for themselves as serfs.

On social issues Radishchev was also more radical than the encyclopedists. This can be seen most clearly in his attitude to the common people, whom the encyclopedists – ideological representatives of a wealthy and enlightened middle class – regarded with distaste, fear, and even contempt (some of Voltaire’s comments are particularly revealing in this respect). On the other hand, there is a clear dividing line between Radishchev and the extreme radical wing of the French Enlightenment represented by the utopian communists – Morelly and Mably. The absence of radical utopian motifs in Radishchev’s writings are largely the result of his concentration on the peasant issue. His outlook expressed the interests and hopes of the peasants and other small

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30 See G. Makogonenko, *Radishchev. Ocherk zhizni i tvorchestva* (M, 1949).

31 See Y. F. Kariakin and E. G. Plimak, *Zapretnaia mysl’ obretaet svobodu. 175 let bor’by vokrug ideinogo nasledia Radishcheva* (M, 1966.)

producers who were anxious to ensure the just and more widespread distribution of private property rather than its abolition.

That Radishchev only expressed peasant hopes and aspirations indirectly is, of course, self-evident. In view of his social background he might be called the first Russian gentry revolutionary. His rupture with his own class was so radical, however (far more so than in the case of the Decembrists, the classic representatives of gentry revolutionism), that one should really abandon the word “gentry” and simply call him Russia’s first revolutionary intellectual. He was a wonderful example of the process described by Herzen, by which a “universalist education” uprooted thinking Russians from their “immoral soil” and turned them into opponents of official Russia.<sup>32</sup>

Radishchev’s tragedy was that he stood alone. In his days the feudal system in Russia was still firmly established and circumstances were not favorable to the emergence of an organized radical movement. The Jacobin Terror and Napoleon’s imperial ambitions disappointed his early hopes in the French Revolution. It is understandable, therefore, that on his return from banishment, when Paul was succeeded by Alexander I – who had been brought up on the ideas of the Enlightenment – Radishchev was ready to put his trust once again in an enlightened monarchy. In his fine poem “The Eighteenth Century,” he compared the bygone age to a raging river swollen with blood: “Happiness, virtue, and freedom were engulfed in the waters’ depths.” The age was not without its achievements, however. Two Russian rulers – Peter and Catherine – stood like two unyielding rocks amid the bloody waters and already reflected the rays of the future dawn.

Yet Radishchev’s optimism rested on very fragile foundations. Unwilling to face new disappointments, he committed suicide a year after his return to St. Petersburg.

## **The Treatise on Immortality**

The treatise *On Man, His Mortality and Immortality* stands apart in Radishchev’s work. This essay, which was written in Siberia, undoubtedly represents the highest achievement of Russian Enlightenment thought in the sphere of pure philosophical speculation. Its conclusion states that the human soul is immortal, and that since its goal is self-perfection it will continue to perfect itself even after the death of the body.

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32 See A. Gertsen, *Sobranie sochinenii* (30 vols.; M, 1954-65), vol. 2, p. 155.

Radishchev reaches this conclusion by a very involved argument. Pushkin aptly observed that “although Radishchev revolts against materialism, the disciple of Helvetius is still visible. He much prefers to expound arguments in favor of absolute atheism than to refute them.”<sup>33</sup>

The essay *On Man* consists of four parts. In the first two the author – mainly following Holbach – puts forward the argument against immortality. In his ontology he takes as his starting point the basic thesis of materialism, which he formulates as follows: “Things exist independently of our knowledge of them – they exist in their own right.”<sup>34</sup> In his epistemology he takes the sensationalist position that there is nothing in the mind that was not previously in the senses. From these premises he demonstrates that man is a wholly mortal being.

In the third part of his essay Radishchev attempts to refute this conclusion without, however, abandoning his ontological or epistemological premises. He does this by differentiating between the concepts “soul” and “spirit” with the help of the hylozoist thesis that every particle of matter is animated to a greater or lesser degree. According to this argument nothing in nature perishes; it merely disintegrates into small particles. After death man’s physical remains fuse with matter while his spiritual element fuses with the spirit of the universe that animates all of nature. This cannot be called individual immortality; man’s individual soul is mortal and only the spirit – the spiritual element in its universal embodiment – has eternal life.

This conclusion did not, however, satisfy Radishchev, who understood man’s craving for individual immortality. In order to prove its possibility, he made use of Moses Mendelssohn’s essay *Phaedon, or the Immortality of the Soul* and works by Leibniz and Bonnet. The human soul is a simple substance, Radishchev’s argument runs, and cannot therefore disintegrate or be deprived of its individual existence; its goal is unceasing self-perfection, so that its existence after physical death is more perfect than temporal existence, just as the life of a butterfly is more perfect than that of a caterpillar or chrysalis. Since the instrument of the soul’s perfection is the body, in its life after death the soul will also be endowed with some kind of corporeal existence, superior to human existence. This idea, which in Radishchev’s essay is barely touched upon, is related to Bonnet’s conception of immortality as a form of progressive reincarnation – an unceasing upward progress through a series of different

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33 From Pushkin’s article “Aleksandr Radishchev.” Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that Radishchev’s arguments in favor of atheism were more convincing, rather than more enthusiastic.

34 Radishchev, *Izbrannye sochineniia*, p. 423.



incarnations – and his hypothesis that in the “great chain of being” there must be reasoning beings more perfect than man.

Radishchev makes it clear that these are only conjectures, a matter of faith rather than knowledge. He proclaims his belief in the immortality of the soul and the continued process of perfection after death because they seem to him to be essential prerequisites of morality; nevertheless, he admits that these are beliefs for which no adequate theoretical arguments can be deduced.

This line of argument was very characteristic of the moral philosophy of the Enlightenment. Nikolai Novikov justified his belief in immortality in similar terms. There is also a certain analogy between Radishchev’s treatise and the philosophy of Kant. Kant recognized the existence of God and immortality of the soul as “postulates of practical reason”; in other words, he recognized them because (like Radishchev) he regarded them as a guarantee of morality.

In 18<sup>th</sup> century Russia, where philosophy was still in its infancy, the essay *On Man* was something unique. In it Radishchev displayed his great talent and erudition: he utilized the arguments of nearly all leading French and German 18<sup>th</sup> century thinkers and showed his knowledge of classical Greek philosophy. His systematic exposition of arguments both for and against immortality enabled him to show the controversial nature of the problem.

Vasily Zenkovsky, the Orthodox priest and historian of Russian philosophy, appreciated this as he stated that Radishchev’s treatise on immortality was a model example of philosophical conscientiousness, and a convincing argument in favor of the possibility of pursuing self-reliant and mature, creative philosophy in Russia.<sup>35</sup>

In spite of this, however, the work did not exert any influence on the evolution of Russian thought – the heirs to Radishchev’s democratic and libertarian ideas were not concerned with the problem of immortality, whereas religious philosophers did not seek inspiration in the works of Enlightenment thinkers.

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35 See V.V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, vol. 1, p. 90.



## Chapter 3

# Political Philosophy in the Age of Alexander I

The reign of Alexander I (1801–25) was essentially a period of transition. In some aspects, it marked, both chronologically and intellectually, the inauguration of a new century – the 19<sup>th</sup>. In some other aspects, however, it was a continuation of the preceding century, its organic prolongation, as well as a culmination of the ideological trends of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Some scholars even consider it the final phase of the great Westernizing reforms initiated by Peter I.<sup>1</sup>

The personality and intellectual evolution of the Emperor himself played a crucial role in the process. Alexander was the favorite grandson of Catherine II who had prepared him for wielding power with utmost thoroughness. His preceptor, a Swiss philosopher and republican, Frederic-Cesar de la Harpe, demanded a colossal reading list: Alexander had to thoroughly study classical literature, the history of Europe, the Ottoman Empire and the United States, as well as, obviously, the entirety of Enlightenment philosophy, including the writings of British thinkers, especially Adam Ferguson and Adam Smith. Political studies completed the schedule and included speeches by eminent members of the British Parliament, while religion was taught by Father Andrei Samborsky, ex-Chaplain of the Russian Embassy in London and supporter of a “universal Christianity” that would bring peace amongst nations and improve the ethics of political relations.<sup>2</sup>

Catherine’s direct successor and Alexander’s father, Paul I (1796-1801) was a despotic ruler, extremely arbitrary and mentally unstable. The educated gentry elite regarded his rule as a disquieting regression and fully realized the necessity of securing institutional guarantees of their personal freedoms and group autonomy. The Coronation Manifesto, proclaimed on March 12<sup>th</sup> 1801, anticipated those expectations: it proclaimed a return to the spirit of Catherine’s rule, promised rigorous law and order, restored the validity of the gentry rights chart articles that had been violated by Paul, declared amnesty, lifted the ban on

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1 Cf., e.g., S.V. Utechin, *Russian Political Thought. A Concise History*, New York-London 1964.

2 R.S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy. From Peter the Great to the Death of Nicholas I*, Princeton, N.J. 1995, pp. 160-162.

foreign travel, as well as on buying foreign books. It was received with an explosion of euphoria and an enormous surge of hope.<sup>3</sup> All of educated Russia joined their Emperor in the belief that the 19<sup>th</sup> century would make Russia a flourishing country, nobly representing European tradition and realizing an important historical mission. The coming of a major transformation was felt, in which everyone wanted to be an active part. This common feeling united old-fashioned Enlightenment rationalists and mystically-inclined Freemasons known as “the Illuminati” or “Martinists.”

More than a decade later, in 1815, Alexander enjoyed the zenith of his popularity in Europe.<sup>4</sup> The Russian Empire, too, found itself at the summit of glory, having marched all across Europe, overthrown the Napoleonic Empire and triumphantly entered Paris. As the main conqueror of Napoleon, Alexander became “the first arbiter of Europe’s destinies”<sup>5</sup> at the Congress of Vienna. He was especially adored by the defeated France, grateful for the conqueror’s magnanimity and favorably surprised with the exemplary behavior of the Russian occupational troops in its capital. The author of *The Marseillaise*, Rouget de Lisle, praised the Russian monarch, imploring him to “restore the throne to the Bourbons and splendor to the lilies.” The French Institute expressed its deep gratitude to Alexander for restoring the fruit of civilization to France. A project to pay homage to him was considered, along with the Emperor of Austria and the King of Prussia, on the column of Vendome and the Arc of Triumph.<sup>6</sup> The Christian loftiness of the Holy Alliance principles was much admired, as was the Russian Emperor’s persistence in persuading the Congress of Vienna to establish – against “the resistance of nearly all of Europe” – the Constitutional Kingdom of Poland, bound to Russia only by personal union.<sup>7</sup>

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3 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 194-196.

4 See N.V. Riasanovsky, *A Parting of Ways*, pp. 75-77.

5 M. Malia, *Russia Under Western Eyes. From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum*, Cambridge, Mass.-London 1999, p. 87.

6 See Riasanovsky, *A Parting of Ways*, p. 76. A detailed description of the French cult of Alexander I can be found in the book by Charles Corbet, *L’Opinion française face à l’inconnue russe (1799-1894)*, Paris 1967.

7 The quotation comes from an article by General M. Kukiel, “Próba unii polsko-rosyjskiej (1805-1815),” written in exile in 1950. It says that Alexander I “at the Congress, faced resistance from nearly all of Europe, headed by Castlereagh, Metternich and Talleyrand, while Prussia remained hesitant. The Tsar vainly persuaded Castlereagh that he had moral obligations toward the Poles and that a union with a free and liberal Poland would by no means support an aggressive policy by Russia in Europe [...]. A paper war followed, in which Castlereagh went as far as to accuse the Tsar of betraying the agreements of Kalisz, Reichenbach and Teplice (concerning partition of

It did not go unappreciated in Poland, either. The Poles were greatly impressed that the Polish troops that had fought under French banners against Russia were allowed to proudly return to Poland and give rise to a new Polish army, that “the name of Poland was resurrected” in that of the Kingdom, that a liberal Constitution was proclaimed and Alexander was crowned a Polish King. The anthem, “*Boże coś Polskę*” [“God, who hath Poland”], presently associated with opposition against foreign authority, had been written by Alojzy Feliński to commemorate the first anniversary of the Kingdom’s establishment, its refrain being: “Lord, save our King.”<sup>8</sup>

In the following years, however, the Holy Alliance came to be increasingly associated with conservative monarchs, thwarting revolutionary and national liberation movements (including the insurrections in Greece) – which provoked the need of an opposition by a revolutionary alliance of the peoples. At the same time, in his domestic policy, Alexander – who had aptly been called “a Hamlet on the throne” – wavered, gave up the undertaken reforms, succumbed to the influence of openly reactionary circles and betrayed liberal principles in favor of conservative ideologies in the guise of a Chiliastic mysticism. His intentions became more and more unclear which earned him the nickname of “a crowned Sphinx.” The alliance between the monarchy and the educated elites that had been so strong back in 1801 began to crumble, paving the way for secret organizations of opponents. The aim of these organizations was, initially, to support the Emperor against his conservative entourage – while the Emperor ignored informers’ reports, saying that it was not his role to persecute the idea of freedom and punish its propagators.<sup>9</sup> Eventually, however, a secret oppositional movement organized in military circles by former Napoleonic campaigners took on the form of a revolutionary conspiracy, leading – in the days of the succession crisis following Alexander’s death – to the failed Decembrists’ Uprising.

Despite the increasing backwardness of his views, Alexander remained to the end of his life an intellectual idealist, vividly reacting to ideas and endowed with imagination – an unlikely feature in a stereotypical conservative. This is proved, for example, by the fact that in the last year of his life, he seriously

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the principality), and especially the three superpowers’ agreement of 1797, concerning the definitive partition of Poland, threatening him with the anger of his Russian subjects” (M. Kukiel, *Historia w służbie teraźniejszości i inne pisma emigracyjne*, ed. R. Habielski, Warsaw 1994, p. 96).

8 See T. Kizwalter, *O nowoczesności narodu. Przypadek Polski*, Warsaw 1999, pp. 150-151.

9 See Riasanovsky, *A Parting of Ways*, pp. 85, 97-98.

considered accepting the primacy of the Pope and conducting Russia toward a religious union, which was to serve the idea of united Churches as a necessary condition of Europe's spiritual rebirth.<sup>10</sup>

## Projects of International Order

In June of 1801, Alexander established the so-called Secret Committee for State Reform. The Committee was made up by four young and especially trusted advisers of the new Emperor: Nicolai Novosiltsev, Count Pavel Stroganov, Count Victor Kotschubey and Polish Prince Adam Czartoryski. The last one – in service, together with brother Konstanty, at the Petersburg court since 1795 – was especially important in the group, being a close friend of Alexander.

The young Russian imperial heir's friendship with the Polish prince was based on a close affinity of ideas and political emotions. It was as early as the spring of 1769 that Catherine II's grandson – during a private stroll in the Taurid Gardens – confessed to Prince Adam that he hated despotism, approved of republican principles, had much respect for Thaddeus Kościuszko and wished to amend the wrongs that had been done to Poland.<sup>11</sup> He added that the only other person who knew about these facts was his very young wife, Elizabeth. Soon afterward, the imperial heir's Polish friend fell passionately in love with Elizabeth and conquered her heart. Alexander amicably supported the love affair, declaring that it was only fraternal love that bound him to his wife. As has been aptly observed, his attitude expressed "a strange tangle of friendly emotions that went far beyond the usual limits."<sup>12</sup>

In September, 1802, Czartoryski was nominated an "assistant" of the Empire's Foreign Minister, Count Alexander Vorontsov. In fact, the function put him at the helm of Russia's foreign policy. Following Vorontsov's death in December 1805, he formally became the acting minister (only to resign in July

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10 More on the subject in: A Walicki, *Rosja, katolicyzm a sprawa polska*, Warsaw 2002, pp. 20-21. For a detailed study of pro-Catholic sympathies of Alexander I and his intended conversion to Catholicism, see: P. Pierling, *L'Empereur Alexandre I est-il mort catholique?*, Paris 1901. See also: A. Boudou, *Le Saint-Siege at la Russie*, vol. I, Paris 1922, pp. 135-136.

11 Alexander Pypin, an eminent expert on the Alexander Age must have realized the importance of this conversation, since he gave it a broad account in the first chapter of his fundamental book, *Obshchestvennoie dvizhenie v Rossii pri Aleksandrie I* (Sankt Petersburg 1908, pp. 29-36). See also, J. Skowronek, *Adam Jerzy Czartoryski 1770-1861*, Warsaw 1994, pp. 43-44.

12 J. Skowronek, *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

1806, in response to the failure of the Third Anti-Napoleon Coalition). Researchers of his activity in that period are uniform in their opinion that he remained loyal toward Russia while performing his functions and was highly successful in promoting Russia's imperial policy.<sup>13</sup> He was the one to invigorate Russian policy in the Balkans and it seems somewhat paradoxical that it was Czartoryski, a Pole and a Catholic, who best justified the thesis that the aim of Russian policy should be to conquer Constantinople and take control of the Dardanelles Strait.<sup>14</sup> As is generally known, the idea was later to become the cornerstone of Russian Pan-Slavism. Czartoryski was motivated, first of all, by the geopolitical interests of the Empire, but he was well acquainted with the ideas of Vasilii Nazarevich Karazin who, in a letter to Alexander I dated March 22<sup>nd</sup> 1801, as well as in a memorandum to the Foreign Ministry dated November 21<sup>st</sup> 1804, proposed that Russia establish a Kingdom of United Slavs in the Balkans with a constitutional-monarchic political system.<sup>15</sup>

In Czartoryski's opinion, his activity in Russia did not contradict Polish patriotism. He believed that the Poles ought to rely on one of the occupying states, and Russia seemed the obvious choice, being the only one to conduct an enlightened policy and be ruled by noble monarchs.<sup>16</sup> Emperor Alexander was Prince Adam's trusted confessor on Polish matters – and *vice versa*. Therefore, Czartoryski tried to establish a pro-Russian party in Poland and, in 1805, was in favor of uniting the Polish territories under the scepter of Alexander.

The importance of Czartoryski in the history of Russian thought ensues from the fact that it was he, as a Russian statesman, who formulated the central thesis of Russian foreign policy in the initial stage of Alexander I's rule – the idea of

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13 Cf. P.K. Grimsted, *The Foreign Ministers of Alexander I. Political Attitudes and the Conduct of Russian Diplomacy 1801-1825*, Berkeley-Los Angeles 1969, Ch. 4: "Czartoryski: A Spokesman for Concerted Action," pp. 104-150. Cf. also, M. Kukiel, *Dzieje Polski porozbiorowe 1795-1921*, London 1966, pp. 91-95.

14 See F. Fadner, *Seventy years of Pan-Slavism in Russia. Karamzin to Danilevskii 1800-1870*, Washington D.C. 1961, p. 353.  
Czartoryski elaborated on his Balkan projects in a memorandum entitled "Article pour l'arrangement des affaires de l'Europe à la suite d'une guerre heureuse" (1804). Cf. *Ibid.*, s. 91.

15 Karazin was a descendant of a Greek family that settled in the Ukraine in the times of Peter I and claimed to have had a Serbian grandfather. Disillusioned with the Pan-Slavic projects, he wrote (in Autumn 1808) another letter to Alexander I, this time suggesting that Russia adopt an isolationist policy, expel foreigners (except those who served commerce) and stop calling the Russians Europeans (cf. *Ibid.*, p. 82).

16 See Czartoryski's manuscript, "Idée sur l'avenir de la Pologne vis-à-vis de la Russie" (1806), quoted in: P.K. Grimsted, *The Foreign Ministers of Alexander I*, p. 120.

natural law in international relations as a means of establishing permanent peace. He elaborated on the idea in his memorial address of 1803, *O systemie politycznym, który winna stosować Rosja* [*On the political system which Russia should follow*]. In this text he referred to the ideas of Sully, abbot de Saint-Pierre, Rousseau and Kant, as well as to the ideas of Polish theoreticians of the law of nations.<sup>17</sup> He stressed that politics ought to “unite entirely with justice and morality,” expressing “the principles of the universal good of the nations.”<sup>18</sup> A specifically Polish aspect of the program was its focus on making relations amongst states more ethical, as well as those amongst nations, treated as clearly separate from states. The ideal “community of nations” that the memorial described demanded the fulfillment of three conditions: growth of civilization and welfare in backward countries; change of the current state borders so that “the states be divided according to nations, following the boundaries drawn for them by nature itself”;<sup>19</sup> and the introduction in a majority of states of a roughly uniform governing system, based on liberal institutions and the authority of representatives. The first of the three conditions showed Czartoryski’s admiration of colonial states, while the second emphasized a nation’s right to self-determination. Nations, argued the author of the memorial, “cannot fully understand or know one another, and therefore foreign rule cannot be welcome by any nation. Each one aspires to be the master in her own home, and cannot feel at home in the home of another.”<sup>20</sup> “Thus, it is obvious that any foreign rule in a state is contrary to European equilibrium.”<sup>21</sup>

The idea that establishing a just political equilibrium in Europe was the imperial vocation of Russia made an important part of the intellectual climate of Alexander’s age. To include it in the Foreign Ministry’s official program, Czartoryski used the ideas of Vasilii Fedorovich Malinovsky (1765-1814), a former Russian Consul in Jassy and author of a two-part study, *Meditations on*

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17 For Polish theories of the law of nations, see my book, *The Enlightenment and the Birth of Modern Nationhood. Polish Political Thought from Noble Republicanism to Tadeusz Kościuszko*, Notre Dame 1989, pp. 28–37.

18 See, excerpts from the above quoted memorial by A.J. Czartoryski, “Polityką kieruje nie tylko interes, ale moralność” [It is not just the interest that directs politics, but also morality], in: *Wybór myśli politycznych i społecznych*, Skowronek, ed., Warsaw 1992, p. 44.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Czartoryski developed the ideas later on (with no more illusions about the Russian Empire) in his “Essai sur la diplomatie” (Paris-Marseille 1830). See. A. Walicki, *The Enlightenment*, pp. 35-37.



*War and Peace*, published in 1803.<sup>22</sup> Part III of the study, pertaining to desirable political transformations in Europe, was sent to Czatoryski and was kept in his chancellery.<sup>23</sup>

Malinovsky, who was close to the Novikov circles of Freemasons – “Martinists,”<sup>24</sup> combined Enlightenment cosmopolitanism with sensitivity to national problems. He advocated the idea of permanent peace, firmly rejected the Malthusian justifications of wars, and criticized immoral practices of secret diplomacy and any external interference with the politics of weaker states. In the second part of *Meditations*, he developed a project for a “common alliance of Europe,” based on the principles of the law of nations and governed by an elected council, representing all the nationalities. Realization of this idea was, in his opinion, the objective of the anti-Napoleonic coalition, as well as a glorious liberating mission for the Russian Empire.<sup>25</sup>

The proposed restructuring of Europe was to be based on unconditional acceptance of each nation’s subjectivity and its ensuing right to autonomy. Malinovsky was against a legal-political definition of a nation, especially when it confused justice in international relations with dynastic legitimacy. He distinguished between nations and states, defining a nation according to ethnic-linguistic criteria, as a community of one language, faith and customs, endowed with its own national consciousness manifested as patriotism.<sup>26</sup> The nations thus defined were supposed to unite in larger bodies according to federative principles, establishing a loose “alliance” of national bodies (variant one) or a supranational federative state (variant two). For pragmatic reasons, Malinovsky

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22 In 1811, Malinovsky was nominated the first headmaster of Lyceum of Tsarskoe Selo; in this capacity, he influenced the shaping of the mental framework of the School’s student, Alexander Pushkin.

For almost a century and a half, Malinovsky’s writings remained unjustly forgotten and ignored by the scholars. His collected works were published only in 1958 (W.F. Malinovsky, *Isbranniie obshchestvenno-politicheskie sochineniia*. Introduction by E.A. Arab-Ogly, Moscow 1958).

23 It was discovered by Polish historian Jerzy Skowronek. See, his book, *Antynapoleońskie koncepcje Czartoryskiego* (Warsaw 1969), as well as his “Rozważania o wojnie i pokoju Wasyla F. Malinowskiego,” *Teki Archiwalne*, IV, 1978, pp. 23-57. See also, J. Czubaty, *Rosja i świat. Wyobrażenia polityczna elity władzy Imperium Rosyjskiego w początkach XIX wieku*, Warsaw 1997, pp. 126-128.

24 See I.S. Dostian, “Evropeiskaya utopia V.F.Malinovskogo,” *Voprosy istorii*, No 6, 1979, p. 34.

25 See *Ibid.*, pp. 34-36, see also, E.A. Arab-Ogly, “Vidaushchiisia russkii prosvetitel-demokrat,” *Voprosy filosofii*, No 2, 1954, pp. 183-190.

26 See I.S. Dostian, “Evropeiskaya utopia,” pp. 40-44.

was in favor of the latter option. He sketched a vision of the imminent fall of two empires, the Ottoman and the Hapsburg, on whose ruins a powerful “Slavic-Russian state” would be founded, comprising the Balkans and a large part of Central Europe.

Unlike Czartoryski, however, Malinovsky was not a liberal. His “European utopia” smacked of Christian Socialism and a nostalgic agrarianism inspired by Herder and Rousseau. Indeed, Part III of his treatise on war and peace echoes the concepts of Gerard Winstanley, the ideologist of the radical British movement of “diggers” who, in his *Law of Freedom* (1652), proposed common property of land, or “land for all.”<sup>27</sup> Malinovsky can thus be said to have represented a strange mixture of ideas, being simultaneously an Enlightenment theoretician of the law of nations and a precursor of Pan-Slavism, one of the first advocates of the autonomy of nations and a utopian Christian Socialist anticipating the agrarian Socialism of the Populists.

During the war with Napoleon of 1805-1807, the Enlightenment version of universalism lost its prestige, giving way to populist sentiments. Emperor Alexander himself shared the populist enthusiasm and even began to write dramatic plays extolling the patriotic heroism of ancient Russians. However, during the great national war of 1812, the usual, traditional patriotism proved insufficient. The invasion of Napoleon’s troops in Russia provoked apocalyptic feelings – common became the belief that Russia was the chosen nation destined by Providence to fight the Antichrist and bring on the universal rebirth of Christianity. Alexander, who had always been a sensitive barometer of intellectual fluctuations, immersed himself completely in that mystic messianism. After the fall of Moscow, he experienced a “spiritual rebirth,” following a chiliastic conversion. He found supporters in some influential figures at the court, especially the Moldavian Princess, Roxandra Sturdza, who preached an unorthodox, ecumenical version of Orthodox religiousness. The belief in the Russian Emperor’s divine mission was promptly adopted by the mystic-minded German Russophiles, Franz von Baader and J.H. Jung-Stilling.<sup>28</sup> After the Congress of Vienna, they were joined by the charismatic Baroness Julia de Krudener whom Alexander had met (through Roxandra Sturdza) in June of 1815 and in whose prophetic gift he immediately believed. Soon afterward, in September of 1815, the ideological Declaration of the Holy Alliance was written by Alexander and signed by the monarchs of Austria and Prussia. It confirmed

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27 Ibid., pp. 39-40.

28 See A.M. Martin, *Romantics, Reformers, Reactionaries. Russian Conservative Thought and Politics in the Reign of Alexander I*, Dekalb 1997, pp. 148-158.

Alexander's return to universalist ideology – this time, however, in the transformed spirit of a supra-denominational Christianity.

The text of the Declaration was concise, yet ideologically “packed.” It commenced with the statement that its signatories believed Christian principles to be binding not only in private, but also in public life. Thereby followed the conclusion that the three monarchs were obliged to treat one another as brothers and help one another in defending religion, peace and justice. In its key passage, the document claimed that there existed but a single “Christian nation” under the superior authority of Christ himself:

the three allied princes themselves only considering themselves as delegated by Providence to govern three branches of one and the same family, with: Austria, Prussia, Russia; thus confessing that the Christian nation of which they and their people form a part has really no other sovereign than Him to whom alone supreme power belongs, because in Him alone are contained all the treasures of love, of knowledge, and of infinite wisdom, that is to say in God, our divine Saviour Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word.<sup>29</sup>

The text in its final part declared the readiness to admit to the Alliance all the states that wished to co-operate in that spirit. Reactions to the Holy Alliance were varied, usually highly mixed. The British government refused to be part of the Alliance, treating its ideological declaration as mystical nonsense. So, in fact, thought the Chancellor of Austria, Klemens von Metternich, who nevertheless believed that Emperor Francis ought to support the Emperor of Russia for tactical reasons. The Vatican found the declaration of the three monarchs unacceptable since it suggested the existence of a supra-denominational Christian community. It is a common opinion in the literature on the subject that the Holy Alliance was of no practical consequence, given that all concrete decisions still had to be taken at the congresses of the superpowers named in the final Act of the Congress of Vienna.<sup>30</sup>

However, such opinions express a certain undervaluation of the role of ideas in history. It seems that the French historian of the European idea, Bernard Voyenne, is by all means right in calling the Declaration of the Holy Alliance a “true masterpiece.”<sup>31</sup> After all, it did combine an admirable act of Christian humility by the victorious superpowers with a condemnation of the defeated France, not only for her revolutionary sympathies but also – and above all else – for the blasphemous theory of the sovereignty of the nation, contradicting the

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29 Quoted from: Bertrand Russell, *Freedom and Organization: 1814-1914*, London 2001, p. 46.

30 See *Ibid.*, p. 54.

31 B. Voyenne, *Histoire de l'idée européenne*, Paris 1964, p. 113.

universalist foundations of true civilization. It was thus a successful paraphrase of universalist ideas of revolution, which made it ideologically attractive.

From the point of view of this book, the text of the Holy Alliance Declaration is important as a typical document of Russian intellectual history in the times of Alexander – it offers an expression of aspirations to a religious universalism which, under the impact of the Great War of 1812, became a *sui generis* part of the official ideology of Russian imperialism, a demonstration of accompanying ecumenical tendencies and, last but not least, a specific transformation of the theories of the Enlightenment law of nations, postulating international relations based on the principles of ethics and the rule of law.<sup>32</sup> In this sense, the ideology of the Holy Alliance became a transformation of Enlightenment universalism in the spirit of the equally universal ideals of a mystical, supra-denominational Christianity.

## The Liberal Conceptions

Despite a considerably strong backstage influence of Freemasonic mysticism, the beginnings of Alexander I's rule remained, in the intellectual sense, a continuation of the age of lights. The organization uniting and representing the Enlightenment community of that time was the Free Society of the Lovers of Literature, Science and Arts, active especially from 1801-1807. Its most eminent members were Ivan Pnin (1773–1805) who wrote *A Treaty on the Enlightenment in Reference to Russia* (1804), and Vasilii Popugaev (1778–1816) whose most important book was significantly entitled *On the Permanence of the Constitution and Laws*. Both had known Radishchev personally and admired him – both, too, wrote Radishchev-style poetry: Pnin honored Radishchev's death with an epic poem in his praise and in the final year of his own life published an ode entitled *Man* with obvious references to Radishchev's *Ode to Freedom*. No wonder then that literature on the subject treats them as Radishchev's disciples, or plainly, Radishchevites.<sup>33</sup>

From the point of view of the history of political thought, however, this is not quite correct. Unlike Radishchev, Pnin and Popugaev were not radicals, they rejected egalitarian ideas and did not sympathize with revolution. Rather than by

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32 Cf. presentation of the Holy Trinity in: A.M. Martin, *Romanticis, Reformers, Reactionaries*, pp. 157-159.

33 See V.N. Orlov, *Russkii prosvetiteli 1790-1800 godov*, Moscow 1953. The writings of Pnin and Popugaev are part of the two-volume anthology, *Russkii prosvetiteli (Ot Radishcheva do dekabristov)*, Moscow 1966.

the republican trend of the French Enlightenment, they had been intellectually shaped by classical British liberalism that had stemmed from the Scottish Enlightenment.<sup>34</sup> As political thinkers, they were thus continuators of Semen Desnitzky – a pupil of Adam Smith and the first propagator of the Scottish Enlightenment in Russia – rather than of Radishchev. Like Desnitzky, they preached the idea of a “commercial society” based on private property and representing a higher stage of social evolution.

Key to that idea was the concept of a “civic society” [*gradzhanskoe obshchestvo*] defined (after Adam Ferguson) as a system of spontaneously established contractual relations, based on division of the labor and market economies and safeguarded by the civic code, with officially guaranteed human rights. The birth of a “civic society” was perceived as proof of the transition from the “military” to the “commercial” phase of social development. Pnin and Popugaev were convinced that such a transition was conditional on Russia’s further progress. Therefore, they zealously supported the constitutional projects of the young Emperor. They did not dare propose their own project of a Constitution but their minimum program included such postulates as: widespread private property with guaranteed security, personal immunity, the rule of law, definition of the legal limits of political authority and, finally, a gradual introduction of representative government by extending the prerogatives of the acting Senate. The first of the above demands meant the abolition of serfdom and transformation of the Russian peasantry into a class of small owners with full title to the land.

Pnin’s *Treatise on the Enlightenment* is an interesting document of the “historicization” of the concepts of natural law. It was in keeping with the ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment, as well as with Bentham’s utilitarianism which vehemently contradicted the existence of originally given, and thus “natural,” supra-historical individual rights. According to Pnin, the notion of a “natural man” was nonsense, since man had been from the very beginning a “social animal,” deeply immersed in history. Pnin also rejected the alleged “naturalness” of the idea of equality, arguing that it was inequality – causing mutual dependencies and division of function among people – that gave birth to

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34 The difference was of crucial significance because evolutionary British Liberalism grown from the Scottish Enlightenment differed fundamentally from French Liberalism promoting the revolutionary idea of the “sovereignty of the people.” Friedrich von Hayek has concluded that only the former represented “classical Liberalism,” the latter being a “constructivist” deformation of the Liberal ideology. See, F.A. Hayek, “Liberalism,” in: F.A. Hayek, *New Studies in Philosophy, Politics, Economics and the History of Ideas*, London-Henley 1978, pp. 119-151.

an organized society and made possible its development. He believed private property to be the foundation of the social bond; he called it a “holy law,” “the soul of the community,” “the source of laws” and “the mother of welfare and contentment.” This defined his attitude to the heritage of the French Revolution: he fully accepted man’s right to freedom, especially to inalienable property – but distanced himself from “equality” and “fraternity.”<sup>35</sup>

Viewing the history of his own country from this perspective, Pnin, rather obviously, became an enthusiastic Westernizer. His dissertation entitled *The Feelings of a Russian Confessed in Front of the Statue of Peter the First Erected by Catherine the Second* was a paean in praise of the modernizing Russian autocracy. According to the author, Peter the Great had set in motion the process of transforming an uneducated “people” into an enlightened “nation” (let us note that a similar opinion was held several decades later by the ideologists of Westernism active at the time of Nicholas – Vissarion Belinsky and Konstantin Kavelin). It was also to Peter I that Pnin ascribed the transition from the patrimonial idea of “ruling” the country to that of “governing” it with the public good in mind. He saw Catherine as a great continuer of Peter’s achievements and gave her the credit for sowing the seeds of the representational system in Russia.<sup>36</sup>

Popugaev’s conceptions were very similar, albeit less consistent and distinct. His social ideal was that of the Ancient Sparta which, naturally, disagreed with a vision of a demilitarized “commercial society.” He differed from Pnin (and from the British Liberals) – coming closer to Radishchev – also in accentuating the virtues of classical republicanism, an example being his argument that a despot could not be a true patriot since he did not understand the nature of the civic bond uniting free men. Emphasis on a conscious participation in public life (contrary to the liberal appreciation of the private sphere of life) was evident for example in Popugaev’s favorable opinion on the obligatory state service demanded of the gentry by Peter I – as a way of forcing the gentry to actively participate in public life.<sup>37</sup> On other issues, however, Popugaev echoed Pnin: he stressed the role of private property, the necessity of social inequality, the role of the division of labor and of informal social relations in the creation of

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35 See W. Peltz, *Oświeceniowa myśl narodowa w Rosji na przełomie XVIII-XIX wieku*, p. 55. The lack of social radicalism did not, however, save Pnin’s book from confiscation by the censors.

36 See W. Peltz, *Oświeceniowa myśl narodowa*, pp. 48-49.

37 See V.V. Popugaev, “O blagopouchii narodnikh tiel and O politicheskome prosveshchenii voobshche,” in: *Russkii prosvetiteli*, vol. I, pages 292, 317.

a “civic society” and, above all else, the need to subject the monarchy to the rule of law.

The most interesting and influential Russian thinker of the Alexandrian age was Nikolai Speransky (1772–1839). Son of a provincial priest and alumnus of the seminaries, he became – in the years 1807–12 – the most influential figure in the country: a *de facto* Russian prime minister. In 1809, he proposed to the Emperor his extensive “Introduction to the Code of State Laws” that was, in fact, a project for a Constitution. In 1812, following an ungrounded accusation of supporting Napoleonic France, he was dismissed and sentenced to exile – first in Nizhny Novgorod and then in Perm. After his return in 1821, he worked on the codification of laws in the Russian Empire.

The main idea behind Speransky’s constitutional project – one that he had developed even in his article of 1803, *On the Organization of Legal and Administrative Authorities in Russia* – was a distinction between civil rights that safeguarded individual freedom and inalienable property, and political rights, i.e. entitlements to active participation in public life.<sup>38</sup> Corresponding to the division were two kinds of autocratic power. The first one was, obviously, arbitrary despotism, depriving the subjects not only of the possibility to participate in state life, but also of individual freedom and the right to freely dispose of one’s property. The other was enlightened absolutism, i.e., an authority that – despite the fact that it did not recognize political rights – was restricted by civil law and granted its subjects freedom and ownership, i.e., separated the “private” sphere from the “public” one, the latter being governed by the state. The first kind of autocracy collided with the elementary demands of evolution toward a “commercial society” – never in history had members of an enlightened, “commercial” nation accepted the status of slaves. But an enlightened, moderate version of absolutism was quite another story – it seemed acceptable, since the most urgent need of a modern man was individual, private freedom, best secured by a strong state authority.

Speransky added, however, that it was advisable that the individual’s freedom and property be safeguarded by a formal Constitution. Of course, he did

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38 I summarize Speransky’s legal-political views following Pypin (*Obshchestvennoie dvizheniie v Rossii pri Aleksandrie I*, Ch. III) and Victor Leontovich (V.V. Leontovich, *Istoriia liberalizma v Rossii 1762-1914*, vol. I, Paris 1980, pp. 67-97. The German original: V. Leontovitsch, *Geschichte des Liberalismus in Russland*, Frankfurt am Main 1957).

Also, see M.M. Speransky, *Projekty i zapiski*, Moscow and Leningrad 1961. For the most comprehensive monograph of Speransky in English, see M. Raeff, *Michael Speransky: Statesman of Imperial Russia* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, The Hague 1969).

not mean a constitutional sanctification of political rights, but a constitutional order that would leave authority in the hands of a monarch, while excluding from it the domain of civil law. Very similar ideas had been elaborated on in 1819 by Benjamin Constant in his famous dissertation, *On the Freedom of the Ancients in Comparison with the Freedom of the Moderns*. The dates suggest, however, that Speransky could not have borrowed from Constant. The source of the similarity of their concepts of individual, *private* freedom was, obviously, British liberalism, purposefully distancing itself from classical republican (“Ancient”) idea of participatory freedom that identified freedom with the *public* activity of citizens.

Speransky called the combination of absolutism in the sphere of executive authority with the rule of law and autonomy of the “civic society” – a “true monarchy.” Specifying on this ideal in his constitutional project, he firmly separated executive power (which he left entirely to the monarch) from legislative-legal power. He envisioned a four-grade hierarchy of legislative assemblies – from the local *duma* to the State Duma – elected, indirectly, in such a way that the lower-grade assemblies formed electoral colleges for those superior in the hierarchy. He postulated full independence of the courts which were to act upon a published code of state laws, exempt from arbitrary revisions. Elementary civil laws were, in Speransky’s model, binding for all citizens of the state who were, however, divided into three classes: the gentry, the middle class and the “men of labor.” The gentry and the middle class would be entitled to political representation, depending on their property requirements – the gentry enjoying an additional privilege of owning populated land and being free to choose their state service. “Men of labor” – even if they were well off but did not own real estate – were deprived of any political rights (similarly, the Polish 3<sup>rd</sup> of May Constitution granted political rights only to landowners).

In an article of 1838, entitled *On Learning Laws*,<sup>39</sup> Speransky revised his views, giving up the postulate of a formal Constitution. He came to the conclusion that Russia was still too immature for a Constitution and should be satisfied for the time being with a codification of the existing laws. He supported this view with a theoretical motivation, arguing that the term “autocrat” denoted the highest authority that could not be subject to an earthly judgment, but was in fact limited by Christian consciousness, social habits and voluntary obligations of the monarch. Nevertheless, he stuck to the liberal minimum of safeguarding the domain of civil law from interference by the political authority. He recalled

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39 *K poznaniiu zakonov*, 1838. See, Leontovich, *Istoriia liberalizma*, pp. 84-90.



the example of Great Britain, pointing out – after David Hume – that despite not having a written Constitution, the country was a state of law.

This may have been a choice of gradualism, rather than a firm rejection of constitutionalism. In any case, Speransky abandoned his constitutional projects for an attitude known as “liberal absolutism.” It certainly illustrated his reaction to the failure of the Decembrists’ Uprising and the stabilization of autocracy under Tsar Nicholas.<sup>40</sup>

In terms of worldviews, Speransky’s political philosophy could be classified as a specific variation of *Christian liberalism*. A close friend of Ivan Lopukhin, Speransky was an eminent representative of supra-denominational Christianity inspired by the Freemasons – “Martinists.” His juridical Enlightenment rationalism was mentally united with a belief in an above-Church “inner Christianity,” rationalized in the spirit of Freemason ethics, but endowed also with a mystical dimension. While studying the Code Napoleon, he kept reading Boehme, Saint-Martin, Mrs. Guyon and the Church Fathers – his entire work on the reform of the state system was undertaken with the Christianization of social life in mind.<sup>41</sup> He assumed that the introduction in Russia of the rule of law, representative institutions, finance control etc., would fulfill the teachings of the Gospel which he believed to be the book containing solutions to all state problems. He firmly rejected the view that the Kingdom of God was entirely “not of this world,” i.e., could not be realized within the frame of legal-state institutions. It has been rightly observed that this attitude indicated his belief in the sanctity of the state, akin to the beliefs expressed in the declaration of objectives by the Holy Alliance.<sup>42</sup>

Speransky’s out-of-Church Christianity was also strongly anti-ecclesiastical. Anticipating the views of Leo Tolstoy, Speransky boldly claimed that Church institutionalizations of Christian faith had created “an entire system of false Christianity.” He distinguished between a “Church with forms” (external) and a “Church without forms” (internal), arguing that the former was inseparably

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40 Let us note, however, that Speransky was a firm opponent of any form of revolutionary activity. As such, he could accept the function of members of the Supreme Court who passed sentence on the Decembrists.

The term “liberal absolutism” has been used by Leontovich in the above quoted *History of Liberalism in Russia*. He uses the term referring to the views and politics of Catherine II, as well as of an enemy of Speransky’s constitutional project, Nikolai Karamzin. According to I.D. Osipov, Speransky represented “autocratic liberalism” also while working on his constitution project. See, I.D. Osipov, *Filosofia russkogo liberalizma XIX-nachala XX v.*, Sankt Petersburg 1996, p. 42.

41 See V.V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, I, p. 112.

42 See *Ibid.*, p. 114.

connected with fanaticism and lust for material goods, and thus served only the needs of the spiritually immature who needed external control.<sup>43</sup>

In fact, Speransky had an excellent philosophical education. He was acquainted with both Enlightenment philosophy and German idealism – he even wrote an extensive analysis and critique of Kant’s ideas.<sup>44</sup> One of the first historians of Russian philosophy, Ernest Radlov, named Speransky (with Skovoroda, Lomonosov and Radishchev) amongst the chief makers of the modern philosophical tradition in Russia.<sup>45</sup>

The Speransky-Kant relation was predominantly polemical. As a critic of Church Christianity, Speransky came close to the Kantian “religion within the limits of reason” – and yet, as a reformer of the state, he opposed Kantian anti-paternalism. He advocated an enlightened version of paternalism, i.e., the idea of a state that provided its citizens not only with the rule of law, but also with a minimum means of existence,<sup>46</sup> thus preventing social unrest such as the Pugachev movement and guaranteeing the stability of social evolution. Above all else, however, what Speransky had in mind was the realization of a certain social ideal – the ideal of a liberal welfare state in the service of Christian morality.

## **Nikolai Karamzin and conservatism**

Conservative nationalists, much strengthened by the defeat of the Third Coalition in the war of 1805–7, were resolute opponents of liberal trends and of Speransky’s designs for reform. One of the key figures among them was Count Fyodor V. Rostopchyn (1763–1826), Governor General of Moscow, who considered himself a descendant of Genghis Khan but felt perfectly at home in the salons of Paris.<sup>47</sup> In 1806, once France seized Prussia, Rostopchyn considered Napoleon Russia’s greatest enemy, who should be fought like a “wild beast.” A popular legend has it that it was Rostopchyn who ordered the burning of Moscow in 1812 as a greeting to the encroaching French army.

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43 See I.D. Osipov, *Filosofiiia russkogo liberalizma*, pp. 39–40.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

45 See E.L. Radlov, “Ocherk istorii russkoi filosofii” (Prague 1920), in: A.I. Vvedensky, A.F. Losev, E.L. Radlov, G.G. Shpet, *Russkaia filosofiiia. Ocherki istorii*, Sverdlovsk 1991, p. 105.

46 Cf. I. D. Osipov, *Filosofiiia russkogo liberalizma*, p. 48.

47 See A.M. Martin, *Romantics, Reformers, Reactionaries*, pp. 59–69.

Rostopchyn proved himself to be an intransigent conservative who searched for traces of the disastrous influence of “Martinists” and denounced their alleged machinations in court circles. While he defended the traditional Orthodox religion, he used it as a means to achieve his objectives, perceiving Christianity “not as a mystery of incarnation but one of the social order.” In 1807, he published a booklet, *Thoughts Aloud at a Red Porch*<sup>48</sup>, offering a concentrated expression of a nationalistic Francophobia. In it he criticized his compatriots for their inferiority complex with respect to the unscrupulous comers from France; he portrayed the revolution in France as thoughtless slaughter, Napoleon being an incarnation of its ravenous instincts. The publication did not elicit admiration in court circles, but its record-breaking success among the reading public tells much about the public mood.<sup>49</sup>

Edited by Sergey Glinka (1775–1847), the periodical *Russkiy vestnik* (*The Russian Messenger*) became an influential organ of nationalist xenophobia.<sup>50</sup> The traditional patriotism it voiced glorified the purity of the national character and the heroic virtues of Rus’ before Peter I in association with nationalist populism which encouraged the nobility to fraternize with the people and live on their own work.

A more intellectually refined form of nationally-tinted conservatism was proposed by Admiral Alexander Shishkov (1754–1841). He opposed Karamzin’s modernization of the Russian literary language, which he identified in terms of Gallicization. His *Considerations on the Old and New Style of the Russian Language*, 1803, argued that Russian was essentially a continuation of the Old Church Slavonic language; the “high style” in Russian literature ought to be founded upon the Sacred Books, that is, the Old Church Slavonic translations of the Bible. For the “average style,” he recommended that common lexis, drawn from folkloristic sources, be introduced. Thus, a political concept was expressed whereby the Russian nation should defend its traditional public morality against alien influences and constantly refresh its forces through contact with the never-exhausted resources of its intrinsic folk culture, unspoilt by foreign influence.

These ideas were propagated by an association called The Colloquy of Lovers of the Russian Word (Russ., *Beseda lyubitelei russkogo slova*), which existed between 1811 and 1816. Its opponents, defending the style introduced by

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48 *Mysli vsluh na krasnom kryltse*, Moscow 1807.

49 The brochure sold as many as 7,000 copies (A.M. Martin, *Romantics, Reformers, Reactionaries*, p. 69).

50 See A.M. Martin, *ibidem*, pp. 73–84; A. Koyré, *La philosophie et le problème national en Russie au début du XIXe siècle*, Paris, 1929, pp. 18–22.

Karamzin, were grouped in another association – “Arzamas”, so named after a small town known for geese breeding, which was to meant to mark their distanced position toward the pompous and patriotic Colloquy.<sup>51</sup> The polemics between the two groups are known to the history of Russian literature as the “combat between the archaists and the innovators.”

In the spring of 1811, Shishkov delivered a patriotic speech at a Colloquy meeting that was later published as *A Treatise on the Love of the Motherland*. He discerned there three sources of Russian national identity and patriotic pride: the Orthodox faith; the national education shaping the civic values; and, respect for the nation’s own language and literature. He considered language to be a measure of the people’s mind, soul and virtues, a bond integrating a country’s inhabitants into a consolidated nation.

Yet, it was Karamzin’s conservatism that proved to be the most modern, and philosophically the richest among the various Russian conservatisms of the period. Similarly to Speransky’s liberalism and the ideas of the Decembrists, it was a product of the country’s modernization – and, as such, expressed an intellectual ferment and the political ambitions of a Europeanized enlightened nobility, which had aroused under the influence of the Emperor’s liberal gestures and reformative designs.

Nikolai Karamzin (1766–1826) was Russia’s official government historian during the reign of Alexander. In his literary work he was the most typical representative of Russian sentimentalism, a trend with which Radishchev, too, had been associated. Unlike the latter, however, the young Karamzin was less interested in civic virtue or social reform than in the ideal of moral self-perfection. As a young man he rejected “the world’s clamor” in favor of solitary meditation and “sweet melancholy, the passion of tender souls.” This pose of sentimental egocentricity dominates the *Letters from a Russian Traveler*, in which Karamzin describes his travels in Europe in the years 1789-90. It is instructive to compare the *Letters* with Radishchev’s *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, also an account of travels. “I looked about me,” Radishchev wrote, “and my soul was wounded by suffering humanity.”<sup>52</sup> Karamzin, on the other hand, was completely uninterested in social problems (although the French Revolution broke out during his stay in Europe). The *Letters* are only a “lyrical pamphlet,” he writes, an account of subjective impressions: “They are a mirror of my soul during the last eighteen months. Twenty years from now (if I should live that long) they will still be a delight to

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51 See M. Jakóbiec, ed., *Historia literatury rosyjskiej*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 1, Warsaw 1976, p. 362.

52 A. N. Radishchev, *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, trans. by Leo Wiener, ed. by Roderick Page Thaler, Cambridge, Mass. 1958, p. 5.

me – even if only to me. I shall peruse them and I shall see what kind of person I was, what I thought and what I dreamed. And between ourselves, what is more interesting to man than his own self?”<sup>53</sup>

Outside events, however, forced Karamzin to think in social and political categories. The beginning of the French Revolution might have awakened some vague idealistic sympathies in him, but the second phase – the guillotining of the king and the Jacobin Terror – filled him with horror. “The Revolution clarified our ideas,” was how he himself described the profound change that took place in his system of values. He abandoned his sentimental and rather abstract humanitarianism in favor of an ardent defense of autocracy as the only permanent mainstay of the old order. Where formerly he had believed in Europe, he now criticized it as a hotbed of revolution, chaos, and disintegration, and praised Russia as the very antithesis – a country with a settled social order, enlightened absolutist government, and unshaken Christian beliefs.

Karamzin was strengthened in his conservative nationalism by Russia’s reverses in the Napoleonic Wars and by Tsar Alexander’s early liberalism, particularly the intended juridical and administrative reforms that Mikhail Speransky was then planning at the emperor’s behest. The conservative opposition was indignant that the plans for the reorganization of the state were modeled on the Napoleonic Code, sponsored by and named after the man who was not only Russia’s enemy, but also a usurper and heir to the French Revolution. In 1811, when Speransky’s influence was at its height, Karamzin gave expression to this widespread mood of dissatisfaction in his *Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia*, in which he set out in detail his reflections on Russian history and some bold and searching criticism of the government’s policies. The leitmotifs of the *Memoir* are belief in the salutary force of autocracy and an extreme notion of historical continuity – so extreme that it rejects all legislation that does not spring from national traditions but is based on foreign theoretical premises or models. In what was no doubt an exaggerated fear that Alexander was aiming to impose constitutional limitations on autocracy, Karamzin addressed him as follows:

If Alexander, inspired by generous hatred for the abuses of autocracy, should lift a pen and prescribe himself laws other than those of God and his conscience, then the true virtuous citizen of Russia would presume to stop his hand to say:

“Sire! You exceed the limits of your authority. Russia, taught by long disasters, vested before the holy altar the power of autocracy in your ancestor, asking him that he rule her supremely, indivisibly. This covenant is the foundation of your authority,

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53 N. M. Karamzin, *Letters of a Russian Traveler*, trans. by Florence Jonas, New York 1957, p. 340.

you have no other; you may do everything, but you may not limit your authority by law.”<sup>54</sup>

In order to understand this strange standpoint, one must realize that Karamzin thought of autocracy as undivided rather than unlimited power. The tsar’s authority was absolute in affairs of state, but did not extend to the private sphere, which was outside the realm of politics. If we accept this scheme, we realize why from Karamzin’s point of view the freedom of the individual (this was, of course, understood to refer only to members of the gentry) was infinitely greater under autocracy than under the Jacobins’ “sovereignty of the people.” It was consistent with his early sentimentalism – when he had prized isolation and apolitical freedom in a quiet rural setting – that he should now fear above all the “tyranny of popular rule” and regard the monarchy as a “sheet anchor.”

Even in the political sphere, however, Karamzin felt that the sovereign should avoid arbitrary rule. While his authority was not limited by any written laws or constitution, it was limited by an unwritten historical tradition that was laid down in custom and moral convictions. A monarch who did not take account of this tradition – and a strong part of it was the triple alliance between autocracy, nobility, and Orthodox Church – was in danger of becoming a despot. In the name of these notions Karamzin inveighed against the “hydra of aristocracy” – the nobility’s attempts to limit absolutism by legal restrictions – but also against the policies of those tsars who had ruled against the wishes and interests of the nobility. He called Ivan the Terrible a tyrant worse than Caligula or Nero, but argued that this did not absolve Kurbsky from the charge of treason.<sup>55</sup> Peter the Great, too, Karamzin considered a despotic ruler; he gave him credit for his modernization of Russia, but considered his methods a brutal infringement of national traditions and an illegal incursion of political authority into the private sphere.

It should be added that Karamzin defended absolutism not as the ideal political system but merely as a historical necessity arising out of human imperfections. It is interesting, therefore, to see what he thought of the folkmoths or *veche* (whose role in Kievan Russia he greatly emphasized), and also of the ancient Russian “merchant republics” of Novgorod and Pskov. In his

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54 R. Pipes, *Karamzin’s Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia*, Cambridge, Mass. 1959, p. 139.

55 Prince Andrei Kurbsky, the commander of the Muscovite army against the Livonian Order, fled to Poland when he heard of the bloody persecution of the boyars by Ivan the Terrible. In his remarkable correspondence with the Tsar, he eloquently defended the rights of the boyars and justified his flight to Poland by the ancient right of the nobility to refuse to serve an unjust monarch.

tale *Marfa, or the Subjugation of Novgorod* (1803), he seems to side with the victorious principle of autocracy, but he also praises the “republican virtues” of the citizens of Novgorod. The downfall of their “exuberant freedom” is painted in a spirit of elegiac melancholy. There are similar descriptions of the struggle of autocracy with old Russian “republican” institutions in the *Memoir* and in the twelve-volume *History of the Russian State*. In a letter written toward the end of his life Karamzin even stated that “at heart he had remained a republican.”

The fundamental concepts underlying Karamzin’s conservatism – the belief in historical continuity and the separation of politics (the legitimate sphere of absolutist rule) from private life – fulfilled a dual function. On the one hand, they represented an attempt (albeit timid and partial) to protect the individual against the arbitrary interference of authority; on the other, they were a determined protest against any move to change the status quo (which was favorable to the gentry) by even the most minor reforms. In particular Karamzin stressed historical continuity as a powerful argument against any limitation of serfdom. Through Karamzin, the Russian gentry renounced their struggle for political rights but in return demanded guarantees that their social position would continue to be stable and indeed strengthened.

In justice to Karamzin, it must be said that he represented an enlightened conservatism far removed from the reactionary anti-Western obscurantism of such men as Arakcheev, Magnitsky, and Runich, whose influence on the government’s educational policies was to become more and more disastrous during the last years of his life. Nor can there be any comparison between his nationalist sentiments and the chauvinistic xenophobia that filled the columns of S. N. Glinka’s *Russian Messenger* [*Russkii Vestnik*]. Karamzin’s “loyal submission” was far from servile, and his bold and even bitter criticism of the Tsar in the *Memoir* prevented it from being published for many years. His sentimental “republicanism” did not stop him from praising autocracy as the “Palladium of Russia,” but he was still unorthodox enough to be denounced by an overzealous informer as a man whose works were full of “Jacobin poison” and should be burned.

A comparison between Karamzin and the Decembrists makes it clear how widely divergent were the views of these two representatives of the Russian gentry. Whereas Karamzin opposed the Emperor’s projected reforms because he thought them too far-reaching, the Decembrist movement emerged because of doubt about the sincerity of these plans and gained ground as the government’s policies became increasingly reactionary. And yet the Decembrists eagerly read the ninth volume of Karamzin’s *History* and were delighted by his criticism of Ivan the Terrible. The earlier volumes, too, provided them with a great deal of interesting information on the “republican traditions” of Russian history, even if

Karamzin's judgments did not often agree with theirs. Pushkin, who had many contacts with the Decembrists, wrote that the *History* was an absolute revelation: "You would have said that Karamzin discovered ancient Russia as Columbus discovered America."

## The Decembrists

A discussion of the history of the Decembrist movement, named after the ill-fated uprising that took place in December 1825, lies outside the scope of this book.<sup>56</sup> In the present context we shall only deal with the mature ideology of the Decembrists in the years immediately preceding the revolt, without going more deeply into the genesis or evolution of their theories. In those last years, the idea of an armed revolt against the Tsar began to gain ground among the members of the movement. They were encouraged by the example of military rebellions in Spain and Naples (1820), the revolution in the kingdom of Piedmont (1821), the Greek uprising (1821), and also the mutiny in the Semenovskiy guard regiment in 1820. The Union of Welfare, founded in 1818 as the successor to the Union of Salvation founded two years earlier, was unsuited to the new aims of the movement. It therefore became desirable to dissolve it in order to shed uncertain or unreliable members and to form a new organization. In 1821 the Union of Welfare was succeeded by two secret societies consisting largely of army officers, which remained in close touch with each other. These were the Northern Society in St. Petersburg and the Southern Society in Tulchin, the headquarters of the Second Army in the Ukraine. The membership of the Northern Society represented a wide range of political views, but was on the whole far less radical than the Southern Society grouped around Colonel Pavel Pestel. For the sake of clarity, therefore, it will be more convenient to discuss the views of each of these groups separately.

The sudden death of Tsar Alexander I and the commotion around the succession to the throne proved an opportune moment for the armed action that took place on 14<sup>th</sup> December 1825 and was later called the Decembrist revolt (or uprising). The turmoil came about because of the marriage of Grand Duke

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56 M.V. Nyechkina's *Dvizhenie dekabristov* (vol. 1–2, Moscow 1955), an otherwise monumental monograph, is laden with excessive bias as it exaggeratingly identifies the Decembrists with a socially radical stance. A decent summary of the existing knowledge on the Decembrists in English is to be found in A.G. Mazour, *The First Russian Revolution, 1825*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Stanford, Calif. 1961; also, see M. Raëff, *The Decembrist Movement*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1966.



Constantine Pavlovich, the Viceroy (*Namiestnik*) of the Kingdom of Poland, with Joanna Grudzińska, Princess of Łowicz. Since Joanna was not of a royal line, Constantine abdicated the throne, of which fact nobody was aware, save for the Emperor himself. Thus, after Alexander's death, the army, as well as the younger *tsarevitch* Nikolai, swore allegiance to Constantine; loyal to his promise, the Duke did not assume the throne. This being the case, Nikolai turned to Alexander's last will and agreed to take power; as a result, the army had to take the oath of allegiance once again. The plotters used this as an opportunity to come forward in the name of legal succession: the soldiers led by them to Senatsky Square in Petersburg were convinced that they were defending the rights of Constantine, the legitimate successor to the throne, against Nikolai, the usurper. According to a witty anecdote (which in fact departs from the truth), they thought that the Constitution, which the revolting officers mentioned to them, was the name of Constantine's wife.

### *The Northern Society*

In the ideology of the Northern Society especially there were certain elements reminiscent of the views of the aristocratic opposition of the reign of Catherine II. Many of the members in this branch of the Decembrist movement were descendants of once powerful and now impoverished boyar families, some even tracing their descent from the legendary Prince Rurik (Prince Sergei Trubetskoi, Prince Evgeny Obolensky, and Prince Aleksandr Odoevsky). Nikita Muraviev claimed that the movement was rooted in the traditions of Novgorod and Pskov, of the 12<sup>th</sup> century Boyar Duma, of the constitutional demands presented to Anne by the Moscow nobles in 1730, and of the constitutional plans of the Panin brothers and the 18<sup>th</sup> century aristocratic opposition. The poet Kondraty Ryleev painted an idealized portrait of Prince Andrei Kurbsky (the leader of the boyar revolt against Ivan the Terrible) and even devoted one of his "Elegies" to him (modeled on the "Historical Songs" of the Polish poet Julian Niemcewicz). In his evidence before the Investigating Commission after the suppression of the revolt, Petr Kakhovsky stated that the movement was primarily a response to the high-handedness of the bureaucracy, the lack of respect for ancient gentry freedom, and the favoritism shown to foreigners. Another Northern Decembrist, the writer and literary critic Aleksandr Bestuzhev (who later continued to publish his works under the pseudonym "Mariinsky"), wrote that his aim was "monarchy tempered by aristocracy." These and similar facts explain Pushkin's view, expressed in the 1830s, that the Decembrist revolt had been the last episode in the age-old struggle between autocracy and boyars.

There is little doubt that memories of ancient “liberties” and dislike of the bureaucracy, whose social status was a reward for servility and careerism, helped to fan the Decembrists’ hatred of tsarist despotism. This does not mean that they were only motivated by egoistic class interests (the view held by M. N. Pokrovsky and the so-called “vulgar-sociological” school of Soviet historiography). Even those Decembrists who went furthest in idealizing ancient liberties had no wish to revive the past; their plans to overthrow despotism were to benefit the whole nation, not only the nobility, and gave an important place to the abolition of serfdom. If the political program of the Decembrists had been put into effect, it would have created a base for the rapid development of capitalism, which not only would have taken away the nobility’s political privileges but also would have undermined its economic position. Although its origins in the gentry made for certain obvious limitations, Decembrist ideology was essentially an example of modern liberalism. Moreover, insofar as it postulated the overthrow of autocracy – the main pillar of the old order – it was also a revolutionary ideology. Altogether it was a phenomenon familiar from Polish history: a revolutionary and feudal ideology whose main exponents were members of a privileged class – “the best sons of the gentry,” or “gentry revolutionaries,” as Lenin called them.

The reconciliation of disparate elements was made easier by the fact that the Decembrists used the term “republic” loosely, without appearing to be fully aware that there were essential differences between, for instance, the Roman Republic, the Polish gentry republic, the old Russian city states, and modern bourgeois republics. The theorists of the Northern Society made no distinction between criticism of absolutism from the standpoint of the gentry and similar criticism from a bourgeois point of view. Hence they saw no difficulty in reconciling liberal notions taken largely from the works of Bentham, Benjamin Constant, and Adam Smith with an idealization of former feudal liberties and a belief in the role of the aristocracy as a “curb on despotism.” The theoretical premise here was the “juridical world view” of the Enlightenment, according to which legal and political forms determined the revolution of society.

The most important document reflecting the views of the Northern Society was the draft constitution prepared by Nikita Muraviev. Muraviev’s draft abolished serfdom in all its forms but made no mention of any land grants. On the contrary, it stated clearly that all land would remain in the possession of the gentry; it was only in the face of pressure from the more radical members of the Society that an amendment was introduced permitting peasants to own their homestead and two desentines (about five acres) of arable land. In view of the backward state of agriculture in Russia at the time, such a tiny holding was quite inadequate to support a family. It will be seen from this that Muraviev was

anxious to ensure the continued economic dependence of the peasantry on their masters even after the abolition of serfdom. One of the paragraphs in the constitution (removed in the final draft) even stated that future legislation would decide the amount of indemnity for loss of labor a peasant would have to pay his landlord if he wished to leave his village.

Another feature of Muraviev's constitution was the high level at which property qualifications for citizenship were fixed. Only men who owned real estate worth at least 500 silver rubles or other property worth twice that sum were allowed to use the title "citizen." Similar qualifications governing recruitment to the civil service were fixed on a rising scale: the highest offices were to be open only to men with estates worth at least 60,000 silver rubles! In a later version of the draft Muraviev lowered this barrier and conferred the title "citizen" on all inhabitants of the Russian state. Even this version, however, granted full voting rights only to landowners and capitalists and deprived a considerable proportion of the population of an active part in politics. The only office open to "anyone without exception or distinction" was that of head of a commune.

Muraviev modeled his plan for a political system on the United States. The future Russia was to be a federation of fourteen states, each of which was to have its own capital. For example, there was to be a Volkhov state, whose capital would be in "the city of St. Peter," a Charnov state with its capital in Kiev, and a Ukrainian state with its capital in Kharkov (the state boundaries did not coincide with ethnic boundaries). The Kingdom of Poland (within ethnic boundaries) was to remain within the federation, but was to have a greater measure of independence than the other states. Each state was to have a two-chamber parliament, which would enjoy independence in economic, administrative, and cultural matters but would not have legislative powers. The supreme authority in the federation as a whole was to be vested in a Popular Assembly [*Narodnoe Veche*] made up of a Supreme Duma and a House of Representatives. The Tsar would be no more than the federation's leading official. In order to avoid the pernicious influence of court cliques, persons in the imperial service were to be temporarily deprived of political rights. Moreover, there was even a clause forbidding the emperor to travel abroad, so that he might not give heed to the evil promptings of foreigners.

The most progressive feature of Muraviev's constitution was its stand on civil liberties. There was to be complete freedom of worship, assembly, and speech; censorship was to be abolished; and there was to be no state interference in research, art, or teaching. On social issues, however, and especially on the peasant issue, Muraviev's plan revealed the limitations of the gentry mentality all too clearly. The conviction that the peasants ought to be overjoyed merely at

the abolition of serfdom was shared by many Decembrists. Yakushkin, for instance, could not conceal his exasperation at his peasants' demand for land when he offered to free them. When they were told that the land would remain the property of the landlord, their answer was: "Then things had better stay as they are. We belong to the master, but the land belongs to us."

Muraviev's constitution played a significant role in helping to crystallize the views of his fellow members, but it cannot be considered an official expression of the standpoint of the entire Northern Society. In any case, it was agreed that the final choice of constitution was to be left to the legislative assembly convened after the overthrow of the government. Apart from the trend represented by Muraviev, there was a more radical faction whose aim was not a constitutional monarchy but a republic. The leading representative of this trend was the poet Ryleev, a friend of the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz.

### *Nikolai Turgenev*

Among those who were close to the Northern Society, a separate stand was taken by Nikolai Turgenev (1789-1871), a member of the former Union of Welfare and son of the Freemason Ivan Turgenev, one of Novikov's close collaborators. During the Decembrist uprising Turgenev was out of the country. Condemned to death in absentia, he remained abroad.

Unlike Muraviev and the Decembrists proper (i.e. those who were members of secret societies and had decided on armed rebellion), Turgenev was a reformer rather than a revolutionary. He, too, wished to transform Russia into a country enjoying civil liberties and the rule of law, but he was suspicious of the political ambitions of the gentry. Indeed, he believed that of the two evils, absolutism was preferable to aristocratic oligarchy, and that only a strong central government would be able to tackle land reform. Unlike Muraviev, he was also against the imposition of property qualifications; to regard wealth or property as a guarantee of patriotism or love of liberty was, he maintained, an insult to humanity. Nevertheless, in his proposals on the vexed issue of land reform Turgenev went no further than Muraviev. In a book entitled *An Essay on a Theory of Taxation* (1818), he suggested that peasants should be freed without land grants but should be allowed the right to purchase land. From his personal diary it seems that he was in favor of partial land grants but feared that to introduce legislation of this kind would only strengthen the gentry's opposition to what he considered to be the essential reform, namely the abolition of serfdom and the changeover to free hired labor. Turgenev, interestingly enough, was particularly emphatic about the need to dissolve the village commune, which he considered to be the main obstacle in the way of agricultural

modernization. Muraviev, too, was an opponent of the commune, although he did not explain his dislike by any economic arguments.

During his émigré years, Turgenev published a lengthy book, *La Russie et les Russes* (Paris 1847; editions in English and German followed in the same year), which analysed Russia's socio-economic situation and provided an exhaustive account of the Decembrists' revolt. Turgenev attempted to portray the Decembrists as liberals, far from radical and reluctant towards revolutionary methods.

### *The Southern Society*

In the Southern Society of Decembrists the dominant figure was Colonel Pavel Pestel (1793-1826). His views are set out in his draft for a constitution, entitled *Russian Justice*. This detailed description of the future political system to be introduced in Russia was a document to which the Southern Society attached great importance. Unlike the leaders of the Northern Society, Pestel maintained that the question of a constitution should not be left to a future assembly but should be decided in advance, and that after the success of the military coup an Interim Government should be established with dictatorial powers.

The most interesting parts of *Russian Justice* are the sections dealing with land reform. Pestel backed up his arguments with a critical analysis of two theories concerning land tenure: the first considers land to be a gift of nature and therefore communal property; the second considers it to be the property of those who cultivate it. Pestel felt that both these theories contained particles of truth, and he therefore attempted to reconcile them in his own program, which was based on two assumptions: that every man has a natural right to exist and thus to a piece of land large enough to allow him to make a basic living; and that only those who create surplus wealth have a right to enjoy it. After the overthrow of tsarism, therefore, Pestel proposed to divide land into two equal sectors: the first would be public property (or, more accurately, the property of the communes); the second would be in private hands. The first would be used to ensure everyone a minimum living, whereas the second would be used to create surplus wealth. Every citizen was entitled to ask his commune for an allotment large enough to support a family; if the commune had more land available, he would even be able to demand several such allotments. The other sector would remain in private hands. Pestel felt that his program ensured every individual a form of social welfare in the shape of a communal land allotment but also left scope for unlimited initiative and the opportunity of making a fortune in the private sector.

Pestel believed that his program had every chance of success since land ownership in Russia had traditionally been both communal and private. Here he

obviously had in mind the Russian village commune; it should be emphasized, however, that Pestel's commune differed essentially from the feudal *obshchina* in that it did not restrict its members' movement or personal freedom and did not impose collective responsibility for individual members' tax liabilities.

The idea that the village commune contained the seeds of Russia's future social system was to have an astonishing career in the history of Russian ideas. To a certain extent Pestel was a precursor of this conception, but it is worth noting that he did not associate the commune with any socialist tendencies (although Herzen thought otherwise). He was convinced of the importance of large-scale capitalist ownership, and his economic ideas were strongly influenced by Adam Smith.

Pestel's constitution abolished the feudal estates, including the nobility. His attitude toward the latter was, however, marked by a certain ambiguity: he was reluctant to damage their position and even argued that it was important to preserve certain privileges for the most deserving citizens. Unlike the members of the Northern Society, Pestel had no sympathy for the ancient aristocracy; any sense of fellowship he might have had would have been with the civil service nobility who owed their social status to government service rather than to birth. This comes out clearly in his *Russian Justice*, where decisions on social issues are largely entrusted to government officials. In the new Russia all independent unions, societies, and associations were to be forbidden by law, and private persons were not even to be permitted to found schools or charitable bodies.

Although Pestel's land reform proposals were more radical than the plans of the Northern Society, they, too, showed a tendency to compromise with the large landowners. Estates were to be divided into three categories: landlords owning more than 10,000 desentines (about 25,000 acres) were to give up half their land without compensation; those owning from 5,000 to 10,000 desentines were to receive partial compensation for half their land; owners of smaller estates were to give up half their land but were entitled to full compensation or a grant of an equivalent amount of land in a less populated region. This reform was to ensure the setting up of a pool of land in every commune (mainly for the benefit of the peasants) consisting of half the entire acreage. After the conclusion of the land reform there was to be no upper limit to the size of private estates. Serfdom was to be abolished at once, but labor obligations [*corvée*] were to be retained for a transitional period lasting from ten to fifteen years.

Unlike Muraviev, Pestel was firmly opposed to the imposition of property qualifications. He favored the existence of men of wealth as an advantage to the state but opposed any connection between political privileges and wealth; a financial aristocracy, he thought, was more harmful than an aristocracy of birth.

Russia was to be a republic where suffrage was to be granted to all male citizens over the age of twenty. Legislative powers were to be vested in a single-chamber popular assembly and executive powers in a five-member State Duma elected by the popular assembly for a five-year term. Juridical and supervisory functions were to be entrusted to a Supreme Council composed of 120 elected life members.

Pestel's constitution also differed from Muraviev's in its views on civil liberties and the structure of government. *Russian Justice* envisaged freedom of worship and movement, inviolability of the home, and freedom of the press (authors of articles were to be responsible only to the courts), but forbade the setting up of any societies or associations and entrusted the conduct of government and civic affairs to the bureaucracy. Pestel favored a strong central government and thought that Muraviev's federalism was too reminiscent of medieval Russia's division into appendage states, which he felt had laid the country open to Tartar invasions. He even went so far as to oppose the granting of autonomy to the peoples making up the Russian empire, since he felt they should become assimilated into one greater Russian nation. The only exception he made was in favor of Poland, as a country with a tradition of statehood capable of forming a strong and separate government. In secret negotiations with the Polish Patriotic Society, Pestel promised the Poles national independence provided they were willing to enter into a close alliance with Russia and introduce a similar social system. The revived Polish state was to include almost the whole of Belorussia, Volhynia, and the western Ukraine.

It is worth looking at Pestel's proposals for a solution to the Jewish question. Jews who were not willing to become assimilated were to be helped to acquire territory in the Near East to form their own state. "If all Russian and Polish Jews," Pestel wrote, "come together in one place, there will be more than two million of them. If a large body of people like that set out to look for a fatherland, they will conquer all obstacles with ease."<sup>57</sup>

The ease with which Pestel himself decided the future of more than a dozen nations, among them nations with such rich and ancient cultural traditions as the Georgians, was not so much the result of his chauvinism as of his abstract rationalism, the tendency to look at nations from a bureaucratic-etatist point of view. For the author of *Russian Justice* the only rational bond between fellow men was a bond based on juridical premises. Taking advantage of the ambiguity in meaning of the Russian word *obshchestvo* (corresponding to the different meanings of the English "society"), Pestel maintained that "society" was simply

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57 Quoted from M. V. Nyeckhina, *Dvizhenie dekabristov* (M, 1955), vol. 2, p. 86.

an association of citizens “for the attainment of a definite goal.”<sup>58</sup> His definition of a nation was an “association of all those members of one and the same state who form a society of citizens in order to ensure the realizable wellbeing of each and all.”<sup>59</sup> This utilitarian definition makes no distinction between a “nation” and the population of a given state, thus ignoring internal linguistic or cultural divisions. If the foundations of society rest on an act of association for the sake of achieving a certain goal, then this society can be dissolved and a new association formed on different and superior principles thought up by revolutionaries. Pestel’s views were influenced by the “Jacobin” conviction that societies can be planned and that such plans can be put into effect through decrees issued by a central authority.

### *The Society of United Slavs*

Apart from the Southern Society of Decembrists, another organization, the Society of United Slavs, founded in 1823 by the Borisov brothers and the Polish revolutionary Julian Lubliński, was active in the Ukraine at this time. In the autumn of 1825, on the eve of the Decembrist revolt, this organization joined the Southern Society as a separate section – the Slavic Board. In contrast to the “true” Decembrists, the “Slavs” were mainly lower-ranking officers from the impoverished petty gentry. Their principal aim was the formation of a democratic, republican federation of Slavic peoples (but including also Hungary, Moldavia, and Wallachia), which was to extend from the Black Sea to the White Sea and from the Baltic to the Adriatic. Unlike the Decembrists, the “Slavs” were not afraid to agitate for their program among the army rank and file. Although their program of social reforms was vague, it was more democratic than that of either of the Decembrist societies; moreover, the “Slavs” were in favor of a popular revolution based on mass support rather than a military revolt.

The leading ideologists of the Decembrist movement were not uninterested in the concept of “Slavdom,” but this interest was mainly in relation to the foreign policy to be adopted by the future Russia. The notion of a Slavic federation based on equal rights was an original contribution made by the Society of United Slavs and had rather a cool reception. Mikhail Bestuzhev-Riumin and Sergei Muraviev-Apostol tried to persuade their colleagues of the Slavic Board that their ideas would distract attention from the immediate aims of the movement, and that “one must give more thought to one’s countrymen than

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58 *Izbrannye sotsial’no-politicheskie i filosofskie proizvedeniia dekabristov* (M, 1951), vol. 2, p. 75.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 80.



to foreigners.” It is no coincidence that the “Slav” program originated in the border area – the meeting place of Poland, Russia, and the Ukraine – and that one of its originators was a Pole. It may even be argued convincingly that the “Slav idea” came to Russia from Poland, where interest in “Slavdom” was at that time very widespread.<sup>60</sup>

### *The Decembrist Philosophy of Russian History*

The idealization of “ancient Russian liberties,” which was so characteristic of the Decembrists, showed itself also in their liking for archaisms and historical reminiscences. Decembrist documents are full of such old terms as *duma*, *sobor* [council], *uprava* [governing body], *veche* [folk moot], and *boyar*. For the capital, of course, the Decembrists preferred Moscow or Nizhni Novgorod to traditionless St. Petersburg. Even Pestel was affected by this trend: he named his draft constitution after the earliest surviving Russian legal document.

Finding not only theoretical arguments but also historical parallels to lend support to one’s own ideological position was common practice at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For Russia, as for Germany, the war against Napoleon played a special role in this process. In the personal biographies of most of the Decembrists the campaign of 1812 represented a turning point. Jakushkin called it an event that “woke the Russian nation.” The patriotic war stimulated widespread interest in Russian history and in the “distinctive” quality or “native principle” [*samobytnost*] of the Russian nation. From this interest emerged the Decembrist interpretation of Russian history, worked out largely by members of the Northern Society and conceived as an antithesis to Karamzin’s theory of the beneficial role of autocracy.

An innate Russian characteristic, the Decembrists maintained – one that later developments had blunted but not destroyed – was a deep-rooted love of liberty. Autocracy had been unknown in Kievan Russia: the powers of the princes had been strictly circumscribed there and decisions on important affairs of state were taken by the popular assemblies. The Decembrists were especially ardent admirers of the republican city-states of Novgorod and Pskov. This enthusiasm was of some practical significance, since they were convinced that the “spirit of liberty” that had once imbued their forebears was still alive; let us but strike the bell, and the people of Novgorod, who have remained unchanged

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60 This is discussed in G. Luciani, *La Society des Slaves Unis* (Paris 1963).

For more on the interest in Slavonic studies and Slavophile ideas in Poland of the period, see Z. Klarnerówna, *Słowianofilstwo w literaturze polskiej lat 1800 do 1848*, Warszawa 1926.

throughout the centuries, will assemble by the bell tower, Ryleev declared. Kakhovsky described the peasant communes with their self-governing *mir* as “tiny republics,” a living survival of ancient Russian liberty.<sup>61</sup> In keeping with this conception, the Decembrists thought of themselves as *restoring* liberty and bringing back a form of government that had sound historical precedents.

These arguments remind us of the fact that the word “revolution” meant originally a “restoration.” This archaic meaning of the term was still alive in the world view of the gentry revolutionaries in Poland and Russia. It is worth adding, however, that there were also some direct links between the ideas of the Russian and Polish revolutionaries. One of the men who influenced the Decembrists’ view of the past, for instance, was the Polish historian Joachim Lelewel, whose review of Karamzin’s *History* (published in the periodical *Northern Archive*) aroused considerable and understandable interest within the movement.<sup>62</sup> The victory of autocracy in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was presented by the Decembrists as a victory of Tartar political principles, alien to the Russian spirit. Their greatest distaste was for Ivan the Terrible; by contrast, Kurbsky was considered a national hero. They also tended to idealize the first two Romanovs, mainly because they had been elected by the Land Assembly and therefore took some heed of boyar advice. Both the Boyar Duma and the Land Assembly were thought to contain the seeds of representative government.

Even this brief account of the Decembrists’ interpretation of history reveals very clearly the influence of the ideas of the old hereditary nobility. The Decembrists identified with the boyars in their conflict with autocracy and used every opportunity to underline the common interests of the boyars and the nation as a whole. They even maintained that the old boyar nobility had been part of the people and that serfdom had been introduced against the boyars’ will in order to reward the new military and official caste for their faithful service to the tsars.

The role of Peter the Great presented the Decembrists with a considerable difficulty. On the one hand he seemed to be a bloody tyrant – another Ivan the Terrible – but on the other he was the creator of the modern Westernized state. When Turgenev called Peter a tyrant, Bestuzhev replied “I love this tyrant passionately.”<sup>63</sup> Ryleev praised Peter, but in his poem “Voinarovsky” painted an idealized portrait of Mazepa, the Cossack hetman who had fought Peter in

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61 See S. S. Volk, *Istoricheskie vzgliady dekabristov* (M – L, 1958), p. 303.

62 The Decembrists were also greatly interested in the research into ancient Slav traditions undertaken by I. Rakowiecki and Zorian Dołęga-Chodakowski (see Volk, *Istoricheskie*, pp. 314-18).

63 *Ibid.*, p. 413.

defense of an independent Ukraine and ancient Cossack liberties. Peter was criticized for his lack of respect for national traditions, but there was general agreement that his reforms had been essential. For the sake of this historical necessity Peter was partly forgiven his despotism, but his successors were treated more harshly. The constitutional demands of 1730, for instance, had the Decembrists' full sympathy.

This divergence of judgment as far as Peter was concerned has a ready sociological explanation. The Decembrists were descendants of the hereditary nobility humiliated by Peter, but at the same time represented its Westernized elite, which owed its very existence to the Petrine reforms. They were against despotism, but as Russian patriots were aware of the benefits brought by Peter's reign to the Russian state. Although grateful to Peter for bringing them closer to Europe, they detested the despotic system he had strengthened because they felt themselves to be Europeans and thought of autocracy as the main obstacle to further Westernization.

### *The Decembrists' Place in the History of Russian Thought*

The Decembrist uprising proved a failure in almost every respect. The regiments whose conspiring officers led them to the Senate Square in St. Petersburg on December 14, 1825, did not know what they were fighting for, and it is hardly surprising that they dispersed after the first few canister shots. Colonel Sergei Trubetskoi, who had been elected military dictator, deserted the cause at the last moment and failed to make an appearance. Many of the rebels joined the uprising in a mood of defeatism, merely in order to demonstrate a desperate, forlorn heroism that would be an example to future generations. The St. Petersburg contingent did not act with sufficient energy and were too afraid of a mass uprising to take advantage of the sympathy shown by the populations of the capital. In the south, too, the revolt was unsuccessful, despite the undoubted heroism shown by Bestuzhev-Riumin and Muraviev-Apostol.

And yet this unsuccessful enterprise was to acquire a legendary aura not altogether undeserved. Before the Decembrist revolt, Russia had known only boyar conspiracies or uncontrolled, primitive Jacqueries. This was the first time that an educated elite with its own considered program of social change had taken up arms against Russian autocracy. The gallows from which the five leaders were to hang (Pestel, Muraviev-Apostol, Bestuzhev-Riumin, Kakhovsky, and Ryleev) made a horrifying impression on Herzen, who was to be a living link between the traditions of the gentry revolutionaries and the radicals of the 60s.

The ideology of the Decembrists was nevertheless a unique phenomenon, without a counterpart in the Russian revolutionary thought of the later period. There was no other revolutionary movement in Russia after Decembrism which would adhere to a liberal, or liberal-aristocratic, concept of freedom and the desire to base the economy of a revived Russia upon the principles of liberal political economy. It is true that the Russian political émigrés Ivan Golovin (1816–90) and Nikolai Sazonov (1815–62) harked back to the Decembrists,<sup>64</sup> but they were not part of an organized movement and their ideas, which emphasized republican principles, had no influence on Russian revolutionary thought. Herzen, too, considered himself a heir to the Decembrists, but his doctrine of “Russian socialism” gave rise to an entirely different tradition of social and political thought. In Russia liberalism became an openly antirevolutionary force, and the revolutionary movement was dominated by various versions of socialist ideas; these were usually accompanied by a dislike of republican traditions, which were largely dismissed as “bourgeois.” This went as far as discrediting political freedom as such: it was perceived as purely formal and deceitful, exclusively serving the privileged classes.<sup>65</sup> It therefore becomes clear why, given the mental and intellectual climate of the time, the Decembrists’ contributions were not perceived as distinct and worth propagating in progressive intelligentsia circles.

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64 See W. Śliwowska, *W kręgu poprzedników Hercena*, Wrocław 1971, chapter III and IV.

65 For a long time such views dominated in the Russian populist movement.

## Chapter 4

# Anti-Enlightenment Trends in the Early Nineteenth Century

The Decembrists' plans for political reforms were imbued with the spirit of 18<sup>th</sup> century rationalism. Their philosophy of history and views on literature also showed the influence of the Romantic Movement, but it was rare to find among them any awareness that the values of the Enlightenment and romanticism were often incompatible. Many Decembrists (for example W. Kuchelbecker) were decidedly in favor of the classical style and held that classical poetry was better able to express the ancient spirit of "republican virtues."

Despite his distinctive position, Karamzin, too, was closely influenced by the intellectual tendencies of the Enlightenment. His arguments on the importance of historical continuity were largely borrowed from Montesquieu (although he categorically opposed his theory of the division of powers). Karamzin respected religion as one of the pillars supporting the social order, but called religious mysticism "nonsensology." The ideologists of national traditionalism and populism also advocated a very pragmatic attitude towards religion. Alexander Shishkov, married to a Lutheran woman, was an example of the social utilitarian approach to religion. He fought Karamzin's sentimentalism from a position close to the Enlightenment combat against foreign influence; together with Gabriel Derzhavin, he propagated literary classicism, and in his struggle for the language referred directly to Lomonosov's conceptions.

The present chapter deals with those trends in Russian thought of the earliest years of the nineteenth century that showed an extreme reaction against Enlightenment philosophy. The first of them and relatively the most lenient was Mysticism, proximate to "counter-Enlightenment" currents in eighteenth-century European culture.<sup>1</sup> Another trend was represented by exponents of bureaucratic obscurantism, who endeavored to fight against any manifestations of anti-traditionalism, particularly with independent philosophy, through the use

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1 The term "counter-Enlightenment" was introduced to scholarly circulation by Isaiah Berlin in his study "The Counter-Enlightenment"; see I. Berlin, *Against the Current. Essays in the History of Ideas*, ed. by H. Hardy, Oxford 1981, pp. 1–24.

of state coercion. Finally, philosophical romanticism, inspired by the speculative idealism of F.W.J. Schelling, appeared as yet another trend, novel as it was in terms of quality.

## Mysticism

Mysticism during the reign of Alexander I was a direct heir to the mystical trend within Russian Freemasonry, represented at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Schwarz and the Rosicrucians. The persecution of Freemasons by Catherine and Paul did not succeed in halting the growth of this trend, and original works as well as translations of the works of foreign mystics appeared in increasing numbers.

The works of Saint-Martin and Jacob Boehme enjoyed special popularity. Schwarz propagated the ethics and theosophy of Boehme in articles in *The Evening Light*, and analyzed Boehme's *Misterium Magnum* during private lectures conducted in his own home. Ivan Lopukhin's pamphlet, *Some Characteristics of the Interior Church* (1789), was the fruit of his profound study of the writings of Boehme and Saint-Martin. Simeon Gamalea also belonged to the ranks of translators and followers of Boehme's works. During the period of Alexander I the fascination with mysticism spread even wider. In 1815, the poet D. Dmitriev complained that Russian booksellers import from the West only "the works of Boehme and those like him."<sup>2</sup>

One of the main reasons for the outburst of mysticism during Alexander's reign was the Napoleonic Wars. Napoleon's defeat was interpreted as proof that Russia had been entrusted with a holy mission, and that she had been chosen by Providence to oppose the Antichrist and bring about a rebirth of Christianity. The French emperor's downfall was compared to the overthrow of the White Horseman of the Apocalypse, and seen as an example of the impermanence of temporal glory and the insignificance of human strength compared to the will of God. This was also an argument against "the conceit of human reason," and therefore *ipso facto* against the claims made by Enlightenment philosophers that the kingdom of God could be established on earth without divine inspiration.

The tone of this movement was set by Alexander himself. It would be erroneous, though, to interpret his "chiliastic conversion" of 1812 in terms of a consistent turn toward the ideas of counter-Enlightenment reaction. In the course of the Vienna Congress, this monarch still sympathized with anti-Enlightenment

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2 See Zdenek, David V., "The influence of Jacob Boehme on Russian Religious Thought," *Slavic Review*, XXI, 1962, pp. 49-55.

conservatism and Enlightenment liberalism, and he was willing to pursue a magnanimous and enlightened policy. At the Aachen Congress of the Holy Alliance in 1818 he uttered the idea that “the governments should take the lead of the movement and bring liberal ideas into being.”<sup>3</sup>

A similar ambiguity proved characteristic of Russian mysticism during the reign of Alexander. It associated the reactionary, often utterly obscurantist, trends with attempts at sublimating religious experience. Many disciples of mysticism were sharply critical not only of the eighteenth-century rationalism but also of the official Orthodox Church, and this led to efforts to found an extra-ecclesiastical “inner religiosity” that would appeal directly to feelings and intuitions. There was much sympathy for Protestant sects, especially for the Quakers, who taught that a mystical “natural light” burning in the soul of every Christian believer showed the way to salvation without the mediation of clergy. The activities of the British Bible Society in St. Petersburg also attracted much attention.

The most eminent figure among the Russian mystics at this time was Aleksandr Labzin (1766–1825). At Moscow University he had been one of the favorite students of the Rosicrucian Schwarz, and under his influence joined the Masonic movement. In 1806 he founded a periodical, *The Messenger of Zion* [*Sionsky Vestnik*], which was almost at once suppressed at the insistence of the Church hierarchy. However, in 1817, a year after the Director General of the Holy Synod, A. Golitsyn, himself a mystic, took over the Ministry of Education, the journal was allowed to appear. In the years 1817-1818, *The Messenger of Zion* was extremely influential – so much so that even Orthodox bishops became infected by its ideas. Archbishop Photius, a bitter enemy of heterodox mysticism, called Labzin a “man-idol” worshiped by the Synod and the St. Petersburg Theological Academy. This was a gross exaggeration, of course; the majority of the clergy were understandably hostile to Labzin, and the Synod favored his ideas not so much from conviction as from a desire to curry favor with the Emperor and Prince Golitsyn.

*The Messenger of Zion* preached the notion of “inner Christianity” and the need for a moral awakening. It promised its readers that once they were morally reborn and vitalized by faith, they would gain supra-rational powers of cognition and be able to penetrate the mysteries of nature, finding in them a key to a superior revelation beyond the reach of the Church.

Labzin’s religion was thus a non-denominational and anti-ecclesiastical Christianity. Men’s hearts, he maintained, had been imbued with belief in Christ

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3 See A.N. Pypin, *Obshchestvennoe dvizhenie v Rossii pri Aleksandrie I*, p. 357.

on the first day of creation; primitive pagan peoples were therefore closer to true Christianity than nations that had been baptized but were blinded by the false values of civilization. The official Church was only an assembly of lower-category Christians, and the Bible a “silent mentor who gives symbolic indications to the living teacher residing in the heart.” All dogmas, according to Labzin, were merely human inventions: Jesus had not desired men to think alike, but only to act justly. His words “Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden” showed that he did not mean to set up any intermediate hierarchy between the believers and God.

When Tsar Alexander began to come under the influence of the Archbishop Photius, Labzin’s fate was sealed. His periodical was once again suppressed, and as soon as the first occasion presented itself he was condemned to banishment, from which he did not return.

After Nicholas I came to the throne, mystical trends soon received short shrift. Their final demise was not natural, though; the most important step in this respect was the closing of the Masonic lodges, which had been the core of the movement. They had been forbidden as early as 1822, but in the atmosphere of fear that prevailed after the failure of the Decembrist revolt any underground continuation was out of the question. Hidden mystical tendencies continued to exist, however, and can be traced in the ideas of Chaadaev and the romantic Wisdom-lovers (*Lyubomudry*), as well as in the young Bakunin and Slavophile ideologists.

## **The Ideology of an Anti-Philosophical Crusade**

Notwithstanding Alexander’s intentions, the publication of the declared goals of the Holy Alliance supplied Russian opponents of liberalism, secular philosophy and any kind of free thinking with an ideological weapon. Prince Alexander Golitsyn, appointed head of the Ministry of Denominations and Public Education in 1816, was an educated, intellectually sensitive man, President of the Bible Society, a representative of Freemasonic supra-denominational religiousness and a zealous preacher of ecumenism. He wanted, however, to introduce his ideas by administrative means, which led to absurdities such as an official ban on inter-denominational polemics, proclaimed in the name of mutual love and Christian unity.<sup>4</sup> Golitsyn had a true sense of mission, which turned his

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4 Cf. G. Florovsky, *Puti russkogo bogosloviia*, 3 edition, Paris 1983 (first printed 1937), p. 134.



Ministry into an “organ of religious-utopian propaganda,” extremely intolerant of any resistance it encountered.<sup>5</sup>

The situation was most inconvenient for both the laymen of Enlightenment culture and the Orthodox Church. No wonder the Orthodox priests were far from delighted by the Minister of Denominations’ contacts with German mystic philosopher Franz Baader, since the fruit of those contacts was a curious project of entrusting Baader (who was a Catholic) with the delicate task of writing a manual of religion for the Russian clergy.<sup>6</sup> The idea was never realized but it is worth mentioning that it had tentative approval from the Emperor.

Verging on infatuation, Golitsyn’s “Christian” enthusiasm was promptly used by men of much more primitive, not to say obscurantist, forms of religious zealotry,<sup>7</sup> especially by two Ministry clerks: Superintendent of the Kazan school district, Mikhail Magnitsky, and the Petersburg School Superintendent, Dmitri Runich.<sup>8</sup> Magnitsky enacted an ideological purge at Kazan University and removed Enlightenment literature from the University library, substituting it with copies of the Bible, introduced obligatory church services for the students and organized them into a system of mutual espionage. Philosophical education was reduced to logic and the history of philosophy, while the professors were obliged to actively fight godless doctrines. As a result of a similar purge by Runich at Petersburg University, twelve professors lost their jobs, including an expert on natural law, Alexandr Kunitsin, and the philosopher of aesthetics Alexander Galich who was accused of excessive objectivism in his lectures on the history of philosophy and of sympathizing with Schelling’s ideas. Soon afterward, Runich submitted a motion at the Ministry, proposing to entirely ban the teaching of natural law which was – in his opinion – a discipline subversive to public order.<sup>9</sup>

The ideological motivation behind those actions was explicitly presented in Magnitsky’s draft of the censorship act:

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5 Ibid., p. 132.

6 Cf. A. Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy*, Oxford 1975, pp. 161-165. Letters on the subject have been published by E. Susini, in: *Lettres inédites de Franz von Baader*, Paris 1942, pp. 292-294.

7 The word “obscurantism” belonged to the language of the times: it was used by the followers of Enlightenment liberalism to denote ultraconservative clericals.

8 Their war against philosophy has been extensively discussed by A. Koyré in: *La philosophie et le problème national en Russie*, Paris 1950, Ch. II: “La lutte contre la philosophie.” See also, A. I. Vvedensky, *Sud’by filosofii v Rossii*, and G. Shpet, *Ocherk rozvitiia russkoi filosofii* (both reprinted in the anthology: A.I. Vvedensky, A.F. Losev, E.L. Radlov, G.G. Shpet, *Russkaia filosofia. Ocherki istorii*, Sverdlovsk 1991).

9 See A.M. Martin, *Romantics, Reformers, Reactionaries*, pp. 191-193.

The same spirit which for Joseph II took on the form of philanthropy; for Frederic, Voltaire, Rousseau and the Encyclopedists assumed the humble cloak of philosophism; in the times of Robespierre put on the hat of freedom; for Bonaparte transformed itself into the tricolor plume of a Consul to, finally, in the Imperial crown, the demand to rule the whole of the world [...]; that same spirit today, philosophical treaties and constitutional charts in hand, has established its throne in the West and wishes to equal God [...]; as soon as peace had been made, as soon as peace had been sanctioned in the name of Jesus, as soon as European monarchs had forbidden themselves to violate it – just then, unrest took hold of universities and furious madmen emerged, appealing for death, corpses and hell! What is the meaning of this unheard of phenomenon? [...] The Prince of Darkness himself has obviously come near us; the human word is the medium of this hellish power, print [is] its tool; the professors of godless universities seep the venom of unbelief and hatred of the legal authority into the hapless youth, while print spreads the venom all over Europe.

In short, the Western world was nearing its doom. If only Russia could be walled off from Europe, no news of the madness of that world could get through to it.<sup>10</sup> The words cannot be treated as the official standpoint of the Russian government. Nevertheless, the attitude toward secular thought which they express was one of the products of the utopian-theocratic ideologization of the state, symptomatic of the last years of Alexander I's rule.

## The Wisdom-Lovers and Russian Schellingianism

Apart from mysticism, the most important expression of reaction against 18<sup>th</sup> century rationalism was philosophical romanticism, largely represented by the secret Society of Wisdom-lovers (*Lyubomudry*) founded in 1823.

Let us emphasise that the Wisdom-lovers were not the first to profess Schellingian ideas in Russia. Some academic philosophers of the time adhered to varieties of Schellingianism. One of them was Alexander Galich (1783–1848), the aforementioned Petersburg University professor, author of a two-part *History of Philosophical Systems* (1818–9), in which Runich detected sympathies for godlessness and revolution. Galich also dealt with aesthetics (*Opit nauki izyashchnogo*, 1825) and philosophical anthropology (*Kartina cheloveka*, 1834). History of philosophy, along with logics, was also the research field of Ivan Davydov, professor with University of Moscow (*Opyt rukovodstva k istorii filosofii*, 1820; *Nachalnye osnovaniya logiki*, 1821); he made apparent his appraisal of Schelling as the greatest of all German

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10 Quoted after G. Shpet, in: *Ruskaia filosofia. Ocherki istorii*, p. 447.

philosophers.<sup>11</sup> Davydov also fell victim to a denunciation but, unlike Galich, managed to avoid repression. The ideas of Schellingian philosophy of nature were propagated at the universities by the philosophizing scientists: Danilo Vellansky (1774–1847), once a student of Schelling's, professor at the St. Petersburg Medico-Surgical Academy; and, Miklail Pavlov (1793–1840), professor at the University of Moscow, contributor to the *Mnemozina* (“Mnemosyne”) magazine edited by the Wisdom-lovers. All these scholars proposed eclectic concepts, repeating a number of Schelling's thoughts while not quite caring about complete compliance with his system or their own philosophical originality. They were doubtless merited in paving the way for professionalization of philosophy in Russia, but did not become the ideological leaders of their generation.<sup>12</sup> Each of them is therefore well described as a professor, rather than a thinker, to follow Gustav Shpet's opinion on Davydow.<sup>13</sup>

It was quite the opposite with the Wisdom-lovers. They lacked professionalism but had instead considerable philosophical imagination and were enormously eager to create a comprehensive and consistent worldview.

In principle this society had only five members (V. F. Odoevsky, D. V. Venevitinov, N. M. Rozhalin, and the later Slavophiles I. V. Kireevsky and A. I. Koshelev), but thanks to its close contacts with the literary society of S. E. Raich, which was allowed to function openly, its influence was considerable. The Wisdom-lovers propagated their ideas in the almanac *Mnemozina*, published from 1824 to 1825. For the word “philosophy” they substituted the mystical Masonic term *lyubomudrie* [love of wisdom] in order to establish their independence from the French *philosophes*. “To this day everyone imagines a philosopher to resemble one of those eighteenth-century French rattles,” wrote Odoevsky, the society's chairman, in *Mnemozina*; “I wonder whether there are

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11 See A. Koyré, *La philosophie et le problem national*, pp. 115 – 126.

12 The merits of Russian academic Schellingianists have been appreciated by V.F. Pustarnakov and other authors of a valuable monograph: *Filosofiya Shellinga v Rossii*, ed. by V.F. Pustarnakov, Sankt Petersburg 1998. Also, see Z.A. Kamenskiy, *Russkaya filosofiya nachala XIX veka i Shelling*, Moscow 1980.

In terms of how the reception of Schelling's philosophy in Slavonic countries related to romantic nationalism, let us add that Vellansky had to his credit a translation and publication in Russian (1834) of a work of J. Goluchowski, a Polish Schellingianist, title *Die Philosophie in ihrem Verhältnisse zum Leben ganzer Völker und einzelner Menschen* (1822). The study argued that Schelling-style philosophical metaphysics is an indispensable instrument of national self-knowledge and an irreplaceable tool in counteracting social atomization.

13 G.G. Shpet, *Ocherk razvitiya russkoi filosofii*, [in:] A.I. Vvedenskiy, A.F. Losev, E.L. Radlov, G.G. Shpet, *Russkaya filosofiya*, p. 562.

many people who are capable of understanding the enormous difference between a truly divine philosophy and that of some Voltaire or Helvetius?" This "truly divine" philosophy the young Wisdom-lovers sought in Germany: "Land of ancient Teutons! Land of noble ideas. It is to you I turn my worshipful gaze," was how Odoevsky expressed their feelings.<sup>14</sup>

Interest in German idealist philosophy represented a turning away from the political interests that were so typical of the Decembrists and their associates. The latter could not accept the Wisdom-lovers' habit of looking at the world from the heights of the Absolute, which encouraged them to despise earthbound "empiricism" and to shut their eyes to the burning social and political issues of the day. The correspondence of the two Odoevsky cousins casts an interesting light on these differences. The elder cousin, Aleksandr, who was a Decembrist, accused the younger of "idolatry," of losing himself in abstractions; the younger, Vladimir, accused the elder of a lack of understanding of the higher concerns of the spirit.

As A. Koyré has aptly pointed out,<sup>15</sup> the differences between the Wisdom-lovers and the Decembrists reflected a gap not only between generations (the Wisdom-lovers belonged to a younger generation for whom the patriotic war of 1812 had not been the greatest formative influence), but also between the two Russian capitals. The philosophy of the Wisdom-lovers evolved in Moscow, whereas the main center of the Decembrists was St. Petersburg. "For God's sake," the Decembrist Küchelbecker wrote to Vladimir Odoevsky, "tear yourself away from the rotten, stinking atmosphere of Moscow." Semi-patriarchal Moscow, with its old noble families, was the capital of ancient Muscovy and the center of Russian religious life; it was also the main stronghold of conservatism, mysticism, and resistance to rationalist, revolutionary, and even liberal thought. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century it had been the chief center of the Rosicrucians, the mystical wing of Freemasonry, and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was to give birth to the Slavophile movement. St. Petersburg, on the other hand, was a town without a past and at that time the only modern city in Russia; it was the cradle of the *raznochintsy*, the uprooted intelligentsia, and the main center of liberal, democratic, and socialist thought.

The young Wisdom-lovers were initially primarily interested in Schelling's philosophy of nature and philosophy of art. They saw the world as a living work of art, and art as an organic unity of unconscious and conscious creation. The

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14 See P. N. Sakulin, *Iz istorii russkogo idealizma. Kniaž' V. F. Odoevsky*, Moscow 1913, vol. 1, pp. 138, 139.

15 See A. Koyré, *La Philosophie et le problème national en Russie au début du XIX siècle*, Paris 1929, p. 43.

inspired artist, they felt, did not imitate reality but created it anew, according to divine principles of creation; he therefore truly deserved to be called a divine being. Art, moreover, was closely related to philosophy; one of the tools of philosophy was in fact artistic intuition. It is no wonder that with such beliefs the young Wisdom-lovers were implacably hostile to all manifestations of classicism and all “imitations of French models.”

The Wisdom-lovers’ nature philosophy was influenced by two Russian Schellingians – D.M. Vellansky and M.G. Pavlov. Unlike their two mentors, the Wisdom-lovers had no scientific training, so that their ideas on nature easily took flight into the realm of fancy. Following Schelling, they were opposed to atomistic and mechanistic physics and saw everything in terms of polarity: nature was a living, spiritual whole containing within it the creativity, movement, and struggle of opposites, both attraction and repulsion; at the same time, nature was only the outer garment of the spirit, and all its manifestations therefore had a secret symbolic meaning. The key to an understanding of these symbols and thus to the interpretation and mastery of nature was to be found in speculative philosophy. In his semiautobiographical *Russian Nights*, Odoevsky described the period of his youth as follows: “My youth was spent at a time when metaphysics was as much in the air as the political sciences are now. We believed in the possibility of an absolute theory that would allow us to create (we used the term ‘construct’) all the phenomena of nature, just as today we believe in the possibility of a social order that would satisfy all human needs.”<sup>16</sup>

Another important ingredient of the Wisdom-lovers’ world view was romantic nationalism. Many articles in *Mnemosyne* called for a truly national and “distinctive” culture. This seemed to coincide with the literary program of the Decembrists, which was why Kuchelbecker contributed articles to *Mnemosyne*. The ideological basis for this collaboration was, however, very slender. According to the rationalistic Enlightenment view (which had a considerable influence on the Decembrists), the nation was above all a “body politic” shaped by legislation and an “aggregation of citizens.” The Wisdom-lovers, on the other hand, conceived the nation as a whole transcending its individual parts, a unique collective individuality evolving historically by its own “distinctive” principles. Potentially, this interpretation could lead to an idealization of irrational elements in national existence, and to a condemnation of all “mechanical changes” or revolutions that might interrupt historical continuity. The conviction that history had destined every nation to have its own separate mission was likely to clash with the rationalistic universalism that was

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16 V. F. Odoevsky, *Russkie Nochi* (M, 1913), p. 8.

one of the main (though not always consciously formulated) premises of Decembrist thought.

The failure of the Decembrist revolt and the conspirators' fate had a profound effect on the Wisdom-lovers. In the interests of safety their society was at once disbanded, but members continued to meet informally. In the latter half of the 1820s they were still a relatively homogeneous group and published their work in the *Moscow Herald* [*Moskovsky Vestnik*], a periodical edited by the historian M. Pogodin. Their main interest shifted away from the philosophy of nature to the philosophy of history, and the issue that now engaged their attention was the position of Russia vis-à-vis Western Europe – especially the problems caused by contacts between the two and by the tension between the purely national element and the Western values transplanted by Peter the Great. This issue was discussed in a short but interesting article, “On the State of Enlightenment in Russia” (1826), by Dmitri Venevitinov, a poet and philosopher. The author's central thesis was that Russian culture lacked a distinctive “native principle.” The only way to let Russia find her true nature, he suggested, was to isolate her from Europe and demonstrate to her an overall view of the evolution of the human spirit grounded in firm philosophical principles; only then would she discover her own place and separate historical mission.

In the 1830s the president of the Society of Wisdom-lovers, Vladimir Odoevsky (1803-69), perhaps the most talented representative of the conservative trend in Russian romanticism, became well known as a writer. He published his *Russian Nights* in 1844. This interesting book, which consists of conversations between friends interspersed with various tales, has something of the value of a historical document since (in the author's own words) it gives “a reasonably accurate picture of the intellectual activity of young Muscovites in the 1820s and 1830s.”<sup>17</sup>

Like Schelling himself, Odoevsky turned increasingly toward theosophy and a religious philosophy of history, and devoted more time to reading the works of mystics and theosophers such as Boehme, Pordage, Saint-Martin, and Baader. One of the vital philosophical issues that now engaged his attention was the problem of original sin. Man, in Odoevsky's view, had once been a free spirit; his present dependence on nature was the outcome of the fall, and the flesh should therefore be called a disease of the spirit. Regeneration was possible, however, through love and art – mankind's aesthetic evolution had shown that humanity was capable of regaining its lost integrality and spiritual harmony. Art

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17 Ibid., p. 21.

must, however, be permeated by religion; when divorced from religion it is a “self-centered force.” The same was true of science, which could bring about the nation’s spiritual death if divorced from religion and poetry.

The force capable of integrating a nation and turning it into a living whole, according to Odoevsky, was something he called “instinct.”<sup>18</sup> This instinct was of course not a biological concept but a powerful irrational force – something akin to the “divine spark” that the mystics said had survived in man after the fall and made possible his future regeneration. Primitive peoples possessed enormous reserves of such instinctive powers, but these had become weakened by the advance of civilization, especially by the rationalism of Roman civilization. Although Christianity had initiated a new age of instinct, at a higher stage than before, the wellspring of these powers was once more drying up. This was the effect of rationalism and excessive analysis, which had given rise to materialism and modern industrialization. It should be noted that the attack on capitalism (closely associated with the critique of rationalism) characteristic of early 19<sup>th</sup> century conservative romanticism here made its first appearance in Russian thought.

True philosophy, in contrast to the rationalism and empiricism of the Enlightenment, is based directly on instinct, Odoevsky declared. Cognition that is capable of perceiving its object synthetically as a living whole is not possible without “innate ideas” springing directly from the instinct. Fortunately art, which retains part of the primitive energy lost under the impact of rationalism, can help to strengthen the weakened instincts. Poetic intuition never errs, and “the poetic impulse is the soul’s most precious power.” Poetry should permeate not only knowledge but also the living social tissue of mankind; like religion, it is a powerful instinctive force integrating society; where the advance of science has led to the disappearance of religion and poetry, society has become a degenerate organism. Instinct is a creative principle, an organic force without which all human endeavor – whether art, science, or legislation – is lifeless. Without instinct there are no living social bonds; rationalism is only capable of creating a “mechanical and lifeless” society.

An important aspect of Odoevsky’s theory was his conviction that the wealth of instinctive powers lost by the inhabitants of Western Europe had been preserved in Russia – a young country still living in its “heroic age.” Thanks to Peter’s reforms the Russians had assimilated European achievements, had gained the experience of old men without ceasing to be children. That was why Russia had now been entrusted with a lofty mission, that of breathing new life

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18 See Sakulin, *Iz istorii russkogo idealizma*, pp. 469-80.

into Europe's old, fossilized culture. It is worth adding that Odoevsky's German mentors shared some of these ideas. In 1842, when Odoevsky was in Berlin, Schelling told him that Russia "was destined for something great";<sup>19</sup> and toward the end of his life the German philosopher Franz von Baader sent a memoir to Count Uvarov, the Minister of Education, with the significant title "The Mission of the Russian Church in View of the Decline of Christianity in the West."<sup>20</sup>

In Odoevsky's conception, Russia and Western Europe were not two opposing poles of an antithesis; Russia's mission was to save European civilization rather than to replace it with a new and radically different culture. In some respects he anticipated the Slavophile criticism of Europe, but his hope that Russia would absorb and breathe new life into all that was best in European civilization was shared by Stankevitch, Belinsky, and the young Herzen.

In his views on society, Odoevsky was (in the 1830s and 1840s) a typical representative of conservative romanticism, with its critical attitudes toward capitalist industrial development and liberal ideas. He dismissed bourgeois society as a mechanism lacking the poetic element, an agglomeration of individuals motivated by self-interest and not held together by any moral bonds. Russia's semi-feudal system seemed to him incomparably superior to the bourgeois state, although he conceded that it was capable of improvement: the landowning gentry, for instance, as guardians of the people would do well to take a special moral and scientific examination of reality. Nonetheless, Odoevsky considered this latter notion so daring that he did not expect it to be implemented until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The ideas of the Wisdom-lovers and their continuation in Odoevsky's later work were an important transitional stage in Russian intellectual history. On the one hand, by popularizing German philosophy in Russia – particularly Schelling – the Wisdom-lovers prepared the ground for the reception of Hegelianism. On the other hand (and perhaps chiefly), they were the immediate precursors of the Slavophiles (the living links between *lyubomudrie* and Slavophilism were Koshelev and Kireevsky). The future ideologists of official Russian conservatism – the historian M. Pogodin and the literary critic S. Shevryev – were also associated with the Wisdom-lovers. Finally, the ideas that the Wisdom-lovers had first discussed were to give rise to Chaadaev's *Philosophical Letters*.

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19 Ibid., p. 386.

20 See E. Susini, *Lettres inédites de Franz von Baader* (Paris, 1942), pp. 456-61.



## Ivan Kireevsky's Young Years, or a West-Inclined Version of Philosophical Romanticism

The ideas of young Kireevsky deserve a separate discussion, as they best illustrate the continuity between the anti-Enlightenment currents of Tsar Alexander's period and Slavophilism, that is, the conservative romanticism of Nicholas I's time.

Ivan Kireevsky was educated in a milieu that was most strictly associated with the Russian "Martinists." His father Vasil Kireevsky was a Freemason and a theosophist, and a close friend of Ivan Lopukhin, the godfather of his son Ivan. In his youth, Ivan Kireevsky devoted himself to reading the works of Masonic mystics; he particularly valued Lopukhin's opusculum *On the Inner Church*.<sup>21</sup> He came across Eastern patristics (many commentators seeing his thoughts as derived from it) only in the mid-1830s, influenced to this end by his wife.

Kireevsky's first article, *A Little a Bit About the Character of Pushkin's Poetry*, 1828, concerned the distinctiveness of Russian culture – an issue that fascinated the Wisdom-lovers. It is to Pushkin's credit, the critic argued, that an autonomy of this sort had been achieved in the arts, while historiography and, primarily, philosophy were still hoping to attain it. This objective should be achieved through the adoption of Germany's intellectual output; hence, the "German option" represented by the *Lyubomudry*, liberating Russia from the baleful Gallomania, was essentially a combat for completion of the process of the nationalization of Russian culture.<sup>22</sup>

Having returned from his trip abroad in 1830, during which he attended the lectures of Hegel, Schleiermacher, Savigny and Schelling, Kireevsky began editing the magazine *The European*, and published an important article, *The Nineteenth Century* (1832), in one of its issues.<sup>23</sup> The article dealt with the problem of the coexistence within Russian culture of traditional and national elements with the European civilization as introduced by Peter I. The author desired to solve the problem in the spirit of romantic historicism which emphasised the need for an organic continuity of history. This, however,

21 See Z.V. David, *The Influence of Jacob Boehme*, p. 56.

22 I.V. Kireevsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, ed. by M. Gershenzon, vol. 2, Moscow 1911, p. 27.

23 For a detailed analysis of this article, see my book *W kręgu konserwatywnej utopii*, pp. 101–6.

The article raised Nicholas I's suspicion and caused the closedown of the magazine. The Emperor's objections boiled down to the claim that Kireevsky's reasoning on "the striving for a synthesis," apparently characteristic to the Europe of the time, commended constitutional monarchy.

implicated a difficulty rooted in the crucial civilizational differences between the Rus'/Ruthenia of yore and Western Europe. According to the author, these differences boiled down to a deficiency in the former of a deeply assimilated antique civilization heritage. Hence, the Petrine reforms, with their attempt to mechanically superimpose Western civilization on Russia, had proven to be partly successful; the Russians had their beard clean-shaven but their head remained unwashed. Russia had an opportunity for real Europeanization only in the time of Catherine; it was then, in the mature Enlightenment period, that Europe entered a new cycle of development which the reformed Russia could join from the very beginning. However, there remained a difference of high importance to conservatives: in the West, the new developmental cycle organically stemmed from the old, whereas Russia would make a "new start," without the foundation of an old and traditional national culture.

Hence, Russia faced a painful choice as it could consciously quit its intrinsic national quality and engage in the new cycle of civilizational development of the West – or, conversely, cut herself from Europe in order to rescue the remnants of its national identity. As befitting with the title of his magazine, Kireevsky, then a young man, opted for the former. He found that the idea of indigenous national culture as proposed by the German romanticists made sense in the West but not quite so in Russia; there, it would constitute propagation of retrogression, decline, and diversion from civilization. What should be given heed, he added, is that further development, in line with what the Western conservatives recommend, be pursued in an organic fashion, rather than using mechanical or external methods.

This is how Kireevsky, once an ideologist of romanticist nationalism, turned into a conservative Westernizer. The price he paid for this transition was bore another axiological contradiction: while he opted for making his homeland part of a new development cycle of the Western civilization, he still preferred the old Christian Europe to the new Europe: secularized, rationalistic and individualistic in the Enlightenment way, increasingly industrialized, and bourgeois.

The dilemma could only be solved by the recognition that the new Russia – and not only the old one, from before Peter's reign – represented a civilization that was qualitatively different from its Western counterpart, thus having a real chance to reconcile her civilizational development and national autonomy. As we will see, this was the solution Kireevsky accepted, as he eventually renounced Westernism and laid the groundwork for Slavophile ideology.

## **Part II**

### **The Reign of Nicholas I**



## Chapter 5

# Petr Chaadaev and Religious westernism

The dilemma of the young Kireevsky of how to reconcile Europeanism with a critical attitude toward Enlightenment rationalism and post-Enlightenment bourgeois Europe reappears in Chaadaev's philosophy.

Petr Chaadaev (1794–1856), a nephew of Prince Mikhail Shcherbatov and a friend of Pushkin, was associated in his youth with the Decembrist movement. The young Pushkin had good grounds for considering him to be one of the outstanding liberals of the 1820s, and his well-known verse “To Chaadaev” (1818) ends with the following lines:

Comrade, believe: joy's star will leap upon our sight, a radiant token;  
Russia will rouse from her long sleep;  
And where autocracy lies, broken,  
Our names shall yet be graven deep.<sup>1</sup>

By an ironic twist of fate, the man to whom these optimistic lines were addressed was later to adopt a profoundly pessimistic view of Russia.

Early in 1821, at their Moscow congress, the Decembrists decided to initiate Chaadaev into their secret society. The invitation came too late, however: at that very time Chaadaev was about to give up his promising army career (for reasons that have never been clarified), withdraw from salon society, and steep himself in the works of religious writers. Shortly afterward he went abroad (in 1823) and became confirmed in his leanings toward Roman Catholicism, which at that time exerted a considerable influence on the Russian aristocracy. On his return to Russia in 1826 he withdrew for several years into almost complete seclusion and devoted himself entirely to the philosophical formulation of his new world view. The fruits of this period are the eight *Philosophical Letters* (written in French from 1828 to 1831), of which only the first – devoted to Russia – was published

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1 Quoted from *The Poems, Prose and Plays of Alexander Pushkin*, New York 1936. The most comprehensive monograph on Chaadaev in English is Raymond T. McNally, *Chaadaev and His Friends*, Tallahassee, Fla. 1971.

during its author's lifetime (in 1836) in the journal *Telescope* [*Teleskop*].<sup>2</sup> After completing the *Letters*, Chaadaev returned to Moscow society and soon became one of the most sought-after guests in the city's literary salons. It was in discussions – more often perhaps arguments – with him that the later views of both Westernizers and Slavophiles began to take shape.

## Chaadaev's Metaphysics and Philosophy of History

Chaadaev's *Philosophical Letters* are a work of rich texture and intellectual depth, firmly rooted in the European intellectual tradition as well as contemporary thought. Some of their leitmotifs can be traced back to Neo-Platonism, which survived in European and Russian religious philosophy and also in certain aspects of hermeticism and Masonic theosophy. Neo-Platonic ideas also reached Chaadaev through Schelling (with whom he corresponded for some years after meeting him personally in 1825). It is worth noting that Chaadaev had also read Kant and even Hegel, something of a rarity in Russia of the 1820s. The major influence on him, however, was that of the French Catholic philosophers, especially de Maistre (who was ambassador in Russia from 1803 to 1817 and called one of his most important works *Les Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg*), de Bonald, Ballanche, Chateaubriand, and Lamennais in his theocratic period.

In contrast to the philosophers of the Enlightenment, Chaadaev held that the aspiration to individual freedom is not natural to man. His true inclination is to subordinate himself, being is hierarchical in structure and the natural order is based on *dependence*. Human actions are directed from outside by a force transcending the individual, and the power of man's reason is in direct proportion to his obedience, submissiveness, and docility. The individual is nothing without society; his consciousness and knowledge flow from a social, supra-individual source. The mind of the individual is anchored in the universal mind and draws its nourishment from it. An element of this universal mind (something like divine revelation) is still deeply embedded in human consciousness. Individual reason in isolation is something artificial, the reason of man after the fall; therefore, men who proclaim the autonomy of their limited

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2 Three Letters were published for the first time abroad by the Jesuit priest I. S. Gagarin (*Oeuvres choisies de Pierre Tschaadaïef*) and were reprinted by Gershenzon in 1913 with a Russian translation. The remaining Letters were found in 1935 by D. Shahovskoi and published in *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, nos. 22-24 (1935). This edition unfortunately published the letters in their Russian translation only.

reason, who seek to reach by themselves for the apple from the tree of knowledge, are guilty of a *répétition* of original sin. Chaadaev suggested that Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* showed the impotence of the isolated individual's reason – what Kant called “pure reason” was in fact only individual reason claiming autonomy for itself and for that very reason unable to solve its antinomies or comprehend the highest truths. This type of subjective reason separates man from the universe and makes true understanding impossible. Such understanding can only be attained through collective knowledge, through participation in a collective consciousness that transcends individual minds; this superior consciousness derives from God, who is the supreme principle of the oneness of the universe.

On this assumption it was a logical step to deny the moral autonomy of the individual. For Chaadaev, like truth, moral law was not something autonomous, as Kant suggested, but a force outside us. Only the great, divinely inspired heroes of history can both act spontaneously and also conform to the precepts of a higher morality; ordinary human beings, whose actions are not guided by “mysterious Stimuli,” must submit to the strict discipline of inherited traditions. Chaadaev, it should be noted, considered that psychology must recognize the heredity of ideas, the existence of a historical memory transmitted from generation to *génération*; he was bitterly opposed to what he called “empirical” psychology, which he accused of reducing the human psyche to a mechanical plaything of fortuitous associations.

To underpin this argument, Chaadaev evolved a metaphysical conception of a hierarchy of states of being. The Great All about which he wrote in the *Letters* has a hierarchical structure consisting of four grades. At the summit of the hierarchy is God. Next, his *émanation* is the universal mind that Chaadaev identified with the *social sphere*, i.e. the collective consciousness preserved in tradition. Considerably below this comes the empirical individual consciousness – the consciousness of individuals who have lost their grasp on the wholeness of being. The lowest (fourth) grade is nature prior to man. In this way God is neither identified with the universe, as in pantheism, nor separated from it, as in traditional theism.

Chaadaev's conception of the “social sphere” and its significance in human life is of particular interest. Knowledge, he argued, is a form of collective consciousness and arises from the interaction of many people, the collision of many conscious minds. Without society (the “supra-individual” sphere), which allows traditions to be handed down, human beings would never have emerged from the animal state. In religious experience, too, this sphere is of decisive importance: through it alone can the individual come to know God and become a vessel for the divine truth. The way to God leads not through individualistic

self-perfection or solitary asceticism, but through the strict observance of the traditional norms and conventions of social life. For Chaadaev this even included care for one's personal appearance and surroundings and the conscientious observance of religious ritual, which he called the "discipline of the soul." The effort to "fuse" with God was identified with the striving after complete sociality: "man has no other mission," Chaadaev wrote, "than the annihilation of his personal being and the substitution for it of a perfectly social or impersonal being."<sup>3</sup>

Chaadaev's ideal of absolute sociality can only be properly understood if it is clearly distinguished from the longing to "merge with the people" that is a frequent motif in the works of Russian thinkers concerned with the problem of alienation. Chaadaev's emphasis on sociality did not preclude a defense of social hierarchy or an espousal of a typically aristocratic, elitist theory of knowledge. The common people, he wrote, have nothing to do with reason, nor can their voice be equated with the voice of God. The guardian of revealed truths is the Church, a social organism whose role is to mediate between the congregation and God. If God were to vouchsafe another revelation, he would make use not of the common people but of chosen individuals with special spiritual qualities. Chaadaev criticized the Reformation mainly for its individualistic egalitarianism and its belittlement of the role of the Church. His dislike of mystical trends was based on similar arguments. If we assume that the essence of mysticism is to strive after direct, individual contact with God, and thus to bypass the alienated, institutionalized forms of religion, we must treat Chaadaev as a determined opponent of mysticism.

At the root of Chaadaev's philosophy of history were his beliefs in a "universal mind" – a collective consciousness evolving within the historical process – and in the importance of the social and organizational functions of the Church. His was a conscious attempt to return to a religious interpretation of history, which had been secularized by the Enlightenment. Again in contrast to Enlightenment historians, Chaadaev held that men's voluntary acts play a negligible role in history. Man's actions are subordinated to a superior supra-individual force – the masses obey it blindly, like "inanimate atoms," whereas chosen individuals are conscious instruments in its service. Man can be called truly great and free when he realizes the Creator's design and identifies his own will with the superior will animating history. Unlike the traditional Providentialists, Chaadaev thus attempted to reconcile the notion of a transcendent Providence with an immanentist philosophy of history. The force

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3 P. Chaadaev, *Philosophical Letters and Apology of a Madman*, trans. and introduced by Mary-Barbara Zeldin (Knoxville, Tenn., 1969), p. 136.



implementing the Creator's design is also the inner pattern that governs the historical process and transforms chaotic happenings into history – into a meaningful process directed to a goal. The instruments of history are individuals and nations endowed with what Chaadaev called supra-individual “moral personalities.” Their mission is to rise toward universality – and isolated nations locked up in their superstitions cannot be such historical nations. Since the time of Christ, the substance of history has been Christianity, the purest manifestation of which is Catholicism. Chaadaev called the papacy “a visible symbol of unity” and at the same time a symbol of the worldwide reunion of the future: in the Middle Ages the papacy had helped to weld Europe into one great Christian nation, but the Renaissance and Reformation had destroyed this unity and were responsible for mankind's relapse into the social atomization of paganism. Fortunately, this spiritual crisis was drawing to a close: Christendom had passed through all the phases of corruption that were an inseparable aspect of freedom, but it had not – and indeed could not – collapse. Even now, Chaadaev wrote, some great turning point was felt to be near. Having outlived its political role, Christianity was becoming social, and mankind was entering the last phase of the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth.

## **Russia's Past and Future**

### *Chaadaev's First Philosophical Letter*

Chaadaev's view of Russia is closely bound with his metaphysics and philosophy of history. In the first of his *Philosophical Letters*, which was devoted to Russia, he attempted to analyze what it was he found lacking in his native country. It was a land, he argued, that appeared to have been overlooked by Providence. It belonged neither to the East nor to the West, was without historical continuity, and lacked a “moral personality.” Russians are only a collection of unrelated individuals; in their heads everything is “individual, unsettled, and fragmentary.” They have no sense of permanency and resemble homeless spirits condemned to creative impotence. In their own families they feel like strangers; in their own homes they behave like visitors; and though they live in cities, they are nomads. The moral atmosphere of the West – the ideas of duty, justice, right, and order – is unknown in Russia, as is the Western syllogism (logic and methodical thinking). Russia does not belong to the moral sphere; her daily life has not yet attained a firm and definite form, but is in a state of permanent ferment resembling the original chaos preceding the present state of our planet. Such people cannot contribute to the evolution of the universal consciousness and are incapable of real progress; they exist only to

teach the world a great lesson. In the following paragraph, this despairing accusation from the first *Philosophical Letter* reaches its climax:

We Russians, like illegitimate children, come to this world without patrimony, without any links with people who lived on the earth before us; we have in our hearts none of those lessons which have preceded our own existence. Each one of us must himself once again tie the broken thread of the family. What is habit, instinct among other peoples, we must get into our heads by hammer-strokes. Our memories go no further back than yesterday; we are, as it were, strangers to ourselves. We walk through time so singly that as we advance the past escapes us forever. This is a natural result of a culture based wholly on borrowing and imitation. There is among us no inward development, no natural progress; new ideas throw out the old ones because they do not arise from the latter, but come among us from Heaven knows where. Since we accept only ready-made ideas, the indelible traces which a progressive movement of ideas engraves on the mind and which give ideas their forcefulness make no furrow on our intellect. We grow, but we do not mature; we advance, but obliquely, that is in a direction which does not lead to the goal. [...] Isolated in the world, we have given nothing to the world, we have taken nothing from the world; we have not added a single idea to the mass of human ideas; we have contributed nothing to the progress of the human spirit. And we have disfigured everything we have touched of that progress.<sup>4</sup>

In the final pages of this letter Chaadaev tries to analyze the reasons for this desperate condition. The main cause, he suggests, is Russia's isolation, both national and religious. This in turn had its roots in the Schism, the separation of Orthodoxy from the universal Church. While the nations of Europe traversed the centuries hand in hand, worshiped the Almighty in one language, and together fought to free Jerusalem, Russia from the beginning found herself outside this great community. In order to rise from the state of "empirical vegetation" to a spiritual life she would have to repeat the entire past development of Europe from the beginning.

Of great interest when taken in conjunction with the argument of the first of the *Philosophical Letters* is the fragment on serfdom in the second. Chaadaev regarded serfdom as the decisive influence in Russian society, the source of its unhealthy atmosphere and paralysis. In the West the Church had abolished serfdom, whereas in Russia she had presided over its introduction without a murmur of protest. "This circumstance alone," he wrote, "could lead one to doubt that Orthodoxy with which we adorn ourselves."<sup>5</sup>

Some elements in Chaadaev's view of Russia can be traced back to the writings of the French traditionalists. De Bonald, too, wrote that Russia, lying

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4 Ibid., pp. 37,41.

5 Ibid., p. 58.

between Europe and Asia, was still an unformed society; he called the Russian character intrinsically “nomadic” and compared the houses of the Muscovites to Scythian chariots from which the wheels had been removed. De Maistre, who lived in Russia for many years, called her a country ignorant of certain universal truths that were the fruits of an ancient civilization, and also ascribed this ignorance to the isolation following the religious Schism. The only remedy, he suggested, was for Russia to rejoin the Catholic community.<sup>6</sup> De Maistre’s views circulated among the Russian aristocracy and may have helped to form the ideas developed by Chaadaev in the first of his *Philosophical Letters*.<sup>7</sup>

The similarities between Chaadaev’s views and those of the French traditionalists (and to a lesser degree, of the German conservative romanticists) are not merely superficial; they derive from the system of values accepted by all these thinkers. The leitmotifs in Chaadaev’s philosophy – the critique of individualism and of 18<sup>th</sup> century rationalism and empiricism; the conception of society as a whole transcending its individual parts; the defense of tradition and historical continuity; the yearning for the spiritual unity of medieval Christendom – all had their more or less exact counterparts in the ideologies of the European conservatives. In the European context, therefore, we would have to call Chaadaev a conservative. Paradoxically, we cannot call him a conservative in the Russian context, especially if we consider that he himself pointed out the absence in Russia of such basic prerequisites of conservatism as a sense of permanency, tradition, and historical roots.<sup>8</sup>

In order to understand Chaadaev, we must remember that his ideas were imbued with a spirit of opposition to the “Orthodox autocratic, and national” Russia of Nicholas I. The first of the *Letters* was a challenge to the official ideology, which proclaimed that the West was rotten whereas prosperous Russia was a “sheet anchor” for the human race. The Chief of Gendarmes, Benckendorff, boasted: “Russia’s past is admirable; her present situation is more than wonderful; as for her future, this exceeds even the boldest expectations.” It is not surprising, therefore, that the publication of the “Letter” caused a violent reaction. The emperor personally intervened to have Chaadaev declared insane

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6 See C. Quénet, *Tchaadaev et les lettres philosophiques* (Paris, 1931), pp. 155-62.

7 See M. Stepanov, “Joseph de Maistre v Rossii”, *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, nos. 29-30 (M, 1937), p. 618.

8 Very similar was the case of the Marquis de Custine, a staunch European conservative who came to Russia in 1839 and found her deeply repulsive – despite Russia’s reputation for being the mainstay of conservatism in Europe. See George F. Kennan, *The Marquis de Custine and His “Russia in 1839”* (Princeton, N.J. 1971).

and placed under police and medical supervision. The periodical *Telescope* was closed down, and its editor, N. I. Nadezhdin, was banished to Ust-Sysolsk.

From Herzen's vivid account we know what effect the "Letter" had on the most radical sections of the young intelligentsia. It was "a shot that rang out in the dark night; whether it was something foundering that proclaimed its own wreck, whether it was a signal, a cry for help, whether it was news of the dawn or news that there would not be one – it was all the same: one had to wake up."<sup>9</sup>

### *Apology of a Madman*

Several years elapsed between the composition of the first of the *Philosophical Letters* (1829) and its publication (1836), and during this time Chaadaev's views underwent certain changes. The July Revolution in France was a shock that undermined his faith in Europe and tempered his pessimistic view of Russia. Under the influence of discussions with the future Slavophiles, above all with Ivan Kireevsky, he too began to see Russia as a providential force destined for a special mission, and for this reason kept apart from the great historical family of nations. The result was the *Apology of a Madman* [*Apologie d'un fou*], written in 1837, in which Chaadaev tried to redefine his views of Russia and also to some extent to justify himself in view of the violent reaction to the first "Letter."

Chaadaev now admitted that his interpretation of Russian history had been too severe; though he continued to adhere to his main theses, he drew different conclusions from them. He reaffirmed that Russia was a country without history and that its past revealed a lack of spontaneous internal development. If she had been a historical nation, his argument ran, the Petrine reforms would have proved impossible, for ancient and deep-rooted traditions would have offered resistance to the emperor's arbitrary will. As it was, Peter's legislation did not transgress against "historicity," since Russia was only "a blank sheet of paper."

<sup>10</sup> It is worth noting that this argument can be seen as a concealed attempt to convince Peter's heir that only the view of Russia as a country without history

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9 Alexander Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts*, trans. by Constance Garnett (London 1927), vol. 2, p. 261.

10 The Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz also compared Russia to a blank sheet of paper: "This level plain lies open, waste and white/ a wide-spread page prepared for God to write" (translated by G. R. Noyes). Numerous parallels between Chaadaev's first Letter and passages dealing with Russia in *Forefather's Eve*, Part 3 ("Digressions"), are discussed in Chapter 1 of W. Lednicki's *Russia, Poland and the West* (New York 1954). Lednicki suggests that Mickiewicz might have met Chaadaev during his stay in Russia and that passages in the "Digression" echoed their conversations.

could justify the violence of his reforms and, consequently, the legitimacy of his arbitrary and bureaucratic despotism.

“I love my country,” Chaadaev wrote, “as Peter the Great taught me to love it.”<sup>11</sup> Russia’s isolation, he now emphasized, was not her fault, but the result of her geographical situation. If she had no history, this could also be regarded as something of a privilege. Fettered by their own traditions, by their splendid history, the nations of Europe found it an effort to construct their future and were constantly struggling against the forces of the past. In Russia, on the other hand, it is enough for some mighty ruler to give vent to his will, and all convictions collapse, all minds open to receive the new ideas. In constructing their future, the Russian people can make use of the experience of European nations while avoiding their mistakes: they can be guided solely by “the voice of enlightened reason and conscious will.” “History is no longer ours, granted,” Chaadaev wrote, “but knowledge is ours; we cannot repeat all the achievements of the human spirit, but we can take part in its future achievements. The past is no longer in our power, but the future is ours.”<sup>12</sup> These were the arguments on which Chaadaev based his conviction that Russia was destined “to resolve the greater part of the social problems, to perfect the greater part of the ideas which have arisen in older societies, to pronounce judgment on the most serious questions which trouble the human race.”<sup>13</sup>

The *Apology of a Madman* brings the tragic paradox of Chaadaev into sharp focus. The man whose philosophical system recognized the inheritance of ideas through a supra-individual universal mind as the “fundamental fact of psychology,” and who was a wholehearted opponent of Locke’s empiricism, was at the same time forced to argue that the minds of his countrymen were a “blank sheet of paper” and their country a land without an inheritance. In the *Philosophical Letters* he had considered this to be a tragedy, but in the *Apology of a Madman* he came to the conclusion that the lack of a heritage could also be viewed as a privilege that offered Russia a unique opportunity.

The view of Russia as a country where nothing had as yet been accomplished and everything remained to be done was not a new one: it had been put forward by Leibniz after the Petrine reforms and by Diderot in connection with the legislation of Catherine the Great.<sup>14</sup> There is dramatic irony in the fact that Chaadaev adopted this view in spite of himself, as it were – it contradicted his own philosophy, which represented a sharp reaction against

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11 Chaadaev, *Philosophical Letters*, p. 173.

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 174-75.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 174.

14 See L. Richter, *Leibniz und sein Russlandbild*, Berlin 1946.

anti-historical rationalism, and also his belief in a conservative system of values. The theory, as he proposed it, could be used to justify not only enlightened absolutism (as its author intended) but also the hopes of revolutionary radicals. Herzen, for instance, was echoing Chaadaev when he wrote that since there was nothing in their past for Russians to love, social revolution would not encounter any serious obstacles.

## **Toward Ecumenism**

Chaadaev as well modified his views of Eastern and Western Christianity, yet in a different manner. While remaining faithful to his opinion that the schism had excluded the Eastern Church from the universal history, he began recognizing a positive aspect of this development in that “the importance of Christianity reduced completely to its own powers has been made apparent”; a Christianity that has been moved to a desert, and was charged with no historical tasks. In contrast, creating history was the vocation of the Western Church; this Church has proven to be ambitious and intolerant, excessively valuing mundane goods – but all this has been, as it were, the reverse of the noble mission it pursued in the universal history. The calling of the Eastern Church was completely different, although not less universalistic: “living in a solitude that the barbarity had produced for it,” the Eastern Church developed a contemplative and ascetic facet of Christianity, giving up interference in the affairs of secular history. Thus, the author of *Philosophical Letters* developed a concept whereby Catholicism and the Orthodox religion were of equal rights, as the two poles of absolute truth: “activism” and “sociality,” on the one hand, and contemplation, asceticism and the evangelical purity of Christ’s teachings, on the other. This enabled him to take a fresh look on the role of the Orthodox Church and religion in Russia. While not renouncing the idea that Russia had been detached from the West because of it, Chaadaev began arguing that it was this lack of secular and history-forming ambition, which at its extreme meant exaggerated submission with respect to all the possible princes of this world, that had enabled the Russian church to save amidst the tempests of history the Christian identity of the Russian populace. Concluding this chain of thought, he stated:

It is this Church, so humble and resigned as it is, and so humiliated, that our country has owed not only the most beautiful pages of its history but its subsistence too. The vocation of this Church has been to offer the world a teaching. A great nation,

completely pervaded with Christ's faith: behold an interesting phenomenon, which we submit to earnest minds for consideration.<sup>15</sup>

Such had been the mission of the Orthodox Church in the history of Russia to his time. Yet, the author of *Apology of a Madman* did not approach this explanation of the past as an objective for its own sake: he desired to understand the past in order to make out the future. With this viewpoint in mind, his concept of the reciprocal complementarity of Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity irresistibly suggested a unification of the Churches in the future. The hope that Russia – the mighty Orthodox power pulled by Peter the Great into the orbit of Western civilization – has a great ecumenical mission to fulfill in the universal history gained in legitimacy.

As can be seen, this new take of the relation between Orthodox Christianity and Catholicism justified *ex post* what could pass as inconsistency in Chaadaev's concept during the period he worked on *Philosophical Letters*: namely, the fact that he did not consider it necessary to formally join the Roman Church. His perception of the positive values in the Eastern Christian tradition intellectually strengthened the critics of the "Latinization" of the Orthodox Church, a trend that was much promoted in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>16</sup> Such a perspective supplied the springboard for idealization of the monastic Orthodox religion, in its form uncontaminated by Latin influence – the Orthodox Church of "saint elders," mystical ascetics and hermits. Yet, there is no doubt that Chaadaev never ceased thinking about the Kingdom of God as an entity that comes true in the history and in the world; and, that he saw the Church as a historical incarnation of the Divine Kingdom. This, in turn, required him to value the history-shaping activism of the Roman Church. With the superior idea of universal unity, to which he did remain unflinchingly loyal, the hypothesis whereby the modification of his views finally led Chaadaev to seeing the religious future of the world as entailing the unification of the Western and Eastern Church, with full respect for their separate tasks in the past, appears quite incontestable.

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15 P.Y. Chaadaev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, p. 264. Also, see Chaadaev's letter to Count A. De Circourt of 15<sup>th</sup> January 1845 (ibidem, vol. 2, pp. 173–8; for the French original version, see in: P.Y. Chaadaev, *Sochineniia i pis'ma*, vol. 1, Moscow 1913, pp. 253–8). I deal at some length on Chaadaev's evolution toward coming to closer terms with Slavophiles in my book *W kręgu konserwatywnej utopii*, p. 91.

16 See A. Walicki, *Rosja, katolicyzm i sprawa polska*, Warsaw 2002, pp. 21–6. See also: G. Florovsky, *Western Influences in Russian Theology*, in *Collected Works*, vol. IV: *Aspects of Church History*, Belmont, Mass. 1987, pp. 157–182.

## Chaadaev's Place in Russian Intellectual History

The author of the *Philosophical Letters* is without doubt one of the most striking personalities in the history of Russian ideas. Although he appears to be an isolated thinker, standing aloof from the main currents of Russian intellectual life, he nevertheless was the first to formulate – in drastic terms – a number of basic problems that were later taken up by thinkers representing very different worldviews: by the Slavophiles and Westernizers, Herzen and Dostoevsky, Chernyshevsky and Soloviev. He was an admirer of the West who was repulsed by liberal and bourgeois Europe; an opponent of revolution who provided intellectual stimulus for revolutionaries; a religious thinker who was accepted by the anterior of the non-religious progressive intelligentsia that followed Herzen in regarding him as a symbol of protest against the stifling atmosphere of autocratic Russia.

In the dispute between the Slavophiles and Westernizers, Chaadaev's position was equally atypical. He was an ardent Westernizer; but the Western Europe he so admired was not that of the democratic and liberal Westernizers of the 1840s, but that of the old aristocratic order before the age of revolutions. Liberalism and revolutionism were to him symptoms of a crisis in European civilization. The Westernizers of the 1840s experienced the formative influence of Hegelianism, and their later philosophical evolution was toward materialism and atheism. Chaadaev, on the other hand (like the Slavophiles), founded his hopes on a future religious renaissance and eagerly welcomed the anti-Hegelian "philosophy of revelation" expounded by Schelling in his final years.

In a certain sense, Slavophilism may be interpreted as a "response to Chaadaev." Not Russia, but revolutionary and individualistic Europe, the Slavophiles insisted, was the land of disinherited people, unconnected by any bonds and with no traditions on which to lean. If Russians felt like "strangers to themselves," this was only because they had been torn away from their own foundations by the artificial process of Westernization. It was true that Russians had no history and no traditions, that they had no connecting links between the generations, and that they lived like nomads without a sense of permanency; but it was true only of the Westernized elite, who had been uprooted and alienated from the common people. The remedy, however, was to be sought not in Europe but in reintegration with the common people, in a return to their own history and religion and a reconstruction of the distinctive forms of national life that had been weakened by Western influences. Such a process of reintegration was possible, the Slavophiles contended, because the Russian people, unnoticed by Chaadaev, had remained faithful to their tradition and the Orthodox faith.



It is thus legitimate to conclude that Chaadaev's ideas acted as an important catalyst in the shaping of Russian Slavophilism. In the context of Russian Occidentalism, the author of *Philosophical Letters* seems to remain a secluded figure: important and respected, though he failed to attract a herd of followers or successors to this intellectual effort.

This opinion, while certainly accurate with respect to Chaadaev's place amongst the Westernizers of the 1840s, is, however, somewhat onesided. It overlooks the fact that apart from a Westernism that was secular by principle, liberal or socialistic, nineteenth-century Russia was also fertile soil for a religious Westernism that preached the idea of Eastern and Western Christianities coming closer to each other and fathering an ecumenical mission upon Russia. This type of Westernism, which flourished during the reign of Alexander I in the form of a powerful current in extra-confessional and supra-ecclesial Christianity, crystallized in Chaadaev's thought as an unambiguously pro-Catholic orientation, valuing institutionalized Christianity and therefore affording priority to the Roman Church. This tendency was somewhat contrary to the "spirit of the time," but in the late years of the century one finds it reappearing in the pro-Catholic philosophy of Vladimir Soloviev, who developed a pan-entheistic philosophy of all-unity, coupled with a vision of a unified Universal Church and Russia's ecumenical mission. Viewed from this perspective, Chaadaev's thought appears as the crucial link between the religious Westernism of the mystical universalism of Alexander's time and the concepts advocated by the greatest religious philosopher of the nineteenth-century Russia.

## Converts of the Age of Nicholas: Ivan Gagarin and Vladimir Pecherin

In his important – albeit often unduly ignored – article for the encyclopedia, *Zapadniki, zapadnichestvo* [*Westernizers, Westernism*], Soloviev named three stages of the development of Russian Westernism: (1) theocratic, initiated by ecumenical tendencies of Freemasonic mysticism and culminating in the pro-Catholic philosophy of Chaadaev; (2) humanitarian, or rational and liberal, represented by the Westernizers of the 40s; (3) naturalistic, theoretically inspired by Positivist scientism and manifesting itself as the "social-economic" trend in political practice.<sup>17</sup>

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17 See V. Soloviev, "Zapadniki, zapadnichestvo (Statii iz Enciklopedicheskovo Slovaria)," in: V. Soloviev, *Sobranie Sochinenii*, vol. XII, Brussels 1970, p. 582–4. The main

There can be no doubt that, in the *typological* sense, the best expression of theocratic Westernism was Soloviev's own theocratic utopia. That is why, among other reasons, it seems advisable to replace the adjective "theocratic" with the semantically broader term "religious." After all, Soloviev did break up with the *theocratic* utopia, never ceasing to be a *religious* Westernizer. Chaadaev, on the other hand, was a pro-Catholic religious Westernizer susceptible to the influence of French theocratic traditionalists, though it would be a gross exaggeration to define him as a consistent theocrat.

The common denominator of all the variants of religious Westernism in Russia was the conviction that Russia would not be truly and irrevocably Westernized unless its Westernization extended to the religious sphere, embracing the whole of spiritual life. In the Freemason circles of the times of Alexander I, this implied the idea of a supra-denominational Christianity that could make Europe encompass spiritual unity, while integrating it with the Russian Empire that would consciously strive to renew and reinforce that unity. But the mystical "Universal Christianity" was easily accused of arbitrariness, subjectivism and lack of inner discipline. Therefore, to those who felt the need for greater discipline and authority, Catholicism became an increasingly attractive option. This explains the relatively numerous conversions to Catholicism among the Russian aristocracy.<sup>18</sup>

Among the most outstanding converts of Alexander's times were a descendant of the Rurik Dynasty, Prince Petr Kozlovsky (1783–1840) and the granddaughter of historian Ivan Boltin, Sophia Svechina (1782–1857), lady-in-waiting to Empress Maria Fedorovna.<sup>19</sup> Kozlovsky, a comprehensively educated Russian diplomat, chanced to meet Marquis de Custine on board a ship and discussed with him thoroughly the problem of the relationship between Russia and Catholic Europe (Custine, in turn, gave an extensive account of the Prince's opinions on the subject in his classical book, *La Russie en 1839*). Svechina, a brilliant erudite and polyglot, settled in Paris in 1916 and set up an influential intellectual salon that was to remain for many years the center of polemical

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representative of the third phase of Westernism was, according to Soloviev, Nikolai Chernyshevsky.

18 See K. Dmitrieva, "Les conversions au catholicisme en Russie au XIX siècle," *Revue des Etudes Slaves*, vol. 16, nos. 2-3, 1995.

19 More about them in my book, *Rosja, katolicyzm i sprawa polska*, pp. 30-37. See also B. Mucha, *Rosjanie wobec katolicyzmu*, Lodz 1989, pp. 149-156 and 27-40. Basic monographs: G. Struve, *Russkii Evropeetz*, San Francisco 1950; W. Frenkiel, *Piotr Borysowicz Kozłowski 1783-1840*, Leningrad 1978; M.J. Rouet de Journael, *Une Russe Catholique: Madame Svetchine*, Paris 1929.

disputes between the conservative ultra-montanians and the liberals. Frequenters of the salon included famous Catholic preachers, such as J.B. Lacordaire and Xavier de Ravignan, and outstanding thinkers, such as Charles Montalembert and Alexis de Tocqueville.

Chaadaev (who, as we have already emphasized, never became a convert) made his contribution by supporting Westernism with an extended philosophy of history, arguing that true progress must be universal and that the font of European civilization was the Catholic Church which best incarnated the idea of an all-human entity. The thesis was, obviously, unacceptable to Belinsky and Herzen who were intellectually shaped by the Hegelian left. There existed, however, at least one Russian intellectual who fully embraced Chaadaev's pro-Catholicism and brought it to extreme consequences. He was Prince Ivan Gagarin (1814–82), Svechina's nephew and publisher of the first edition of Chaadaev's writings (obviously published abroad – in Paris, in 1862).<sup>20</sup> In 1842, in Svechina's Paris salon, Gagarin performed the act of conversion to Catholicism and, in the following year, joined the Jesuit Order.

The motivation behind Gagarin's conversion was partly his discussions with Chaadaev of whom he had been first made aware by Schelling (while performing diplomatic service in Munich). What meaningfully strengthened his decision was the epistolary debate he held in 1840 with ideologists of Slavophilism – Samarin, Ivan Kireevsky and Khomiakov.<sup>21</sup> It confirmed Gagarin's high competence in theology and the history of the Church. The young Russian deftly defended the Catholic dogmas on intellectual grounds, but decisive for him was the Euro-centric argument: had the dogmas not represented absolute truth, European civilization would not have become universal and thus, the world expansion of this civilization, Russia's Europeanization included, would have neither a moral justification, nor a historical case.

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20 I write about him in *Rosja, katolicyzm i sprawa polska*, chapter *Iwan Gagarin: rosyjski jezuita i idea zjednoczenia kościołów* (pp. 285-360). The most extensive monograph on Gagarin is that by J.B. Beshoner, *Ivan Sergeevich Gagarin. The Search for Orthodox and Catholic Union*, Notre Dame, IN 2002. On publication of Chaadaev's writings, see Footnote 1 of the present chapter.

21 See analysis of the content of this correspondence in: A. Walicki, *Rosja, katolicyzm i sprawa polska*, pp. 312-330. I argue there that "if Slavophilism emerged as a certain reply to Chaadaev, then Gagarin's opinions were, in turn, a reply to Slavophilism" (p. 312). Gagarin's correspondence with the Slavophiles which appeared in the journal *Simvol* (vol. 3,4,5, 1980-1981 and vol. 22/1989) published by the Jesuit Slavonic Library at Meudon near Paris. Founded by Gagarin, the Slavonic Library issued the journal with the intention of continuing the opus vitae of its founder.

An important motive of Gagarin's conversion – one that meaningfully completed his purely religious motivation – was his strong and overtly Westernizing patriotism. Gagarin perceived Russia as “the youngest sister in the European family”<sup>22</sup> and identified its good with the strengthening and deepening of its European character. Catholicism thus meant to him a solution to all problems, not just individual, but also national. In 1856 – while Russia, defeated in the Crimean War, was entering a period of liberalism known as the “post-Sevastopol thaw” – Gagarin justified this conviction in a book entitled, somewhat provocatively, *Will Russia become Catholic? [La Russie sera-t-elle catholique?]*<sup>23</sup> Two years later, a Russian translation of the book was published, under a title emphasizing its ecumenical tendency: *On Reconciliation between the Russian and the Roman Churches*.

Gagarin's intention was to prove that overcoming the religious schism which had separated Russia from Europe was conditional to the success of the reforms undertaken by Alexander II. Practical realization of this postulate was to begin with the recognition of the Pope's primacy by the Russian Church, while separate liturgies and Church organizations would be preserved in the spirit of the Florentine Union. The writer believed that this all depended on the concord of “three wills”: the will of the Papacy, the will of the Russian Emperor and the will of the Russian Church, represented either by the episcopate or by the Synod.<sup>24</sup>

For Russia, Gagarin argued, such a decision would be tantamount to embarking upon the road of true progress. It would liberate Russia from its Byzantine heritage of the subjection of spiritual authority to secular authority, while strengthening the authority of the Russian Church without ever questioning its cultural identity. Indeed, it would be a return to origins, since Kievan Russia had been christened before the schism of 1504 and remained for a long time an actual part of the Catholic world (which was confirmed, for example, by dynastic marriages of the Rurik to the Polish Piast and Scandinavian royal families). A solution of that kind would bring reconciliation

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22 I. Gagarin, *Dnevnik. Zapiski o moei zhizni*. Perepiska, ed. R. Tempest, Moscow 1996, p. 109.

23 I. Gagarin, *La Russie, sera-t-elle catholique?*, Paris 1856 (Polish translation by A. Bezwiński, *O pojednaniu Kościoła rosyjskiego z rzymskim*, Toruń 1995).

24 Inspiration for the idea came from the views of the Anglican theologian William Palmer, representative of the so-called Oxford Movement, which strove toward uniting the Churches and exchanged letters on the issue with Khomiakov. It was Palmer who suggested the idea of “the union of three wills,” in *Dissertations on the Subjects Relating to the “Orthodoxy” or “Eastern Catholic” Communion*, London 1853.

of the national spirit with universal civilization, overcoming the painful division into an Europeanized Russia and a “folk” Russia, and thus putting an end to the Westernizer-Slavophile controversy by partial acceptance of the motivations on both sides: the Westernizers would come to understand the importance of religious attitudes in European civilization, while the Slavophiles would appreciate the Papacy as a priceless ally in the war against the anti-religious tendencies of the age. Having overcome its alienation, the Russian educated class would become immune to the influence of revolutionary ideas, thanks to which the Russian monarchy would be able to fulfill its mission as the natural defender of European order against revolutionary destruction. The multinational empire would be internally strengthened thanks to the neutralization of the Poles who, once Russia was reconciled to Rome, would lose their religious reasons for separatism. Russia’s international prestige would increase immensely, facilitating her resistance to Muslim expansion and the peaceful conquest of Asia.

Gagarin’s book won the approval of Pius IX, but was not appreciated in Russia. The conservative circles pronounced it a horrendous act of apostasy, while censorship forbade any public mention of it. Khomiakov entered into polemics with Gagarin in a separate brochure published in French under the pseudonym “Ignotus.”<sup>25</sup> He argued that Orthodox ecclesiology relied not so much on hierarchy as on the principle of “councilarity” [*sobornost*], concluding that a union with Rome would have been impossible even if desired by the Tsar and the episcopate together, since such an apostasy would never gain the acceptance of the “Church people.”<sup>26</sup> As for Herzen and the democratic activists of the “thaw” period, they opined that the Russian Jesuit’s proposals distracted public attention from the truly important issues and were not really worthy of discussion. Gagarin’s idea thus became shrouded for many years in a conspiracy of silence.<sup>27</sup>

The most vivid reaction to *La Russie...* came from Germany. One of the book’s two German translations was supplied with an enthusiastic introduction

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25 Its full title was *Encore quelques mots par un chrétien orthodoxe sur les confessions occidentales à l’occasion de plusieurs publications religieuses, latines et protestantes*, Leipzig 1858. Russian translation in: A.S. Khomiakov, *Sochineniia w dvukh tomakh*, Moscow 1994, vol 2: *Raboty po bogosloviiu*.

26 The argumentation clearly alluded to the Brest Union, approved by the bishops but rejected by the majority of the faithful.

27 This started changing only in post-Communist Russia. See especially E.N. “Tsymbaeva, Put’ iskanii kniazia I.S. Gagarina,” *Voprosy filosofii*, No 7, 1996, pp. 133- 137. The article speaks of Gagarin as “one of the most original religious thinkers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century” who put in practice the ecumenical ideas of Chaadaev and Solovev.

by Baron Haxthausen, author of a famous work on agrarian relations in Russia. Gagarin's ideas spurred Haxthausen to energetic action: he organized a conference on the union of the Churches in which the author of *La Russie...* participated, he founded a special society, ("the St. Peter Association") to realize the goal – he even tried to win the support of the Russian court.<sup>28</sup>

Gagarin himself was also extremely active in the promotion of his issue. In 1855, he co-founded *L'Oeuvre des Ecoles des Orient* – an organization that was to set up Catholic schools in the Near East and propagate the union of the Eastern Churches and Rome in that area. Soon afterward, he started publishing the journal *Etudes de theologie, de philosophie et d'histoire* and initiated the St. Cyril and Methodius Society which accumulated a rich Slavonic library. He won the support of other Russian exiles – Pavel Pierling, Ivan Martynov and Evgeny Balabin – whom he persuaded to convert to Catholicism and join the Jesuit order. In 1867, the four co-founded the Russian Jesuit Centre in Versailles. Gagarin published numerous studies on the history of the Church to justify his thesis on the original unity of the Greek and Latin parts of the Universal Church, as well as his view that Kievan Russia had once recognized the primacy of the Pope to which it should simply return. He devoted much attention to reconstructing pro-Catholic tendencies in Russia, authoring a pioneering study on the subject called *Catholic Tendencies in Russian Society* (1860), with profiles of Sophia Svehina, Prince Petr Kozlovsky, Catholic Decembrist Mikhail Lunin and, naturally, Chaadaev.<sup>29</sup> He also elaborated on the problem of Alexander I's intended conversion to Catholicism (continuation of his work was a monograph on the subject by Father Pavel Pierling).<sup>30</sup>

The "Catholic tendencies in Russia," so painstakingly recreated by Gagarin, found their culmination in the ecumenical-imperial utopia of Vladimir Soloviev, graphically presented in his book *La Russie et l'Eglise Universelle* (Paris 1889). It is highly symptomatic that Soloviev had been writing that book in the Jesuit Slavonic Library, i.e., in the place most tightly connected with the author of *La Russie sera-t-elle catholique?*, surrounded by Gagarin's closest collaborators and witnesses of his life whom he was continuously consulting, endeavoring to

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28 A detailed discussion of Haxthausen's activities in support of Gagarin's project can be found in: P. Pierling, *Le Prince Gagarin et ses amis, 1814-1882*, with Introduction by F. Rouleau, SJ. Beauchesne, Paris 1996.

29 I.S. Gagarin, *Tendances Catholiques das la Societe Russe*, Paris 1860 (reprint from *Correspondant*," vol. 50, 1980, pp. 286-318).

30 See I.S. Gagarin, *Les archives russes et la conversion d'Alexandre I-er, Empereur de la Russie*, Lyon 1877; and P. Pierling, *L'Empereur Alexandre I est-il mort Catholique?*, Paris 1901.

follow their advice.<sup>31</sup> In keeping with the deeply rooted tradition of eradicating Gagarin from the intellectual history of Russia, researchers of Soloviev's works tend to ignore the fact altogether. Soloviev's Catholic sympathies are usually treated as if they had no antecedent in Russia. And yet, it seems unquestionable that it is Gagarin who ought to be granted priority in formulating the central idea of Soloviev's messianism – namely, that uniting the Churches under the spiritual authority of Rome was the historical mission of Russia. Both thinkers were convinced that realization of this idea would integrate Russia with Europe and save the former from a revolution, resolving the Polish question, allowing for the introduction of the rule of law in Russia and resting the Russian Empire on stout moral foundations. Both actively propagated their opinions within the Roman Church, trying to carry favor for them with the Popes. Last but not least, both started from the assumption that the Church of Kievan Russia – the Church of St. Vladimir – had been part of the yet undivided Universal Church, respectful of the priority of the Holy See.

Another outstanding convert of the age of Nicholas I was Vladimir Pecherin (1807-1885), a promising professor of Classical Studies at Moscow University who, in 1836, decided to emigrate and several years later (in 1840) converted to Catholicism and joined the Redemptorist Order.<sup>32</sup> His decision to convert was largely motivated by a deep sense of estrangement from the Russian reality of the times, corresponding to Chaadaev's description of Russians as spiritual nomads, foreign and superfluous in the world. Taking religious vows, he wished to free himself from this painful alienation by succumbing to the rules of a disciplined community, capable of summoning the transcendent sanction, the authority of the Church and the oldest institutionalized tradition of the West. His sentiments toward the Nikolaian Russia were expressed in the following moving quatrain of 1834:

How sweet to hate your motherland  
And crave her fall with mirth,  
In Motherland's defeat to see  
The dawn of World's rebirth!

Unlike Gagarin, Pecherin was a man of contemplation, rather than of action. Not being a proselyte by temperament, he hated mixing religion with politics – the ideas of Gagarin and of the Polish Uniat Father Hipolit Terlecki on propagating Catholicism of the Eastern rite by connecting it with the national aspirations of

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31 See A. Walicki, *Rosja, katolicyzm i sprawa polska*, pp. 217-228.

32 Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 47-53.

the Slavs, were repugnant to him. But he did not shun history. On the contrary: his imagination had been shaped by utopian-Socialist visions of Earthly salvation and the anticipation of a “social palingenesis” or resurrecting a breakthrough in the history of mankind. During the 1848 revolutions, he cherished high hopes for Europe’s rebirth in a Catholic-theocratic spirit. In November 1848, he shared Gagarin’s belief that revolution would convince both the monarchs and the peoples of the impossibility of a purely human government, making them return under the wing of the Roman Church.<sup>33</sup> In March 1850, in another letter to Gagarin, he expressed a yet more astonishing opinion, arguing that time had come for a new barbaric invasion and that the providential mission of the “new barbarians” belonged to Russia. A “new Attila” leading the “Slavonic hordes” would arrive at the walls of Rome, he would be welcomed by a “new Pope Leo,” they would seal an agreement and the Russian Empire would join its forces with the spiritual power of the Papacy, thereby securing the universal triumph of Catholicism and putting an end to all revolutions. Rational and commercial civilization that had depraved the European peoples would vanish. Russia would become an integral part of the Catholic world, a fief of the Holy See. An age of mankind’s universal rebirth would thus begin.<sup>34</sup>

Completing the vision was a hope that it would be achieved by Emperor Nicholas – provided that the latter became Catholic.<sup>35</sup>

The vision was neither unique, nor exotic in the history of 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian thought. Similar visions can be found in the writings of the two most outstanding preachers of the theocratic mission of the Russian Empire – Fedor Tyutchev and the already mentioned Vladimir Soloviev.<sup>36</sup> Tyutchev, however, promoted the project of uniting the Empire with the Papacy in a version contrary to that of Soloviev: it was not Russia that needed to renounce its sinful schism, thereby restructuring the Universal Church under the primacy of the Pope – rather, it was the Pope who needed to recognize his sins, return to the Universal Church and accept the protection of the Russian Emperor, the lawful heir of Constantine’s Empire. Nevertheless, in both cases – as in Pecherin’s vision – the issue was to combine the earthly power of the Russian Empire with the spiritual power of Rome in order to overcome the forces of destruction, to unite the Churches and to achieve the ideal of Christianized political relations, proclaimed by Emperor Alexander in the founding act of the Holy Alliance.

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33 See K. Dmitrieva, *Les conversions au catholicisme*, p. 327.

34 P. Pierling, *Les Prince Gagarin et ses amis*, p. 150.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 151.

36 See Chapter 18.



## Chapter 6

# The Slavophiles And Other Versions Of Anti-Westernism

The term “Slavophilism” was originally used as a gibe to underline a certain narrow tribal particularism that was felt to be typical of the opponents of Russian Westernism. The term “Westernism” [*zapadnichestvo*] had similar origins; it was first coined by the Slavophiles to draw attention to their opponents’ alleged national apostasy. Both terms, however, could be interpreted positively and were finally accepted by the ideologists of each side as something in the nature of a challenge.

The etymological meaning of “Slavophilism” is “love of Slavs.” In Russian historical literature, however, this term has come to be applied in a more narrow sense to a group of ideologists belonging to the conservative nobility, whose outlook was formed in the late 1830s in opposition to the trend known as “Westernism.” Moreover, Slavophilism denoted in this case not so much a feeling of solidarity with brother Slavs as a cultivation of the native and primarily Slavic elements in the social life and culture of ancient Russia. An interest in the fate of the non-Russian Slavs only began to play a role in Russian Slavophilism at the time of the Crimean War; in the 1840s only Khomiakov could be called a “Slavophile” in the etymological sense of the word.<sup>1</sup>

The most outstanding thinkers of Slavophilism were Ivan Kireevsky (1806-56), Aleksei Khomiakov (1804-60), Konstantin Aksakov (1817-60) and Yury Samarin (1819-76). Kireevsky (who was associated with the Wisdom-lovers in

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1 The most important American contributions to the study of Russian Slavophilism are N. V. Riasanovsky, *Russia and the West in the Teaching of the Slavophiles* (Cambridge, Mass., 1952); P. Christoff, *An Introduction to Nineteenth-Century Russian Slavophilism: A Study in Ideas*, vol. 1, A. S. Khomiakov (The Hague, 1961), vol. 2, I. V. Kireevskij (The Hague, 1972); A. Gleason, *European and Muscovite: Ivan Kireevsky and the Origins of Slavophilism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972). The most comprehensive study of the Slavophile conceptions, their prehistory, their opponents and their different continuations, is A. Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy*. Clarendon Press, Oxford 1975 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Notre Dame, 1989).

his youth) was, as a philosopher, chiefly responsible for the formulation of the Slavophile philosophy of man and of history. Khomiakov, a man of wide interests and a strong and colorful personality (during his career he was a cavalry officer, poet, publicist, philosopher, and inventor), was above all a lay theologian and the creator of Slavophile ecclesiology. Aksakov and Samarin, who were known as the “younger Slavophiles,” were both fascinated by Hegel in their youth. At the beginning of the 40s they were what has been termed “Orthodox Christian Hegelians,”<sup>2</sup> but they abandoned Hegelianism when they decided that it could not be reconciled with Slavophile ideas. Within the Slavophile movement, however, Aksakov and Samarin represented diametrically opposing trends. Aksakov, who had studied history and philology, was an extreme utopian idealist, with a fanatical belief in the virtues of the common people and “folk principles”; he even went so far as to grow a beard and wear the traditional Russian peasant coat, although (according to Chaadaev) this merely led to his being mistaken for a Persian. Samarin, on the other hand, was a sober politician not given to moralizing; when in later years he played an active part in drawing up and putting into effect the land reforms of 1861, he was quick to see how the Slavophile cult of the common people could serve the political interests of the nobility.

We should also note the names of three other Slavophiles who did not, however, make any important theoretical contributions to the movement’s doctrine. These are Petr Kireevsky (Ivan’s brother), a folklorist and collector of Russian folk songs; Aleksandr Koshelev, a politician who in the 1860s represented the right wing of gentry liberalism; and Ivan Aksakov (Konstantin’s brother), who was to become one of the leading representatives of Russian Pan-Slavism.

## **The Slavophile Philosophy of History and Social Ideals**

The central issue of Slavophile ideology was Russia’s relationship to Western Europe, which the Slavophile’s examined in the light of an all-embracing philosophy of history. The principal tenets of their philosophy were formulated in 1839 in Kireevsky’s unpublished article “A Reply to Khomiakov,” and were expanded in Kireevsky’s long essay *On the Character of European Civilization and Its Relationship to Russian Civilization* (1952).

The fabric of European civilization, Kireevsky argued, was made up of three strands: (1) Christianity, (2) the young barbarian races who destroyed the

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2 Cf. D. I. Tschizhevskij, *Gegiel w Rossii* (Paris, 1939).

Roman Empire, and (3) the classical heritage. Russia's exclusion from the heritage of Rome was the essential feature distinguishing her from the West. In the pre-Slavophile stage of his intellectual development<sup>3</sup> Kireevsky had regarded this circumstance as regrettable, but as a Slavophile he came to see it as a blessing. He saw ancient Rome as a rationalist civilization that represented "the triumph of naked and pure reason relying on itself alone and recognizing nothing above or outside itself."<sup>4</sup> That was why the Romans had excelled mainly in the sphere of jurisprudence, in the pernicious rationalization and formalization of vital social bonds. The juridical rationalism of the Roman state had appeared to hold society together, but it had actually torn apart its organic unifying bonds. Roman society had been merely an aggregation of rationally thinking individuals motivated by personal advantage and knowing no other social bond than that of common business interests. The state, or "universal" sphere, had split off from the sphere of private, antagonistic interests and had risen above it as an alienated, external force that chained people together but did not unite them. Having inherited this pagan rationalism, Western Europe found its evolution bound to be a constant struggle of mutually antagonistic interests; Russia, on the other hand, had been spared this fatal heritage and was therefore established on purely Christian principles that were in complete harmony with the spirit of the Slavic peasant commune.

"Private and social life in the West," Kireevsky wrote, "are based on the concept of an individual and separate independence that presupposes the isolation of the individual. Hence the external formal relations of private property and all types of legal conventions are sacred and of greater importance than human beings."<sup>5</sup> In this world, there could only be an external and artificial unity precluding freedom; that is why European history had (in Khomiakov's succinct phrase) been the history of the struggle between "unity without freedom" and "freedom without unity." According to Khomiakov, the first principle was embodied in the Catholic Church, which established papal absolutism, exchanged the bond of love for institutionalized bonds, and itself

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3 That is, during the period that Kireevsky was editor of the periodical *The European* (1832). At this time his outlook – which was influenced by the philosophical romanticism of the Wisdom-lovers – was clearly pro-Western (as the title of the periodical suggests). His article "The Nineteenth Century," published in *The European*, aroused the suspicions of the Emperor himself and led to the suppression of the periodical.

4 I. V. Kireevsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, ed. M. O. Gershenzon (2 vols.; M, 1911), vol. 1, p. 111.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 113.

came to resemble a hierarchical and authoritarian state. The second principle found expression in Protestantism, which was justified as a negative reaction but lacked constructive force. Further stages in Europe's spiritual evolution listed by Khomiakov were the philosophy of the Enlightenment, which paved the way for the French Revolution, and German Idealism, which ultimately led to Feuerbach's deification of man and Stirner's apotheosis of egoism.

This spiritual evolution was accompanied by appropriate social changes, such as the growing atomization of society and its increasing rationalization. Atomization, in turn, led logically to the idea of a "contract" as the only rational bond linking isolated autonomous individuals. The "social contract" thus was clearly not the "brainchild of the encyclopedists but a concrete ideal that had once been the unconscious and was now the conscious goal of all Western nations" (Kireevsky). Organic communities were replaced by associations based on calculations, and human energy was now entirely redirected to the outside, to feverish and restless activity. This soulless "logico-technical" civilization was governed by the mechanism of industrial production. "Only one serious thing", Kireevsky wrote:

was left to man, and that was industry. For him the reality of being survived only in his physical person. Industry rules the world without faith or poetry. In our times it unites and divides people. It determines one's fatherland, it delineates classes, it lies at the base of state structures, it moves nations, it declares war, makes peace, changes *mores*, gives direction to science, and determines the character of culture. Men bow down before it and erect temples to it. It is the real deity in which people sincerely believe and to which they submit. Unselfish activity has become inconceivable; it has acquired the same significance in the contemporary world as chivalry had in the time of Cervantes.<sup>6</sup>

In ancient, pre-Petrine Russia, the Slavophiles believed that they had found an entirely different form of social evolution. Orthodox Christianity – a form of Christianity that had not been infected by Pagan rationalism or the secular ambitions of Catholicism – had contributed a principle unknown to the West, that of *sobornost'*<sup>7</sup> or "counciliarism" (Khomiakov). This was a form of true fellowship, a "free unity" of believers that precluded both self-willed individualism and its restraint by coercion. The relationship between the common people and the ruler it had "called" to power (a reference to the "calling of the Varangians") was based on mutual trust. The disintegrating

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6 Ibid., p. 246. (Quoted from J. Edie et al., *Russian Philosophy* [3 vols.; Chicago 1965], vol. 1, p. 195; the last sentence has been retranslated.)

7 The word *sobornost'* comes from the noun *sobor* (council) and the verb *sobirat'* (collect, connect, and unite).

egoism of private ownership as a privilege divorced from any duties was unknown, and so was the rigid division into estates and the ensuing antagonisms. In ancient Russia the basic social unit was the village commune [*obshchina*], which was founded on the common use of land, mutual agreement, and community of custom, and which was governed by the *mir* – a council of elders who settled disputes in accordance with hallowed traditions and were guided by the principle of unanimity rather than the mechanical majority of a ballot. Society was held together by what was primarily a moral bond – a bond of convictions – that united the entire land of Rus into one great *mir*, a nationwide community of faith, land, and custom.

At first glance it might seem that there is no room in this picture for an absolute ruler or a strong centralized government. In fact, however, the Slavophile interpretation of Russian history had little in common with the Decembrist idealization of “ancient Russian freedom” or with Lelewel’s conception of Slavic communalism. In contrast to these conceptions, the Slavophile ideal of “ancient Russian freedom” had nothing in common with “republican liberty.” This fact emerges most clearly in the historical writings of Konstantin Aksakov. Republican liberty, he argued, was political freedom, which presupposed the people’s active participation in political affairs; ancient Russian freedom, on the other hand, meant *freedom from politics* – the right to live according to unwritten laws of faith and tradition, and the right to full self-realization in a moral sphere on which the state would not impinge.

This theory rested on a distinction the Slavophiles made between two kinds of truth: the “inner” and the “external” truth. The inner truth is in the individual the voice of conscience, and in society the entire body of values enshrined in religion, tradition, and customs – in a word, all values that together form an inner unifying force and help to forge social bonds based on shared moral convictions. The external truth, on the other hand, is represented by law and the state, which are essentially conventional, artificial, and “external” – all the negative qualities that Kireevsky and Khomiakov ascribed to institutions and social bonds that had undergone a rationalizing and formalizing process. Aksakov went even further than the other Slavophiles in regarding *all* forms of legal and political relations as inherently evil; at their opposite pole was the communal principle, embodied in the village commune, based (in Aksakov’s view) purely on trust and unanimity and not on any legal guarantees or conditions and agreements characteristic of a rational contract. For Aksakov the difference between Russia and the West was that in Russia the state had not been raised to the “principle” on which social organization was largely founded. When the frailty of human nature and the demands of defense appeared to make political organization necessary, Russians “called” their rulers from “beyond the

sea”<sup>8</sup> in order to avoid doing injury to the “inner truth” by evolving their own statehood; Russian tsars were given absolute powers so that the people might shun all contacts with the “external truth” and all participation in affairs of state.

Relations between “land” (that is the common people who lived by the light of the inner truth) and state rested upon the principle of mutual noninterference. Of its own free will the state consulted the people, who presented their point of view at Land Assemblies but left the final decision in the monarch’s hands. The people could be sure of complete freedom to live and think as they pleased, while the monarch had complete freedom of action in the political sphere. This relationship depended entirely on moral convictions rather than legal guarantees, and it was this that constituted Russia’s superiority to Western Europe. “A guarantee is an evil,” Aksakov wrote. “Where it is necessary, good is absent; and life where good is absent had better disintegrate than continue with the aid of evil.”<sup>9</sup> Aksakov conceded that there was often a wide gap between the ideal and reality, but he ascribed this gap entirely to human imperfection. He strongly condemned rulers who tried to interfere in the inner life of the “land,” but even in the case of Ivan the Terrible, whose excesses he condemned, he would not allow that the “land” had the right to resistance and he praised its long-suffering loyalty.

A paradoxical aspect of Aksakov’s argument is that he subconsciously adopted and applied to Russia’s past one of the chief assumptions of Western European liberal doctrine – the principle of the total separation of the political and social spheres. At the same time he rejected both liberal constitutionalism and the very content of the liberal ideal of freedom. Aksakov’s interpretation of the freedom of the “land” is not to be confused with the freedom of the individual, since in his interpretation freedom only applied to the “land” as a whole; it was not the freedom of the individual in the community, but the community’s freedom from outside interference in matters of faith, traditions, or customs. This noninterference had nothing to do with the liberal doctrine of *laissez-faire*, since, according to Aksakov, the moral principles of the “land” rendered economic individualism out of the question. Even his call for freedom of speech was not a truly liberal postulate since it did not envisage the acceptance of pluralistic beliefs or of minority oppositions within society. While demanding freedom in the nonpolitical sphere, Aksakov wanted every individual

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8 What Aksakov had in mind was the legend about the “calling of the Varangians” from Nestor’s *Primary Chronicle*, according to which the Kievan state was founded by “Norman” (or Norse) princes who were invited by the quarreling local tribes to rule over them.

9 K. S. Aksakov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenni*, 3 vols., Moscow 1861–80, vol. 1, pp. 9, 10.

to submit totally to his *mir* – a submission, moreover, that was to be “according to conscience” and not only “according to law.” His ideal was a “free unity” based on a total unanimity that would reduce external constraints to a minimum but at the same time exclude individual autonomy and any departure from communal traditions.

The greatest difficulty faced by the Slavophiles in their interpretation of Russian history was to find an adequate explanation for the Petrine reforms. How was it possible, they had to ask themselves, that the truly Christian community of ancient Russia gave way before the onslaught of an inferior civilization based on the “external truth”? The fault, they suggested, lay not with the people but with the state and those members of the elite who were dazzled by the purely external achievements of European nations. A civilization based on rationalist criteria can evolve faster and more easily than one based on Christian principles, for its development does not depend on the inner perfection of its human potential; therefore Europe outstripped Russia in the material sphere and built a civilization whose technical achievements aroused the envy of Peter and his supporters.

The Petrine reforms, according to the Slavophiles, cut the links between Russia’s upper strata and the common people.<sup>10</sup> A leitmotiv of Slavophile ideology is the consequent cleavage in Russian life, the antithesis between the people [*narod*] and society [*obshchestvo*] – the enlightened elite that had adopted Western ways. The people cultivated stable customs, whereas society bowed to the caprice of fashion; the people had preserved the patriarchal family, whereas society was witnessing the breakup of family ties; the people had remained faithful to ancient Russian traditions, whereas society was an artificial product of the Petrine reforms. Westernized Russians had become “colonizers in their own country” (Khomiakov). Through being torn away from their popular roots, they had lost their sense of historical attachment and had become what Chaadaev had accused them of being: men without a fatherland, strangers in their own country, homeless wanderers. The return of the enlightened sections of society to the fold of Orthodoxy and the “native principles” preserved in the present village commune seemed, from this vantage point, to offer the only hope of a cure for Russia and the indispensable premise for any social transformation.

These ideas gave rise to a specific diagnosis of the contemporary situation as well as certain directives for political action. Aksakov specified it, giving

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10 The Slavophiles maintained that before Peter the higher estates were an organic part of the “people.” In fact, by “people” they meant all sections of society who had remained faithful to the old tradition – for instance the old Moscow merchant families were part of the “people,” whereas Westernized merchants belonged to “society.”

detailed historical grounds, in an extensive memorial *On the Internal Condition of Russia*, a copy of which was handed over in 1855 to the new emperor Alexander II.<sup>11</sup> The memorial, which formed the first Slavophile attempt to directly influence government policy, persuaded the emperor that any fear of revolution in Russia was groundless, but at the same time depicted contemporary Russia in quite black terms – as a state of “shameless lies” and universal corruption: “Everyone is lying to one another, they can see it themselves, go on telling lies, and no-one knows what they might come to.” Aksakov identified the deification of the state as the reason for this; the state’s stifling of freedom of speech and conscience, and violation of moral freedom. He believed freedom of speech and of the press to be a remedy; he considered the convention of the *zemsky sobor* (“assembly of the land”) premature, as the nation should in the first place be morally revived and united. The final conclusion of the memorial claimed:

To the Government – a limitless freedom of authority, as only due thereto; to the people – a complete liberty of life, in its internal and external manifestations, which freedom is guarded by the Government. To the Government – the right to act and, consequently, the legislative power; to the life – to the people – the right to freedom of opinion and, consequently, freedom of speech.

A special *Supplement* to the memorial, specified the content of these postulates, claiming that freedom of speech was needed immediately, the *zemsky sobor* assembly being expected soon. While freedom of speech is a must, the sobor is necessary and useful.

## The Concept of the “Integral Personality” and “New Principles in Philosophy”

It was suggested earlier that Slavophile ideology could be interpreted as a reply to Chaadaev’s *Philosophical Letters*.<sup>12</sup> From a wider perspective, one might say that it was a reaction to processes taking place in the awareness of the intellectual elite – the generation of “superfluous men” who lived during the reign of Nicholas I and were immortalized in Turgenev’s novels. Herzen aptly defined this reign as a “strange age of external constraint and inner liberation.”<sup>13</sup>

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11 For a detailed discussion of the memorial, see A. Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy*, pp. 249-256. The memorial itself has been published in the anthology: L.N. Brodsky, *Ranniie slavianofily*, Moscow 1910, pp. 69–97.

12 See the end of the chapter on Chaadaev, p. 91.

13 A. Herzen, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 30 vols., Moscow 1854–65, vol. 14, p. 157.



Despite the government's constant attempts to ward off "infection" from Europe, the Russia of Nicholas experienced to an unusual degree the impact of cultural influences from Western Europe. Literature and philosophy became increasingly powerful tools in the liberation of the individual from the pressure of received truths imbibed at the breast and accepted unreflectively. The struggle for emancipation that would not be played out in the political arena became "introverted" and found an outlet in philosophical exaltation and the cult of introspection, accompanied by a sense of isolation, alienation, and inner fragmentation. The articles and letters of the young Bakunin, Herzen, Stankevich, and Belinsky are filled with complaints about the excessive reflection that kills all spontaneity, about inner dualism, about "spectrality" and Hamlet-like self-analysis. The Chaadaevian motif of alienation and homelessness also makes an appearance: "a wanderer in Europe, a stranger at home and a stranger abroad" is how Herzen described the hero of his novel;<sup>14</sup> and Ogarev echoed this with his "*Ich bin ein Fremdling überall*" – a homeless wanderer from country to country.<sup>15</sup>

For the Slavophiles these moods were a symptom of the "spiritual malady" that resulted from the cleavage between "polite society" and the common people. They welcomed this symptom, however, as evidence that alienation was not accepted as something normal. Their aim was to help the "Russian Hamlets" overcome their alienation and inner dualism by showing them the ideal of the *tsel'naia lichnost'*, the integral personality.

In their philosophy of man and their epistemology, the Slavophiles (especially I. Kireevsky) were largely concerned with analyzing the destructive influence of rationalism. Rationalism, they argued, is the main factor in social disintegration, and also destroys the inner wholeness of the human personality. The ideal, untainted personality is an integral structure with an "inner focus." This "inner focus" helps to harmonize the separate psychic powers and safeguards the inner unity and wholeness, or "integrality" [*tsel'nost'*], of the spirit. The unifying principle is concealed but can be grasped by means of inner concentration; it is only this "vital focus hidden from the ordinary condition of the human soul" but accessible to those who seek it that makes the psyche something more than an aggregate of heterogeneous functions. Natural reason, or the capacity for abstract thought, is only one of the mental powers and by no means the highest: its one-sided development impoverishes man's perceptive faculties by weakening his capacity for immediate intuitive understanding of the truth. The cult of reason is responsible for breaking up the psyche into a number

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14 Beltov, the hero of *Who Was Guilty?*.

15 In his poem *Humor*.

of separate and unconnected faculties, each of which lays claim to autonomy. The resulting inner conflict corresponds to the conflict between different kinds of sectional party interests in societies founded on rationalistic principles. Inner divisions remain, even when reason succeeds in dominating the other faculties: the autocratic rule of reason intensifies the disintegration of the psyche, just as rationally conceived social bonds “chain men together but do not unite them” and thus intensify social atomization. “The tyranny of reason in the sphere of philosophy, faith, and conscience,” wrote Samarin, “has its practical counterpart in the tyranny of the central government in the sphere of social relations.”<sup>16</sup>

Thus, against the principle of autonomy the Slavophiles set the ideal of “integrality,” the precondition of which they found in religious faith uncontaminated by rationalism. Only faith, they claimed, could ensure the wholeness of the psyche. Faith helped to fuse “the separate psychic powers [...] into one living unity, thus restoring the essential personality in all its primary indivisibility.” Thanks to Orthodoxy, Russians were still capable of attaining this kind of inner integration. In their search for truth they were guided not by natural reason but by “integral reason,” which represented the harmonious unity of all the psychic powers. The inhabitants of Western Europe, on the other hand, had long since lost their inner wholeness, their capacity for inner concentration, and their grasp on the profound current of spiritual life. Different spheres of life – the intellectual, moral, economic, and religious spheres – had become separated and were in conflict with each other. This was responsible for the amorality of Western civilization, which could continue to advance even when the inner psychic powers had become weakened, when total havoc reigned in the sphere of moral values. At the same time Western civilization suffered from a tragic dilemma: the “division of life as a whole and that of all the separate spheres of individual and social being.”<sup>17</sup>

The Slavophiles emphasized that their conception of the “integral personality” was only a continuation of the philosophy of the Greek Church Fathers, to whose writings Kireevsky had been introduced by Father Makary, a learned monk from the famous Optina Pustyn Cloister. By acknowledging their debt to Eastern Patristics, the Slavophiles were trying to stress their roots; but it must be pointed out that their handling of this tradition was influenced by their reading of the German conservative romantics, with whom they had much in common. The idea of the “integral personality” is closely related to the typically romantic critique of rationalism, as is the theory of knowledge expounded by

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16 Yury Samarin, *Sochineniia* (M, 1877), vol. 1, pp. 401-2.

17 Kireevsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, p. 218.

Kireevsky in an essay with the significant title *On the Necessity and Possibility of New Principles in Philosophy* (1856).

“Logical thinking, when separated from the other cognitive faculties,” Kireevsky declared, “is a natural attribute of the mind that has lost its own wholeness.”<sup>18</sup> Rationalism acts as a disintegrating force because it transforms reality into an aggregate of isolated fragments bound together only by a network of abstract relationships. Reason is a purely cognitive faculty that can only grasp abstract notions and relationships; the substantial, on the other hand, can only be comprehended by a faculty that is itself substantial – in other words by the whole psyche. This kind of understanding presupposes a vital and *immediate* connection between the knower and the object of knowledge. By isolating the knower from reality and setting him up in opposition to it, rationalism casts doubt upon the reality and objective nature of the universe. True understanding, therefore, cannot be content to define relationships but must attempt to penetrate to the substantial essence of things, must be a kind of *revelation* or *immediate* cognition. Only *believing reason*, as Kireevsky called it, can achieve direct contact with God, the supreme principle of the oneness of the universe.

Not all individuals possess the capacity for true understanding to the same degree. The main weakness of Protestantism (and later of the Cartesian system), Kireevsky suggested, was that it ignored the existence of a spiritual hierarchy and attempted to find a basis for the perception of truth “in that part of human reason common to every individual.” Philosophy inspired by Protestantism therefore had to “restrict itself to the domain of logical reason shared by every man, regardless of his moral worth. The concentration of all spiritual forces into a single power, the integrity of mind essential for attaining integral truth, could not be within everyone’s reach.”<sup>19</sup>

At first sight this characteristically elitist theory of knowledge seems to be incompatible with the elements of sociologism that are an unmistakable feature of Slavophile theories. Kireevsky, for instance, held that “everything essential in the human soul grows in it socially,”<sup>20</sup> that true faith (and therefore knowledge) could not be experienced by an individual in isolation, and that the authentic Orthodox faith was preserved only among the common people and not among the demoralized elite. In fact there is no real contradiction. The Slavophiles’ “spiritual hierarchy” was not a hierarchy of talent or of social status; at its apex were to be found men of unusually strong faith bound by exceptionally strong ties to the national community and the fellowship of the Church.

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18 Ibid., p. 276.

19 Ibid., p. 230.

20 Ibid., p. 254.

An application of these ideas is to be found in Khomiakov's theory of knowledge, which assumes that only the organic fellowship of *sobornost'* makes true understanding possible. The organic root of understanding, he wrote, is *free will* and *faith*, and the degree of their intensity reflects the strength of the social bond connecting the individual to the collective. "The isolated individual," on the other hand, "represents absolute impotence and unalleviated inner division."<sup>21</sup> An individual can comprehend the truth only insofar as he is united to the Church in loving fellowship and thus becomes an organ of a consciousness transcending the individual (*sobornost' soznaniia*). Thus truth, which is "seemingly accessible to only a few, is in fact created and shared by all."<sup>22</sup>

Only the Orthodox Church had preserved this supraindividual Christian consciousness in all its purity. Western European thought was everywhere infected by the incurable disease of rationalism. Kireevsky and Khomiakov approved of Hegel's criticism of Enlightenment intellect (*Verstand*) but felt that Hegel's own dialectical reason (*Vernunft*) was no less rationalistic and even more dangerous. Khomiakov called Hegel the most complete rationalist of modern times, a thinker who had transformed "living reality" into a "dialectic of incorporeal notions" and had exhausted the potentialities of cognitive rationalism by taking it to its logical conclusions. In Europe, the thinker who had realized the one-sidedness of philosophical reason was the aged Schelling, who had evolved his religious philosophy of revelation<sup>23</sup> in opposition to Hegelianism. Although the Slavophiles approved of Schelling, Kireevsky criticized the philosophy of revelation for confining itself to a merely negative critique of rationalism. The dilemma, as he saw it, was that a new, positive philosophy required true religious faith, whereas Western Christianity was itself infected by rationalism. Although Schelling was aware of this, and had attempted to cleanse Christianity of the deposits of rationalism, it was "a lamentable task to invent a faith for oneself."<sup>24</sup>

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21 Khomiakov, A.S., *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. I, p. 161.

22 Ibid., p. 283.

23 In 1841 the elderly Schelling was summoned to Berlin by Frederick William IV and there began his lectures on the "philosophy of revelation," which were supposed to reconcile religion and philosophy and counteract the growing influence of the Hegelian Left. Schelling called his philosophy "positive" and contrasted it with Hegelian rationalism, which he called a "negative" philosophy that was confined to the sphere of pure logical thought.

24 Kireevsky, *Pol. Sob. Soch.*, vol. I, p. 262.

It was logical to infer from the arguments that only Orthodox Russia could give birth to a new and truly Christian philosophy capable of transforming European intellectual life. The Slavophiles felt that they themselves – and particularly Kireevsky and Khomiakov – had been responsible for formulating the basic principles of this new philosophy.

## Slavophile Ecclesiology

The notion of *conciliarism* formed a bridge between Khomiakov's epistemological views and his theology – or, more accurately, his ecclesiology. In his essay *The Church Is One*, Khomiakov described the Church as neither “institution nor doctrine” but a “living organism of truth and love” pervaded by the spirit of *sobornost'*. This spirit of “free unity” made the Church an ideal social organism, an antidote to the social atomization and spiritual disintegration of the contemporary world.

Khomiakov's views on the role of the Church took as their starting point Slavophile criticism of Catholicism and Protestantism, which was mentioned earlier in connection with the Slavophile philosophy of history. He accused the Roman Catholic Church of choosing a material unity symbolized in the person of the pope, and thereby replacing the unity of love by utilitarian calculations (indulgences) and blind submission to authority.

Protestantism, on the other hand, abolished all outward symbols of the religious bond and became a religion of lonely individuals lost in an atomized society. For the *materialistic* rationalism of the Roman Church the Protestants substituted *idealistic* rationalism. Whereas Catholicism became set in reified concrete forms, Protestantism wasted itself in empty subjectivism; the Catholic spirit expressed itself most strongly in the anti-individualistic conservatism of de Maistre, whereas Protestant individualism turned into atheism and culminated in the nihilism of Max Stirner. According to Khomiakov, the West was dominated by a secular version of Protestant individualism, even in countries that had remained formally true to Catholicism. At the same time the ancient Catholic principle of “unity without freedom” had taken on a new guise and drawn fresh strength from contemporary socialism, which, according to Khomiakov, was in fact an attempt to overcome social atomization by imposing a new kind of all-embracing authoritarian unity modeled on medieval Catholicism. This notion, which was clearly formed under the influence of Saint-Simonian ideas, later in turn influenced Dostoevsky, who in several works (*The Idiot*, *The Diary of a Writer*, and above all “The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor” in *The Brothers*

*Karamazov*) set out to show that the Roman Catholic Church and socialism were closely related.

For Khomiakov, Orthodoxy was the sole repository of the spirit of *sobornost'* and therefore the only true Church. In his description of this Church – or rather of his idealized vision of Orthodoxy – Khomiakov was influenced in many points by J. A. Mohler, a Romantic Catholic theologian from Tübingen who claimed that contemporary Catholicism had degenerated into papism and that the ecumenical council and not the pope was the highest organ of the Church.<sup>25</sup> Mohler's description of the council as "unity in multiplicity" was close to Khomiakov's definition of *sobornost'* as "unity in freedom." In the Orthodox Church, Khomiakov argued, this unity was safeguarded by the far-reaching internalization of tradition, which expressed the supra-individual and supra-rational consciousness of the community. This was a *real* unity, based on organic bonds at a pre-reflective stage of development and not subject to rationalization, and at the same time a *free* unity, not imposed from outside but regulated by norms in which members of the Church community saw reflected their own nature. In this Church there was no room for authority, since authority was always something external; nor was there room for individualism or subjectivism, since the awareness of individuals was not cut off from the supra-individual consciousness of the community. On the other hand, this collective consciousness was *internalized* by individuals and did not become alienated in the shape of institutionalized reified forms; in a fellowship of this kind, the measure of truth was not the authority of the pope or the Scriptures, but the extent to which harmony was achieved with the collective consciousness of the Church evolving historically as a supra-individual whole embracing the entire body of believers, laity as well as clergy. To be part of this transcendent whole was the only way to true understanding – hence Orthodox Russians were privileged when compared to the inhabitants of Western Europe.

Khomiakov was aware that there was a wide gap between his ideal vision of the Russian Church and reality: he himself once noted that his ecclesiology only showed the "ideal essence" and not the "empirical reality" of Orthodoxy.<sup>26</sup> The

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25 See S. Bolshakoff, *The Doctrine of the Unity of the Church in the Works of Khomyakov and Moehler* (London 1946).

26 This, of course, made Khomiakov's attempts to convert others somewhat difficult. He often set out his theological views in his correspondence with various notables, including the Jansenist Bishop Looss and the Protestant theologian Bunsen. His most important letters are those addressed to the Anglican theologian William Palmer, a Fellow of Magdalen College, member of the Oxford Movement, and friend of Cardinal Newman. Under Khomiakov's influence, Palmer came to the conclusion that in the

fate of his own theological writings is an illustration of this gap. They had to be printed abroad (mainly in French) and were strictly prohibited in Russia until 1879, when the Holy Synod finally sanctioned their publication. Even then the Russian edition had to be prefaced by a statement explaining that “the vagueness and want of precision of certain phrases are the result of the author’s lack of specific theological training.” From the point of view of the Synod, conciliarism was a dangerous principle leading to the questioning of church authority and neglect of external, institutionalized forms of religious ritual.

In his preface to the posthumous edition of Khomiakov’s theological work, Samarín called his friend and teacher a Doctor of the Church who had made an epochal contribution to Orthodox Christianity, and suggested that future generations would regard this as self-evident. Although this prophesy was not to be fulfilled, it is nevertheless true that Khomiakov’s influence on Russian religious thought was very considerable. The large group of “lay theologians” who were active at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Bulgakov, Berdiaev, L. Karsavin, and S. Frank, among others) examined Orthodoxy in the light of Khomiakov’s ideas and developed various motifs borrowed from his writings. It must be pointed out, however, that Khomiakov’s role was more important in attracting intellectuals to the Church than in influencing the outlook of the Russian clergy. The Orthodox hierarchy only refrained from attacking his ideas because they were reluctant to offend believers among the intelligentsia. The fact that many of Khomiakov’s views seemed to the Orthodox clergy to smack of Protestant liberalism and Catholic modernism only deepened this mistrust. In a brochure published at the Sergeevskaia Lavra Monastery, the Orthodox theologian Father Pavel Florensky accused Khomiakov of rejecting ecclesiastical authority, obligatory canons, and the “principle of fear,” and even questioned his political loyalty.<sup>27</sup>

It is worth adding that the attempts at modernization of Orthodox Christianity undertaken by Russian religious philosophers who referred to Khomiakov’s ideas were condemned by a *sobor* of émigré Orthodox bishops in Sremski Karlovci, Serbia. That these thinkers were finally recognized as representatives of the Orthodox Church as part of ecumenical dialogue was

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dispute with Rome, the Eastern Church had been in the right. He was very close to conversion, but the attitude of the Hierarchy, whom he came to know during his three visits to Russia, caused him to decide against it. In the end Palmer, like Newman, embraced Catholicism, but insisted on the right to retain his own private views on the Schism. Khomiakov’s correspondence with Palmer has been published by W. J. Birkbeck, *Russia and the English Church*, London 1917.

27 P. A. Florensky, *Okolo Khomiakova*, Sergeev Posad 1916.

thanks to the efforts of the American YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association). In any case, the main ideas of Khomiakov were eventually approved among the official as well as unofficial authorities of the Orthodox Church.

The interpretation of Khomiakov's concepts by twentieth-century Russian religious thinkers who were involved in modernizing and ecumenical trends paved the way for the Slavophile philosopher's influence on the exponents of the Catholic theology of renewal such as Fr. Yves Congar and Fr. Maurice Villain<sup>28</sup>, and, through these figures, at the Second Vatican Council. This is evidenced by *Lumen gentium*, an ecclesiastical constitution influenced by Khomiakov's theology of laity that was compiled by Fr. Yves Congar (later named Cardinal) and adopted by the Council. These facts have contributed to fortifying the idea that apart from being a "forerunner of the Orthodoxy's renewal," Khomiakov proved himself to be an eminent representative of the modernizing trend in Christianity as a whole.<sup>29</sup>

But in reality the truth is more complex. There is no doubt that Khomiakov's concept of conciliarity was an excellent instrument in the struggle for a community-oriented and sacramental ecclesiology, which opposed the traditionalist model of institutional and hierarchical ecclesiology. On the other hand, however, *sobornost'* became the crowning argument against ecumenical tendencies, as it gave grounds for the argument that the hierarchs have no right to decide about the ecclesial community's fate. Khomiakov's peculiar "ecclesiological ideals of democracy" could be of use to the reformers of the Catholic Church; yet, Khomiakov himself did not believe in Catholic-Orthodox dialogue. He was essentially an Orthodox fundamentalist who claimed that the truth of the Orthodox Church was total, affording no compromise whatsoever. He was genuinely allergic to Catholicism, an attitude he expressed, among other moments, in his extremely intolerant response to Gagarin's "apostasy".<sup>30</sup>

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28 See, in particular, Yves Congar, *Chrétiens désunis. Principes d'un "œcuménisme" catholique*, Paris 1937, pp. 263–275.

29 See J. Klinger, *Dwie postacie prekursorów prawosławnej odnowy*, [in:] idem, *O istocie prawostawia*, Warsaw 1983, pp. 270–5.

30 I analyse in detail Khomiakov's attitude to Catholicism and his attacks on Gagarin in my book *Rosja, katolicyzm i sprawa polska*, pp. 66–88 and 312–330.



## Slavophilism as Conservative Utopianism

It is understandable that the Slavophiles were inclined to exaggerate the “native” and “essentially Russian” character of their views. Yet seen in historical perspective, Slavophile ideology was clearly only an interesting offshoot of European conservative romanticism. In particular, there are striking affinities with the ideas of such German romantic thinkers as Friedrich Jacobi (the concept of “believing reason”), Schelling (the critique of Hegelian rationalism), Mahler (“unity in multiplicity”), Adam Muller (the harmful influence of Roman civilization on the history of Christendom), and Friedrich Schlegel (rationalism as the cause of the disintegration of the psyche). The most striking parallels are to be found between the history of philosophy of Ivan Kireevsky and that of Franz von Baader, who like the Slavophiles looked to Orthodox Russia for future salvation.<sup>31</sup> Although there is no doubt that the Slavophile theorists, especially Kireevsky and Khomiakov, were well acquainted with the works of the German philosophers, one should not dismiss these similarities as a matter of influence only. At a fundamental level they were a function of social developments in the two countries. Though at different levels of development, both Russia and Germany were economically backward and faced the need to modernize at a time when capitalism had already become established in the more advanced countries of Europe. In these latter countries the new social and political system had already begun to reveal its negative features and had already come under attack by critics on the right as well as the left; this gave German and Russian conservative thinkers a wider perspective, and made it easier for them to idealize the patriarchal traditions and archaic social structures that in their countries had shown an obstinate vitality.

Slavophile criticism of Western Europe was therefore essentially, though not solely, a critique of capitalist civilization from a romantic conservative point of view. In this instance, however, conservatism cannot be equated with the acceptance of the status quo in Russia and suspicion of any kind of change; it was less defense of the present than romantic nostalgia for a lost ideal. In this sense it is possible to call Slavophile philosophy conservative utopianism: *utopianism* because it was a comprehensive and detailed vision of a social ideal, sharply contrasted to existing realities; and *conservative*, or even reactionary, because it was an ideal located in the past. This utopianism also had a strongly compensatory element, for dreams of a lost harmonious world always conceal some sense of alienation or deprivation. As the educated offspring of old aristocratic families, the Slavophiles were too closely bound up with old Russian

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31 See E. Susini, *Lettres inédites de Franz von Baader*, Paris 1942, pp. 456-61.

patriarchal traditions, and at the same time too much influenced by Western culture, to feel happy in the outwardly Westernized authoritarian bureaucracy of Nicholas I.

The Slavophile utopia was not, of course, a utopia in the sense of a carefully thought-out model of a future society. It was a vision based on the concrete experience of that segment of the hereditary nobility whose lives followed a firmly traditional social pattern. That is why Slavophilism contains many elements of what might be called “pre-sociological” thought. The typology adopted by the 19<sup>th</sup> century German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies in his classic study *Community and Society* is of particular assistance in clarifying these elements. The Slavophile antithesis of Russia and Europe, of “people” and “society,” and of Christian and rationalist civilizations corresponds almost exactly to the distinction Tönnies makes between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* [community and society].<sup>32</sup> In my first article published in the United States I wrote about this as follows:

It is significant that even the terminology was very similar. The Slavophiles saw contemporary Russia as a country split between the people, the folk, which remained true to the old “community principles” [*obtinnoe načalo*], and “society,” an aggregate of individuals separated from the people and living a conventional and artificial life. This concept of “society” is almost identical with Tönnies’ *Gesellschaft*; the Slavophile concepts of folk and “community principles” has essentially the same content as Tönnies’ *Volkstum* and *Gemeinschaft*. Members of the community, according to Tönnies, are endowed with “natural will” [*Wesenwille*]; “society” is composed of people endowed with “rational will” [*Kurwille*]. This conception had its counterpart in the Slavophile conception of the organic “togetherness” of man’s spiritual forces as opposed to calculated rationalism. “Community” was described by Tönnies and the Slavophiles as a living organism: “society” was presented as a mechanical artifact, a mere sum of isolated individuals. Tönnies and the Slavophiles alike insisted that real community is based on mutual understanding, concord, and unanimity [*Eintracht*], while society is characterized by inner conflict, mutual tension, and the rule of a mechanical, quantitative majority, which presupposes an internal atomization and disintegration of organic social ties. Community is an enlarged family; in society, human relationships assume a contractual form. The collective will of the community expresses itself as common belief and common custom; in “society” these great unifying spiritual factors are replaced

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32 See A. Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy* (Oxford 1975), pp. 168-78, 265-66. Here there is also a comparison between Slavophile ideas and the interpretation of the rationalization of social relations in the historical sociology of Max Weber.

by public opinion, always accidental and unstable. The modern bureaucratic state was regarded by Tonnies as a phenomenon of *Gesellschaft*; the same conceptions, the same characteristic pair of opposite categories – *Volkstum* and *Staatstum*, *narod* and *gosudarstvo* – were constantly used by the Slavophiles, to whom the bureaucratic state appeared to be a soulless machine, a product of the artificial Westernization of Russia. There is no need to multiply these similarities. It may be interesting, however, to indicate that they can be found even among the purely historical generalizations of Tonnies and the Slavophiles. The latter believed, as we know, that Old Russia could preserve, let us say, the pure form of *Gemeinschaft* because she was not encumbered by the heritage of rationalistic Roman culture, especially that of Roman law, which was so powerful a force in the process of disintegration and dissolution of “community principles” in the West. Tonnies subscribed to this view when he wrote that “a rational scientific law was made possible only through the emancipation of the individuals from all organic social ties,” and that “the assimilation of Roman Law has served and still serves to further the development of *Gesellschaft* in a large part of the Christian-German world.”<sup>33</sup>

Attention has been drawn to these parallels between Slavophile ideas and those of Tonnies, not because of any desire to claim for Slavophile theory a degree of scientific importance it does not possess, but because Tonnies’s typology provides conceptual tools for a better interpretation of the social content of Slavophilism. Romantic conservatism of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, wrote Karl Mannheim in his work on the German conservatives,<sup>34</sup> was an ideological defense of *community* against *society*. The Slavophiles provide an excellent example of the accuracy of this comment.

It is worth noting that Tonnies’s view on the role of juridical rationalism in European history has been brilliantly corroborated by Max Weber in his powerful analysis of the progressive rationalization of economic production, human behavior, and social institutions of the West. “The tremendous aftereffect of Roman Law, as transformed by the late Roman bureaucratic state,” Weber wrote, “stands out in nothing more clearly than in the fact that everywhere the evolution of political management in the direction of the evolving national state has been borne by trained jurists.” It has been the work of jurists to give birth to

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33 A. Walicki, “Personality and Society in the Ideology of the Russian Slavophiles. A Study in the Sociology of Knowledge”, *California Slavic Studies*, 2 (1963), pp. 7-8. Tonnies is quoted from F. Tonnies, *Community and Society*, trans. and ed. by Charles P. Loomis (East Lansing, Mich 1957), pp. 202-3.

34 See K. Mannheim, “Conservative Thought,” in *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology* (London 1953), p. 89.

the modern Occidental state as well as to the Occidental Churches.” This evolution, according to Weber, was “peculiar to the Occident” and had no analogy anywhere else in the world.<sup>35</sup> The Russian Slavophiles would have subscribed wholeheartedly to this view.

## The Ideology of “Official Nationality”

The specific utopianism of Slavophile thought consisted in the fact that an idealized past became a tool of biting criticism aimed at the present. This is precisely what distinguished Slavophilism from the political loyalty of another influential brand of anti-Westernism active in the age of Nicholas I, known as the ideology of “official nationality.”

The basic slogan of that ideology – “Orthodoxy, autocracy and nationality” – was coined in 1834 by the Minister of Education, Count Sergei Uvarov. In his interpretation, it did not have an ostentatiously anti-Western resonance. Uvarov considered Russia a member of the “European family”; he even believed in the existence of an all-human law of progress. The specificity of Russia was, in his conception, relative: with Russia opposed to a Europe of liberals and revolutionaries, but not to a Europe of the Holy Alliance. He emphasized that the Russian autocracy ought to not only be powerful, but also “enlightened and humanitarian.”<sup>36</sup> “Nationality” meant to him, the national legitimization of the monarchy, rather than a “native principle.”

The Emperor’s ideas were, in fact, still less “national.” Nicholas I considered himself an heir of Peter the Great and wished to be a European emperor, rather than an Old-Russian tsar – despite all his respect for Orthodoxy and the national past, he did not intend to adjust the state apparatus to the demands of religion or the folk-preserved Old-Russian tradition, whereas deliberations on law that ought to organically grow out of traditions and customs, smacked to him – not entirely groundlessly – of a desire to limit the prerogatives of an autocrat. The Central Censor’s Office struck the right tone, commenting on Kireevsky’s ideas as “failing to do justice to the immortal services of the Great Russian Reformer and his imperial heirs, who spared

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35 Cf. Max Weber, *Essays on Sociology*, ed. by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York 1958), pp. 93-94, 299.

36 See the valuable article by Cynthia H. Whittacker, against presenting Uvarov as a black reactionary – an obligatory trend in Russian historiography (Cynthia H. Whittacker, “The Ideology of Sergei Uvarov: An Interpretative Essay,” *Russian Review*, vol. 37, no. 2, April 1978. Reprinted in: *Imperial Russian History I: 1700-1861*, pp. 104-222).

neither labor nor effort in order to acquaint us with Western civilization.”<sup>37</sup> Works by other authors of the Slavophile almanac *Moscow Miscellany* [*Moskovskii sbornik*] were judged in a similar vein. As a result, continuation of the almanac was prohibited, while its five leading authors (Kireevsky among them) were placed under police surveillance and ordered to obtain a special permission from the Central Censor’s Office for any further publications.

Equally unequivocal was the Emperor’s understanding of the concept of “nationality.” It certainly did express an all-national, i.e. also *popular* [“narodnii”] character of the state that allegedly distinguished Russian autocracy from Western monarchies. The Emperor did tolerate the common idea that his time saw the end of Russia’s dependence on borrowings from the West and the inauguration of a period of *national* development in which Russia relied on its own strengths. Yet, the idea of “nationality” had to be handled with care, as it implied two dangers in the eyes of the Emperor: in domestic policy – the kindling of ethnic antagonisms and discord among loyal subjects, and in foreign policy – the undermining of the principle of dynastic legitimacy.<sup>38</sup>

Above all else, however, it should be realized that there existed no kind of structured or superimposed state ideology in the Russia of Nicholas I. The ideology of “official nationality” was mainly on the lips of its intellectual opponents, while the adjective “official” was meant to indicate pro-government loyalty to the adherents of this ideology, rather than an official sanctioning of its content. Incidentally, among the unwavering loyalists were men of purely dynastic and manifestly non-national orientation who proposed to re-name Russia “Petrovia” or “Romanovia.”<sup>39</sup>

The two outstanding figures amongst the thinkers who endeavored to make “nationality” an ideological pillar of the Nikolaian system were the editors of the periodical *Muscovite* (*Moskvianin*): historian Mikhail Pogodin (1800-1875) and literary critic Stepan Shevyrov (1806–64), both connected in their youth with the

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37 See *Delo o vishedshem v Moskvie v 1852 g. “Moskovskom sbornikie*, Tsentralnii Gosudarstvennii Istoricheskii Arkhiv SSSR, fond 772, op. 1.

38 An illustration of the conflict between the legitimacy and the duties of a “Christian monarch” is the suggestion made by Nicholas I to the representative of Turkey, namely, that the Sultan ought to convert to Orthodoxy, so that the legality of his rule could not be questioned by the European monarchs. See, N.V. Riasanovsky, *The Parting of Ways*, p. 146.

39 They were: the Minister of Finance, Count Egor Kankrin, of German origin, and a Russified Pole, Thaddeus Bułharyn, publisher of the pro-government “Northern Bee.” See, N.V. Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia 1825-1855*, Berkeley-Los Angeles 1959, p. 139.

circle of Wisdom-lovers.<sup>40</sup> The term “ideology of official nationality” usually refers to the opinions of both, regardless of the degree of their acceptance by official government bodies and the monarch himself.

Son of a serf, Pogodin praised autocracy as a system in which “a common man has free access to the highest state offices, while a university diploma stands for all the privileges.”<sup>41</sup> Unlike the Slavophiles, he was not interested in the peasant community, nor did he criticize Peter’s reforms or oppose Moscow with Petersburg and Moscow Russia with Petersburg Russia – on the contrary: he eulogized Peter the Great as the creator of the modern Russian state,<sup>42</sup> believed Europeanization to be a necessity and pronounced the violence of Peter I’s reforms to be a typical manifestation of the spirit of Russian history in which the state had always been the single creative force, arbitrarily deciding the fate of an inert, passive people. The Russian “native principle” consisted, according to Pogodin, not so much in the *obshchina* or the “communal” spirit of Orthodoxy, as in absolute autocracy, but in the boundless “humility” of the people. There was no place in his historical conception for the Slavophile theme of “old” *versus* “new” Russia: Peter the Great – he claimed – had strengthened autocracy and thereby strengthened, rather than weakened, the native principle of Russia.

The common denominator of Pogodin’s and the Slavophiles’ ideologies was their criticism of the contemporary West and the thesis of different “principles” behind Western and Russian histories, the difference consisting in the undisturbed social development of Russia, which precluded sharp class distinctions and revolutions. In 1845, Pogodin decided to draw the Slavophiles into close co-operation with *Moskvianin*: he even ceded the editor’s function to Ivan Kireevsky. Three months later, however, ideological differences made their

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40 Sympathizing with the ideology of Moskviainin were, among others, Nikolai Gogol and poet Vasilii Zhukovsky (tutor to the imperial heir and future Alexander II from 1828-1841).

41 M. P. Pogodin, *Istorichesko-kriticheskie otryvki*, Moscow 1846, p. 8.

42 In his article “Peter the Great”, published in the first issue of *Moskvianin* of 1841, Pogodin elaborated on the idea that the entire modern Russia – European, diplomatic, commercial, industrial, scientific and literary – was the doing of Peter the Great. Pogodin’s apology for the Westernizing reforms did not contradict his conception of Russia’s separate road to development. Including Russia in the “East”, he meant the European East. Europe, on the other hand, was to him the world’s sole cradle of enlightenment – an enlightenment that, sooner or later, voluntarily or by colonization, would have to be accepted by all the non-European nations (see, Pogodin, *Istoricheskie aforizmy*, Moscow 1836, pp. 14-15). Evidently, even anti-Westernism and Eurocentrism could be combined.

further co-operation impossible. The immediate cause of the breakup was Petr Kireevsky's polemics with Pogodin's article on the genesis of the Russian state and national character of Russians. The Slavophile ideologist accused Pogodin of blurring the fundamental difference between a voluntary "summoning" of the Varangians and an invasion, and of attributing to Russian people the qualities of absolute humility, unconditional obedience and passive indifference. Quoting *The History of Slavic Legislations* by Maciejowski, he argued that Slavs had not been "an unplowed fallow," since they boasted a developed family organization that spontaneously transformed itself into statehood.<sup>43</sup> The polemics were subsequently joined by Ivan Kireevsky who argued that there had been no "unconditionally loyal subjects" in the Old Russian times, since a "single authority" (i.e., authority held by one person) must not be confused with "autocracy" (i.e., unlimited authority).<sup>44</sup> Pogodin, however, summed up the polemics by charging Petr Kireevsky with denying Russians their greatest virtues – patience and humility – and thereby serving the West.

On the issue of foreign policy, Pogodin – unlike his contemporary Slavophiles – was a "Slavophile" in the etymological sense of the term, i.e., an active propagator of a "Slavic mutuality." He travelled extensively, had numerous Slavic contacts, actively encouraged friendly Russian-Polish relations and backed the "national awakening" movements in Slav countries, including the Ruthenian movement in East Galicia.<sup>45</sup> He tried to persuade the Russian government to adopt a Pan-Slavic policy which ran against the principles of legitimism. During the Crimean War, he even became a spokesman for national revolutionary movements in the Hapsburg and Ottoman Empires, the Hungarian movement included;<sup>46</sup> as for Russia's defeat, he put it down to Nicholas I's stubborn adherence to the outdated fundamentals of the Holy Alliance.

In other words, Pogodin's ideology tallied neither with classical Slavophilism, nor with the official policy of Nikolaian Russia. To his contemporary liberal and democratic Westernizers, however, the most important aspect of his ideas was their conservative anti-Westernism. Therefore, Vissarion Belinsky made no distinction between the ideology of the Slavophiles and the opinions of *Moskvianin's* editorial board, whereas Herzen considered Pogodin

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43 Petr Kireevsky's article, "On Ancient Russian History," was published by the periodical's new editorial board against Pogodin's wishes (in issue No 3, 1845). See, *Ocherki po istorii russkoi zhurnalistiki i kritiki*, Leningrad 1950, pp. 493-495.

44 See I.V. Kireevsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, p. 239 (a letter to Pogodin from early 1846).

45 Cf. E. Kucharska, *Michała Pogodina zainteresowania polskie*, Warsaw-Wrocław 1978.

46 Cf. F. Fadner, *Seventy Years of Pan-Slavism in Russia*, pp. 207-217.

and Kireevsky to be ideologists of two wings of a single anti-Western “Moscow party.”<sup>47</sup>

Stepan Shevyrev was a more philosophical thinker than Pogodin and in many aspects came closer to Slavophilism. Like the Slavophile classics, he was a conservative Romantic, molded by philosophical German Romanticism. He held Schelling’s “philosophy of revelation” in high esteem and boasted personal contacts with Baader, publishing contents of their discussions on Christian philosophy in *Moskvianin*.<sup>48</sup> He went further than Pogodin in his criticism of the contemporary West, arguing that Western countries had betrayed Christianity and were heading for an imminent fall.

In his famous article, *A Russian’s Views on the Modern Civilization of Europe* (published in the first issue of *Moskvianin*, 1841), he wrote:

Indeed, in our frank, friendly, intimate contacts with the West, we fail to notice that it [the West] is like a man carrying inside a terrible, contagious illness, surrounded with a dangerous aura of poisonous miasmata. We kiss him, embrace him, share our feast of thoughts with him, drink up the goblet of emotion [...] and we fail to see the venom hidden in this carefree communion, we do not smell the future cadaver, already pungent, amongst the joys of the feast.

This is how the ill-famed theory of the “rotten West,” considered sometimes the quintessence of Russian anti-Westernism, came to be born. However, as Petr Struve rightly observed, Shevyrev had adopted the term from the French publicist Philaret Chasles whose argument on the subject he quoted extensively in his own article.<sup>49</sup> The cited excerpt from Chasles included phrases on the imminent decadence of the West and on “tumbling down into a chasm” with the Mediterranean countries at the helm, they being the ones representing the oldest and the most decayed civilization. Nor did the French author fail to name (following Tocqueville) America and Russia as the two young lands that might be able to bring about the rebirth of civilized humanity.

Indeed, Chasles was not original in his opinions: similar arguments abounded in the periodicals of the European conservatives of the age of broadly

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47 Cf. A. Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy*, p. 241. Plekhanov, too, denied the existence of significant differences between Pogodin and the Slavophiles in his article, “Pogodin and the Class Struggle.”

48 See S.P. Shevyrev, “Khristianskaia filosofii. Biesiedy Baadera,” *Moskvianin* No 6, part 3, 1841.

49 P.B. Struve, “S.P. Shevyriov i zapadniie vnusheniia i istochniki teorii-aforizma o ‘gnilom’ ili ‘gniushchem’ zapadie,” in: *Zapiski Russkovo Nauchnovo Instituta v Belgradzie*, WYP. 17, 1940, pp. 201-247. Shevyrev quoted an extensive fragment of P. Chasles’ article, “Revue de la literature anglaise,” from *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, vol. 24, 1 November, 1840.



defined Romanticism. But Struve was right in deciding that the non-Russian genesis of the theory of Europe's fall was worth recalling. As has been aptly observed, the same goes for other components of the theory of "official nationality:" it was the Russian equivalent of all-European trends, rather than a unique product of the "native soil."<sup>50</sup>

## Tyutchev's Imperial Vision

One of the considerably numerous supporters of the ideology of "official nationality" amongst Russian writers was the great Romantic poet Fedor Tyutchev (1803-1873). His peculiar views focused on the mission of Russia as the heiress of the Byzantine Empire and referred to the idea of Moscow as the Third Rome.<sup>51</sup>

Tyutchev's opinions were molded by the tradition of political thought that prevailed in his family home (his father was an alumnus of the Greek Corps established by Catherine II with the intention of liberating Greece from Turkish bondage) and by the contacts he made in Germany as an employee of the Russian diplomatic post in Munich. It was then that he met Schelling, on whom he made an excellent impression, as well as the Romantic Russophile Baader and the famous Byzantine history scholar Jacob Fallmayer who preached the theory of the Slavonic origins of modern Greeks. His best friend and partner in disputes became a young attaché of the Russian legation, Ivan Gagarin.<sup>52</sup>

In 1845, Tyutchev handed to Nicholas I a confidential memorandum on Russian politics.<sup>53</sup> He argued in it that Russia was a contemporary incarnation of the Eastern Empire – an Orthodox empire, i.e. one representing the true Universal Church. The Roman Church, usurping the name of universal, was in fact a particular Western Church, responsible for all the misfortunes that had afflicted Western Europe. In those circumstances, the Emperor of Russia was the only lawful ruler of the entire Orthodox East, and even more: of the entire territory spreading east from the border of the Western Roman Empire.<sup>54</sup> The

50 Rightly emphasized by N.V. Riasanovsky (*A Parting of Ways*, p. 134).

51 The idea that, following the fall of Constantinople, Moscow had become the "Third Rome", while a Fourth Rome was never to be, was coined by a Pskov ihumen, Philotheus [Filofei], in a letter to Vassily III in 1510.

52 It was to Gagarin that Tyutchev owed the first publication of his poems (in Pushkin's periodical *Sovremennik*, 1836).

53 First printed in *Noviie literaturnoie obozreniie*, No 1, 1992. Editing and Introduction by A.I. Ospovat.

54 See D. Stremoukhoff, *La poesie et l'ideologie de Tiouttchev*, Paris 1937.

boundaries of that territory were drawn by the poet in an astonishing poem entitled *Russian Geography* (1848):

From the Nile to the Neva, from the Elba all the way to China –

From the Volga to the Euphrates, from the Ganges to the Danube.

Specifying on this vision were three articles published by the poet for the use of the Western reader, and an unfinished dissertation, *Russia and the West* of 1848-49.

The article *Russia and Germany* (*Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1844) was an apology for Russia's role in the defeat of the Napoleonic Empire, in the establishment of the Holy Alliance system and in the wielding of hegemonic tutelage over the German states to protect Germany from the appetites of France. The victory of the Russian Empire over the Napoleonic parody of Charlemagne's became, in this interpretation, the initial meeting of two long separated European worlds: Carolinian Europe and Eastern Europe, the latter represented by Russia, boasting her heritage of Constantine's Empire. In this light, Russia's territorial expansionism turned out to be a restitution of the rights due to the heirs of Byzantium, and so an act concordant with the principles of historical legitimism.

In the revolutionary years of 1848-49, Tyutchev developed these ideas in his article *Russia and Revolution*, published in Paris as a separate brochure. In the article, he described Russia as Europe's sole defender from revolutionary catastrophe. He drew a vision of a dying West perishing in a universal fire, and Imperial Russia towering over its ruins "like a holy ark of salvation."

But the poet's most spectacular performance was his article *The Roman Question*, written in October 1849, and published in "La Revue des Deux Mondes" in January 1850. The article's historical background was the revolutionary developments in Italy that had forced Pius IX to flee from the Vatican. In Tyutchev's opinion, the events epitomized the deepest crisis of the Western world and the logical result of the entire Western history. To motivate that diagnosis, Tyutchev elaborated on the idea of Catholicism, Protestantism and Revolution as three phases of the apotheosis of the human "self." The Roman Church, having split from the Universal Church, absorbed the entire Church in its particular Romanism, incarnated by the Pope. The next phase, initiated by Luther, represented the rebellion of the individual against the authority of Rome, which started the lethal process of secularization. The third

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Georgii Florovsky points out that the idea of empire, as a fundamental category of the philosophy of history, clearly separated Tyutchev from the Slavophiles, while joining him with V Soloviev. See, G. Florovsky, Tyutchev and Vladimir Soloviev, in: G. Florovsky, *Collected Works, vol 11*, Belmont, Mass. 1989.

and final phase was the proclamation by the French Revolution of the principle of the people's sovereignty that was, in fact, the sovereignty of individuals calling themselves a sovereign people and governing by brutal material force.

Thanks to the French intervention, the Papacy was spared the fate that revolution had prepared for it. However, protection by the secular French state was not enough. In order to regain strength, the Roman Church ought to heal the wound that had been bleeding for as long as 800 years – it must return to the Universal Church from which it split in 1054. The universal Orthodox Church had always counted on it, forever believing that, despite the split, the Christian principle had not vanished from the Roman Church and, in the moment of a decisive trial, it would allow that Church to defeat its enemies and return to its unity with the Universal Church.

In Tyutchev's dissertation *Russia and the West*, the above idea is coupled with a vision of the East Roman Empire reconstructed by Russia, while in one of his last notes it has been specified as follows: "An Orthodox Emperor in Constantinople, ruler and protector of Italy and Rome; an Orthodox Pope in Rome, subject to the Emperor."<sup>55</sup>

Thus, the vision of a Russian-resurrected Eastern Empire fused with the Orthodox version of ecumenism that demanded the subjection of the Papacy to the theocratic authority of Emperor Constantine's legal heir.

In his article *The Roman Question*, Tyutchev briefly alluded to the idea, recalling the uplifted spirits that accompanied Tsar Nicholas I's visit to St Peter's Basilica in 1846. The editor of "La Revue des Deux Mondes," P. Laurentie (who mistook Tyutchev for a spokesman of the Tsar's opinions), deciphered the allusion, correcting it in the spirit of de Maistre: the Russian Emperor, legal heir of the Eastern Roman Empire, had the chance to save Catholicism by uniting the Churches under his own authority, provided he first converted to Catholicism.<sup>56</sup>

Laurentie's interpretation reversed the original argument, Tyutchev having meant the subjection of the Pope to the Emperor, and not vice versa. It is worth

55 Note of September 12, 1849. See, K.V. Pigarev, *Zhizn i tvorchestvo Tutcheva*, Moscow 1962, p. 176.

56 "La Revue des Deux Mondes", V, 1850, pp. 117-118 (cf. V. Lednicki, *Glossy Krasnińskiego do apologetyki rosyjskiej*, Paris 1959, pp. 22-23).

Somewhat later, Laurentie devoted a separate brochure to Tyutchev's vision, in which he argued that if Nicholas I converted to Catholicism, Western Christianity would be saved and Russia would fulfill its European mission of unification and rebirth (P. Laurentie, *La Papauté, réponse à M. de Tutcheff, Conseiller de sa Majesté l'Empereur de Russie*, Paris 1982).

noting, however, that in the corrected version, Tyutchev's vision came close to the hope cherished at the same time by Vladimir Pecherin and comprehensively developed several decades later in the ecumenical-imperial utopia of Soloviev.

Unlike Pogodin, Tyutchev clearly distinguished between imperial ideology and Pan-Slavism. Pan-Slavism, he wrote in his dissertation *Russia and the West*, was a tribal, ethnic issue implying blood ties and a family of languages; Empire, on the other hand, was the ultimate legitimizing principle, uniting people on the grounds of a universal idea.<sup>57</sup> The world's history was a succession of empires, each age boasting but one empire that was lawful. Russia was called on to create the last of the empires: the definitive Empire of Christendom. The mission implied the task of uniting the Slavs only because Orthodoxy remained the sole uncontaminated form of Christianity, and a vast majority of Orthodox believers were Slavic peoples.

The most problematic among the non-Orthodox Slavs were, obviously, the Poles.<sup>58</sup> Tyutchev imagined, however, that a union of the Churches combined with a union of the Slavic nations and the transfer of the national capital to Constantinople, would transform the Russian Empire into a truly universal monarchy, thereby making possible a spiritual reconciliation between Poles and Russians.<sup>59</sup> The hopes were cut short by the Polish Uprising of 1863 and the moral support it received from the Vatican.

## The Evolution of Slavophilism at the Time of Great Reforms

Slavophile utopianism was the product of an age in which Russian social thought could not be expressed or tested in the political arena. This situation changed after Russia's defeat in the Crimean War and the death of Nicholas I. Alexander II undertook certain overdue reforms, among which the peasant reform was foremost. Censorship restrictions on literature and the press were eased in order to sound public opinion. Contemporaries referred to these changes as the

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57 See F. Tyutchev, "Niezaviershennii traktat 'Rossiia i Zapad'," Published in K. Pigarev, *Literaturnoie nasledstvo*, vol. 97, part 1, Moscow 1988, pp. 222-223.

58 The Czechs, Tyutchev believed, would heartily welcome the idea of returning to Orthodoxy, since their identity had been molded by Hussitism which was, in fact, an expression of nostalgia for Orthodoxy as "the Slavs' natural religion." See the introduction on the Czechs in Tyutchev's article "Russia and Revolution."

59 The hopes were voiced in Tyutchev's poem of 1850, commencing with the line: "*Togda lish v polnom torzhestvie ...*".

“thaw,” and although this thaw was interrupted by attacks of frost and did not entail any basic changes in the autocratic structure of government, it was sufficient to change the general intellectual climate. A new element was the widespread conviction that ordinary citizens had the right to express their views on affairs of state and to influence the direction of the reforms introduced by the government. There was also a growing awareness that abstract philosophical and historiosophical discussions were becoming out of date; now, any ideology had to prove itself useful by offering a concrete and realistic program of action. In this context, the romantic utopianism of the Slavophiles slowly began to disintegrate and burst at the seams in favor of the overwhelming practical considerations that ultimately turned out to reflect the concrete class interests of the landed gentry. Those who now came to the fore were men with a gift for practical leadership, such as Ivan Aksakov, Samarin, and Koshelev.

In its transition from philosophy to politics Slavophilism split into two currents – a nobility-related conservative reformism on the one hand, and Pan-Slavism on the other. Even within Slavophile reformism there were two trends, represented by Samarin and Koshelev, whose careers were almost identical. Both took part in the preparations of the emancipation act; after the defeat of the Polish uprising of 1863, both were sent on important government missions to the defeated Poland<sup>60</sup>; and, finally, both were active in the *Zemstvos*. Their debt to Slavophile ideology is apparent in their ardent defense of the village commune, although the arguments they used scarcely recall Konstantin Aksakov’s idealized picture of the rural *obshchina* as an ideal and truly Christian social organism. Samarin and Koshelev regarded the commune as a form of the peasants’ attachment to the land and a useful instrument for exercising control over them, facilitating the collection of taxes and redemption payments, and ensuring a source of cheap farm labor to landowners. The land reform model they proposed (which was actually implemented by the government) was essentially a deliberate adaptation of the Prussian model – Samarin even wrote a detailed monograph entitled *The Abolition of Serfdom and the Structure of Peasant and Landowner Relations in Prussia*. Both men accepted the need for capitalist development in Russia (thus abandoning romantic anti-capitalist utopianism) but feared that its uncontrolled expansion might result in social unrest; this danger could be tempered, they believed, by the institution of the *obshchina* and the active interference of a strong monarchic authority. The

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60 Samarin was the ideological inspiration and direct helper of Nikolai Milutin, the emperor’s plenipotentiary for Polish affairs between September 1863 and December 1866. In parallel (until September 1866), Koshelev ran the financial policies of the Congress Kingdom of Poland.

difference between the two men was that Samarin consistently opposed all types of representative institutions, whereas Koshelev was in favor of an all-Russian Land Assembly (*Duma*) – a representative institution with advisory powers – to be convened in Moscow, where it would act as a counterpoise to the Petersburg bureaucracy.

The events that provided the immediate stimulus for the transformation of Slavophilism into Pan-Slavism were, of course, the Crimean War and the resulting interest in the fate of the Southern Slavs. Khomiakov, who had always been interested in Slavdom and wrote about it in his three-volume *Notes on Universal History*, was not the only one to cry out: “Let the standards fly, let the battle trumpets sound!” One of the documents preserved in the Moscow archives is Konstantin Aksakov’s memorial *On the Eastern Question*, which shows that he, too – who had been until recently a determined pacifist entirely uninterested in the fate of the Slavs under Turkish rule – was affected by the mood of the times and proclaimed that the “holy aim” of the Crimean War was to conquer Constantinople and unite the Slavs under the rule of the Russian tsar.<sup>61</sup>

Russia’s defeat dashed these hopes, but the issue of Russia’s all-Slavonic mission nonetheless became an inseparable part of the Slavophile political program. This was a new phenomenon in the history of Slavophilism, shifting the focus of the Slavophile ideology toward the problems of Russian foreign policy, conceived in Pogodin’s spirit. In the period Slavophilism was in flourish as a romantic conservative utopianism, placing emphasis on the moral and religious revival of the Russian nation and definitely distancing itself from politics, Khomiakov was the only one to represent such a trend. Ivan Aksakov, who was arrested together with Samarin in 1849, could share with the police, with a clear conscience, the following information on the Slavophiles’ attitude toward Pan-Slavism:

We do not believe in Panslavism and consider it impossible: 1) because unity of religion of the Slavic peoples would be indispensable for this, whereas the Catholicism of Bohemia and Poland constitutes a hostile and alien element which is incompatible with the element of Orthodox among other Slavs; 2) all separate elements of the Slavic nationalities might be dissolved and merged into a whole only in another, mightier, more integrated, more powerful element, that is, the Russian; 3) the greater part of Slavic peoples are already infected by the influences of barren Western liberalism which is contrary to the spirit of the Russian people and which can never be grafted onto it. I admit that Russia (*Rus’*) interests me much more than

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61 O vostochnom voprose, “Centr. Gos. Lit. Arkhiv”, Moscow, fond 10, op. 1 – *iedinitsa khraneniya* 219. The document is not only about liberating the Slavs from the Ottoman yoke but also about the conquest of Constantinople and annexation of East Galicia to Russia. See A. Walicki, *W kregu konserwatywnej utopia*, pp. 364–5.

all the other Slavs, while my brother Constantine is even reproached for complete indifference to all Slavs except those of Russia, and then not all but particularly those of Great Russia.<sup>62</sup>

Konstantin Aksakov's ostentatious indifference with regard to Slavs other than Great-Ruthenian Slavs (thus extending eventually to the Ukrainians and Byelorussians) was aligned with his limitless idealization of the Great-Ruthenian commune which represented the principle of a "moral chorus" and having, to his mind, no tangency with the state's "outer truth."<sup>63</sup> During the war years, the limits between isolationism and imperial patriotism appeared smooth and transgressible. After the humiliating defeat, the daydreams of a "new road to greatness and powerfulness"<sup>64</sup> became, of necessity, more temperate. The idea of the liberation and unification of Slavs "under the wings of the Russian Eagle" gave way for some time to the idea of Russian moral and cultural patronage over Orthodox Slavdom; this was expressed in the famous *Letter to the Serbs* authored by Khomiakov in 1860 and co-signed by the Aksakov brothers, Koshelev, Samarin and a few other Slavophiles and sympathizers of Slavophilism.<sup>65</sup> Yet, the evolution of Slavophilism into Pan-Slavism became irreversible and was viewed as self-evident.

The leading figure in the transformation of Slavophilism into Pan-Slavism was Ivan Aksakov (1823–86). In Nicholas's time, he represented the left wing in the Slavophile movement; later on, influenced by the developments in Poland and the revolutionary movement in Russia, he underwent a political evolution which eventually placed him amongst extreme-right ideologues. He was an important and influential, but hardly original, thinker. The newspapers he edited: *Den'* (1861–5), *Moskva* (1867–8) and *Rus'* (1880–5) made Slavophilism a real political power. After Pogodin's death, he took the chair of the Slavonic Charitable Society in Moscow. In the time of Russo-Turkish War of 1877–8, this Pan-Slavic organization rose, under his leadership, to the apex of its

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62 Quoted after M. Boro-Petrovich, *The Emergence of Russian Pan-Slavism*, New York 1958, p. 41.

63 It was (obviously enough) with indignation that Aksakov rejected Chicherin's view that the commune existing in Russia was the creation of centralized state administration.

64 The phrase was used by K. Aksakov in his memorial *O vostochnom voprose*.

65 Published as a separate brochure in Leipzig, 1860, the *Letter to the Serbs* is referred to as "Khomiakov's testament". As P.K. Christoff aptly observed, the ideology it outlined was eclectic, in line with the eclectic tendency of Khomiakov's thought – the trait that made it different from I. Kireevsky's internally coherent worldview (see P.K. Christoff, *An Introduction to Nineteenth-Century Slavophilism*, vol. 1: A.S. Komjakov, pp. 116–7. An English translation of the *Letter to the Serbs* is included in this edition, pp. 246–268).

development. Aksakov's influence among the Southern Slavic nations was marked by the fact that once Bulgaria was liberated, some local election committees proposed him as a candidate for the Bulgarian throne.<sup>66</sup>

Ivan Aksakov's articles on the Slavic question contain all the typical Pan-Slavist stereotypes: the antithesis of Slavdom and Western Europe; aggressive hostility toward Austria; the accusation that the Poles were the "renegades of Slavdom"; demands for the conquest of Constantinople and the establishment of a powerful federation of Slavic nations under Russian hegemony. This went together with the actual, albeit not completely realized, relinquishment of the anti-capitalist spirit of Slavophile utopianism and rapprochement toward Pogodin's great-power nationalism; already under Nicholas, Pogodin strove for a "nationalisation" of Russian policy through liberating it from "legitimist superstition." As opposed to Pogodin, however, Aksakov endeavored to keep his independent position; he would not hesitate to criticize various moves made by the government, and would go so far as publicly defending freedom of conscience and freedom of speech, which he – like his brother – considered a natural, rather than "political," right of humans.<sup>67</sup>

The evolution of Slavophilism was much affected by the Polish uprising of 1863, as it triggered the process of the transformation of Slavophilism into a nationalistic ideology, free of Christian or "Slavonic" scruples.

Samarin's article *The contemporary scope of the Polish question*, published in September 1863 in Aksakov's magazine *Den*, was the most important comprehensive take on the Polish question from the Slavophile standpoint. It discerned between the three different aspects of the issue: (i) Polish nationality, manifesting itself in the language and culture, and having the right to exist as a Slavonic nationality; (ii) Polish statehood, which has always been invasive in this respect; (iii) "Polonism," that is, a Polonized form of the expansive Latin civilization, which is irreconcilable with things Slavonic. This Polonized Latinism alienated Poland from Slavdom, destroyed the Slavonic commune within it, turned Poles into loyal vassals of the West and, once the Jesuit Counter-Reformation won, rendered Polish statehood subject to the interests of

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66 M. Boro-Petrovich, op. cit., p. 101.

67 One expression of this attitude was Aksakov's letter to K. Pobedonostsev of 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1870 ("Centr. Gos. Lit. Arkhiv", fond 10, op. 1, *ied. khr.* 160), in which he reports on his indignation due to a rejection by the Emperor a Moscow Duma's address. As we can read there: "Is autocracy equivalent to oppression of the believing conscience, opinion, or speech? Is it really to deny any human element, any dignity of its subjects – and, making them resemble some mute beings, to demand merely one thing from them: and that is, thoughtless obedience? [...] I confess that I have thought otherwise."



Catholicism and the armed propaganda of Latinism in the West. The borderline between the *Slavia Latina* and the *Slavia Orthodoxa* appeared in this light as one that separated two hostile worlds; the January Uprising of 1863–4 was thus seen as a direct continuation of Poland’s traditional mission as the “bulwark of the West.”

The general conclusion of the article under discussion was that Poland had “two souls”: the Latin soul of its nobility and the Slavonic soul of its not-yet-Latinized commons. Not only was the former been killing the latter but it moreover demanded that Poland rule the other nationalities, justifying this expectation by the nation’s alleged civilizational mission. It is on the outcome of the struggle between these two souls that the future of Poland depends: the country shall either perish or revive as a people’s Poland – a Poland within the realm of Slavdom.

To render the latter option feasible, Russia would have to undertake the following twofold political activity: (i) within the Congress Kingdom, peasants would have to be indoctrinated and the influence of “Latinized” nobles weakened; (ii) in the Lithuanian-Ruthenian lands, combating Catholicism, this main backbone of Polish influence, should be established as a priority.

Ivan Aksakov’s views on the methods he considered of use with respect to these objectives grew increasingly radical with time.<sup>68</sup> He initially postulated that administrative autonomy of the Kingdom be maintained, which would allow for treating Poles outside the Kingdom as foreigners; and, that the Polish element be isolated in the “western *guberniyas*.” Years later, he nonetheless came to the conclusion that these measures would not suffice: he found “Polonism” to be superior in terms of civilization, an advantage that could only be broken through integrating the Kingdom into the remainder of the Empire, in conjunction with an active Russification policy. He would add that the struggle with the incessantly reviving Polish influence in the “western *guberniyas*” called for a national mobilization of the masses, since Polonism cannot possibly be successfully combated using bureaucratic methods, even the most perfect ones.<sup>69</sup>

68 See A. Walicki, *Rosja, katolicyzm i sprawa polska*, pp. 110–9.

69 Aksakov went as far as plainly stating that the Polish impact on Lithuanian-Ruthenian lands was a moral power that was founded on social influence, whereas the counteracting Russian impact is only supported by the force of bayonets (I.S. Aksakov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, Moscow 1886: *Pol’skii vopros i zapadno-russkoe delo. Evreiskii vopros*, pp. 233 and 417). He consequently drew the conclusion that Polonization of these lands could only be prevented through the grassroots national movement of the Byelorussians and Ukrainians (whom he obviously considered to be a regional variety of Russians), under the lead of the “white” (non-monastic) Orthodox clergy (*ibid.*, pp. 41–3). He assumed, though, such movement should be supported by

Another important element of this program was the postulate that civic equality ought to be denied to two religious groups, the Catholics and the Jews. As interpreted by the Slavophiles, these two religions were political in nature, which was essentially incompatible with loyalty toward the Orthodox state: a Russian Catholic would always remain a papist, which makes him a cognizant or non-cognizant tool of Polonism, whereas a Russian Jew would not ever renounce the Old-Testament concept of “the chosen nation.”<sup>70</sup>

This is how Slavophilism transformed into a program for a “nationalization” of the Empire and through subordination of its internal policy to Russian ethno-nationalism, and its external policy to Pan-Slavism. In consequence, the Slavophile ideology became “more realistic” and, at the same time, was depleted and trivalised. The romantic utopianism and the ambitious program of “new rules in philosophy” gave way to ordinary nationalism which postulated the proactive discrimination of national and religious minorities. However, this degradation of Slavophilism was powerfully opposed in Vladimir Soloviev’s religious philosophy.

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administrative action, which ought to be “brazen”, rejecting excessive respect for formal lawfulness in the name of a higher-level law – “the law of the Russian nationality” (ibid., p. 482).

70 Ibid., pp. 426–7.

## Chapter 7

# The Russian Hegelians: From “Reconciliation with Reality” to “Philosophy of Action”

One of the characteristic aspects of the 1840s<sup>1</sup> in Russia was the fascination exerted by Hegelian philosophy. Hegel’s works, Herzen wrote:

were discussed [...] incessantly; there was not a paragraph in the three parts of the *Logic*, in the two of the *Aesthetics*, in the *Encyclopaedia*, etc. that had not been the subject of desperate disputes for several nights running. People who loved each other avoided each other for weeks at a time because they disagreed about the definition of “all-embracing spirit,” or had taken as a personal insult an opinion on the “absolute personality and its existence in itself.” Every insignificant pamphlet of German philosophy published in Berlin or even a provincial or district town was ordered and read to tatters and smudges; the leaves fell out in a few days if only there was a mention of Hegel in it.<sup>2</sup>

The impact of Hegelian philosophy in Russia, as well as in Poland, cannot be compared to that of any other Western thinker; its influence was both widespread and profound; it reached to distant provincial centers and left its mark in Russian literature. In many instances this was only a superficial intellectual fashion; but seen as a whole, it was a phenomenon with far-reaching consequences.

First, the reception of Hegelian philosophy was the natural culmination of a period in Russian intellectual history which deserves to be called the “philosophical epoch.” It was the epoch when the progressive intelligentsia, bitterly disappointed by the failure of the Decembrist uprising, lost faith in the efficacy of political action. Instead, intellectuals became preoccupied with philosophical problems, such as the meaning of history, the individual’s relationship to supra-individual social and cultural structures, and Russia’s place

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1 The “period of the 40s” in Russian historical literature usually refers to the years 1838-48, which Pavel Annenkov in his memoirs called “a marvelous decade.” A most stimulating analysis of the intellectual history of this period can be found in the chapter entitled “A Remarkable Decade” in Isaiah Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, New York 1978.

2 Alexander Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts*, trans. by Constance Garnett, London 1927, vol. 2, p. 115.

in universal history. In Russia, as in Germany, philosophical speculation had a compensatory function for men of intellectual vigor living in a society where public life was almost totally paralyzed.

Second, Hegelian philosophy was welcomed as an antidote to romanticism. To begin with, it recommended itself as the antithesis of introspective “day-dreaming” and attitudes of romantic revolt inspired by Byron and Schiller; in this context Hegelianism was largely interpreted as a philosophy of “reconciliation with reality.” Somewhat later it was seen as a powerful tool in the struggle against romantic irrationalism and conservatism, represented in Russia by the Slavophiles. At the same time (here the Left Hegelians in Germany were not without influence) the need began to be felt to master and transcend the Hegelian system; this in turn led to a transformation of the philosophy of reconciliation with reality into the philosophy of rational and conscious action.

Third, and last, both the “reconciliation with reality” and the “philosophy of action” seemed to supply answers to moral and philosophical dilemmas that had tormented the “superfluous men” mentioned earlier in connection with the Slavophile movement. For educated Russians who suffered from their own alienation and inner dualism, Hegelianism was above all a philosophy of *reintegration*, of overcoming one’s alienation either through a conscious adaptation to existing reality or through efforts to change it. In the latter variant, philosophy rehabilitated political action, which earlier had been despised, and ushered in the “translation of thought into action.”

## Nikolai Stankevich

In the 1830s the chief center of Russian Hegelianism was the Stankevich circle. The importance of its contribution to the evolution of progressive thought in the reign of Nicholas I can be compared to that of the Wisdom-lovers to the formation of Slavophile ideology.

NIKOLAI STANKEVICH (1813-40) was a thoroughly typical representative of the younger progressive intelligentsia of noble birth. In Annenkov’s words, he “personified the *youthfulness* of one of the stages of our development; he united all the best and noblest characteristics, aspirations, and hopes of his companions.”<sup>3</sup> His circle counted among its members the radical democrat

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3 N. V. Stankevich, *Perepiska ego i biografiia napisannaia P. V. Annenkovym* (M, 1857), pp. 236, 237. The most comprehensive recent monograph on Stankevich in English is Edward J. Brown, *Stankevich and His Moscow Circle* (Stanford, Calif. 1966).

Belinsky, the liberals Granovsky and Botkin, the anarchist Bakunin, and even the Slavophile Konstantin Aksakov. Herzen, the founder of "Russian socialism," was one of Stankevich's friends. In their later reminiscences, all these very different men recalled Stankevich with equal affection. Ivan Turgenev, whose novels are both a literary monument to the "superfluous men" and an indictment of their weakness, confessed that his association with Stankevich marked the beginning of his spiritual development.

Stankevich's early interests concentrated on the romantic philosophy of nature (especially the *Naturphilosophie* of Schelling) that had fascinated the Moscow Wisdom-lovers. Stankevich defined the nature of being as *creativity*, and *love* as its animating spirit. He was primarily concerned to overcome subjective aestheticism [*Schönseeligkeit*] – to free himself from the "oppressiveness of the particular" and to find support in the sphere of the "universal." At first he saw this as a question of religious identification of the self with God and with a pantheistic conception of nature. Under Hegel's influence, the nature of the problem changed almost imperceptibly until it came to express the conflict between personality and history, between the subjective aspirations of the individual and historical necessity. Although Stankevich did not formulate the need for reconciliation with Russian reality in so many words, there is no doubt that Hegelian philosophy provided him with arguments in favor of the rejection of romantic poses of revolt and "irrational" attempts to change the existing order. In one of his letters, which were in themselves miniature philosophical essays, he wrote: "The world is governed by reason, by the spirit – that sets my mind entirely at rest."<sup>4</sup>

This comment was not, however, Stankevich's last word. In spite of the advancing ravages of consumption, his mind was astonishingly active to the very end of his life. In his intellectual development he appeared often to anticipate many of the ideas of the Russian philosophical left. In the last year of his life, for instance, he read the early works of Feuerbach and the Polish philosopher August Cieszkowski's *Prolegomena zur Historiosophie* (Berlin 1838). This led him to postulate (following Cieszkowski) the "translation of philosophy into action" and to link this to a rehabilitation of the feelings and senses, as called for by Feuerbach. Death prevented Stankevich from developing his ideas, but any account of the intellectual evolution of Bakunin and Belinsky, of Herzen and Ogarev should note the part played by Stankevich in pointing out the way shortly to be followed by his friends.

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4 Stankevich, *Perepiska*, p. 342.

## Mikhail Bakunin

After Stankevich went abroad in 1837, the leadership of his circle was taken over by MIKHAIL BAKUNIN (1814-76). Bakunin's enthusiastic proselytism and his devotion to philosophy, which verged upon a fanatical intolerance of views he did not share, became almost legendary. For the young Bakunin, philosophy was the way to salvation and a substitute for religion; the desired trip to Berlin in 1840 was to him a journey to the "new Jerusalem."

At first Bakunin's interpretation of Hegel was influenced by the mysticism of the German romantics. He concentrated largely on the issue that traditionally occupied the mystics, namely man's separation from God. Salvation, he thought, depended on killing the "individual self" and liberating the element of infinity locked up within it. The way to achieve this salvation seemed to be at first through love and later (under the influence of Hegel) through total reconciliation with reality. Being the will of God, Bakunin argued, reality must be rational; everything in it is good and nothing evil, for the very distinction between good and evil (the "moral standpoint") is the result of the fall: "Whoever hates reality hates God and does not know him." Poetry, religion, and philosophy help to reconcile man to God; anyone who has passed through these stages of development attains perfection: "Reality becomes his absolute good and God's will his own conscious will." In order to achieve this identification with the divine – to become "the spirit personified" – it is necessary first to pass through "the torment of reflection and abstraction," to experience the "independent development and purgation of the mind" that makes it possible to cleanse oneself of "spectrality." It is characteristic of Bakunin at this time that he substituted such mystical terms as "torment" and "purgation" for the Hegelian "negation"; in his interpretation, the dialectical drama of the Spirit became a kind of pilgrim's progress toward "the Kingdom of God," and philosophy a substitute for religion.

In his *Foreword to Hegel's School Addresses*, published in 1838, Bakunin proclaimed the "reconciliation with reality in all respects and in all spheres of life." The separation from reality, he argued, was a disease, the "inevitable consequence of the abstraction and spectrality of the limited intellect [*Vernunft*], which recognizes nothing concrete and transforms every manifestation of life into death." Schiller's *Schönseeligkeit*, the subjective philosophy of Kant and Fichte, and Byron's rebellious poetry had been successive stages of this disease. The revolt of the intellect led to the Revolution in France, a country that was mortally sick, a symbol of barren negation, of "vast spiritual emptiness." "Reconciliation with reality in all respects and in all spheres of life," Bakunin concluded, "is the first task of the age. Hegel and Goethe were the leaders in this

process of reconciliation, in the return from the state of death to life.” The discrepancy between this article, which was generally accepted as a manifesto of Russian Hegelianism, and Hegel’s own intentions is quite obvious. For instance (to give just one example), Hegel traced his philosophy back to the Reformation, which Bakunin (following the conservative romantics sympathetic to Catholicism) regarded as the original source of the “disease of the spirit.”

Nevertheless, Bakunin’s views did not spring from an authentically conservative outlook. Bakunin was a typical representative of the unattached intelligentsia – that is, members of the gentry who had become alienated from their own class and were therefore ready to adopt new world views associated with a different social background. His later philosophical evolution provides telling testimony of this. In Germany his ideas began to develop with such rapidity that they gave the impression of sudden leaps from one extreme to another.

The inner logic of Bakunin’s ideas led him to a gradual affirmation of the active element in personality and a rejection of the contemplative ideal. Paradoxically, even his temporary recognition of the personal nature of God and the immortality of the soul was a step in this direction; the immortality of the soul seemed to be a metaphysical guarantee of the preservation of individuality, an affirmation of the autonomy and activity of the psyche. The idea of man’s fusion with God gave way almost imperceptibly to the idea of setting free the divine element in *man*. In any case, Bakunin’s new conception of God lent support to revolutionary negation and the philosophy of action rather than to reconciliation with reality: “God himself [is] nothing other than the miraculous creation of oneself [...] a creation that in order to be truly understood and grasped must be constantly understood anew – and it is the nature of action to be a constant affirmation of God-in-oneself.”<sup>5</sup>

The notion of “action” was not new in Bakunin’s world view. However, in the 30s, when he was under the influence of Fichte and had not yet read Hegel, he used the word only in connection with “spiritual acts.” He criticized Belinsky for his “Robespierrian” interpretation of Fichte and for taking the postulate of action literally. In 1842, Bakunin himself understood action as active participation in the revolutionary transformation of reality.

Bakunin’s famous article “The Reaction in Germany” (published in 1842 in Arnold Ruge’s *Deutsche Jahrbücher für Wissenschaft und Kunst*)<sup>6</sup> elaborates further the theoretical foundations of the revolutionary philosophy of action. The

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5 N. Bakunin, *Sobranie sochinenii i pisem* (M, 1934-36), vol. 3, pp. 111, 112.

6 English translation in J. Edie et al., *Russian Philosophy* (3 vols.; Chicago 1965), vol. 1, pp. 385-406.

publication of the article coincided with Bakunin's decision to remain in Germany rather than return to Russia and to abandon philosophy for politics. The article was directed against the *juste-milieu*, against the "eclectic compromisers" who strove for the reconciliation of opposing sides. It was one of the first serious attempts at a radical left-wing interpretation of Hegelianism – at demonstrating what Herzen called "the algebra of revolution" through the Hegelian dialectic. Bakunin considered Hegel's greatest contribution to be his concept of the struggle of opposites and his recognition of "the absolute legitimacy of negation." In fact, Bakunin departed from the Hegelian interpretation of negation by rejecting the moment of mediation between the opposites. In contrast to Hegel, he saw transcendence [*Aufhebung*], i.e. the final result of dialectic process, not as negating and preserving at the same time, but as a complete destruction of the past. The essence of contradiction, he argued, is not an equilibrium of the two opposites but "the preponderance of the negative," whose role is decisive. As the element determining the existence of the positive, the negative alone includes within itself the totality of the contradiction and so alone has absolute legitimacy. From this it follows that the creation of the future demands the destruction of the existing reality. Bakunin closed his article with the famous sentence: "The joy of destruction is also a creative joy" [*Die Lust der Zerstörung ist auch eine schaffende Lust*].

Bakunin signed his article with the French pseudonym "Jules Elysard." This had symbolic significance and was meant to show that he now rejected his recent Francophobia and sympathized with France as the land of "action" and revolution. Many progressive thinkers (including the young Marx) were at that time attracted by the possibility of a future fusion of the German and French elements, of philosophy and political action.

The idea of a "Franco-German intellectual alliance" was proclaimed also by Arnold Ruge, the editor of the *Deutsche Jahrbücher* and the leader of the Left Hegelians. In a short editorial note he therefore presented the article by Jules Elysard as a new and striking fact, namely "a Frenchman who understands German philosophy and [...] will induce certain [German] sluggards to arise from their bed of laurels." This example, Ruge suggested, should encourage Germans to give up their "boastfulness in the realm of theory" and to become Frenchmen.

## Vissarion Belinsky

The chief personality among the philosophical left in the 1830s and 1840s was undoubtedly the remarkable literary critic VISSARION BELINSKY (1811-48). His



philosophical explorations found an outlet in essays of literary criticism that had an unprecedented and indeed unparalleled influence in 19<sup>th</sup> century literature.<sup>7</sup> Through these essays the issues discussed in the Stankevich circle reached a much wider audience. It is no exaggeration to say that Belinsky's dramatic intellectual evolution influenced the outlook of an entire generation.

Unlike his gentry friends, Belinsky, who was the son of a provincial doctor, had to support himself entirely by his own work and was often in financial difficulties. He was not allowed to complete his studies at Moscow University, ostensibly on grounds of "ill health and mediocre talent," but really because he had written a play [*Dmitry Kalinin*, a Schillerian tragedy attacking serfdom] that he was naive enough to submit to the university censors. The strong sense of human dignity that was such an outstanding feature of Belinsky's personality was formed early and had nothing aristocratic about it. It evolved in protest against the circumstances of his youth – the primitive corporal punishment used at his school, his brutal family life, and the humiliations encountered everywhere in an oppressive society. Last but not least, it was formed under the influence of the glaring contrast between literature, his greatest passion from childhood, and his entire daily environment.

### *Philosophical Evolution*

The young Belinsky's world view was a characteristic melange of philosophical romanticism (derived from Schelling) and rationalist faith in the power of education. He was fascinated by the rebellious courage of the heroes of Schiller's tragedies, and at the same time he was led by hatred of social injustice to look for a philosophy that would validate protest and struggle. His ideological drama began in 1836, when he believed that he had found such a philosophy in Fichte's voluntaristic, activist idealism.

In Fichte's conception of an all-powerful Ego that nothing can crush once it has accepted its vocation, Belinsky saw a sanction of rebellion, even solitary rebellion; as he himself put it, in the new theory he "smelt blood." However, his ingrained *realism* made him suspect that heroic voluntarism was only an illusory solution and that "an abstract ideal taken in isolation from its geographical and

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7 See V. Terras, *Belinskij and Russian Literary Criticism: The Heritage of Organic Aesthetics* (Madison, Wis. 1974). On Belinsky's and Bakunin's roles in the crisis of Hegelian "Absolute Idealism", see J. Billig, *Der Zusammenbruch des Deutschen Idealismus bei den Russischen Romantikern Bjelinski, Bakunin* (Berlin 1930); and A. Koyré, *Etudes sur l'histoire de la pensée philosophique en Russie* (Paris 1950).

historical conditions of development"<sup>8</sup> was doomed to be shattered when it came into contact with the stern laws of reality.

Toward the end of 1837, Belinsky came across a formulation of the problem tormenting him in Hegel's famous thesis that "the real is rational and the rational is real." According to this thesis, the "reason" of social reality is the law governing the movement of the Absolute, a law that is unaffected by the subjective pretensions of individuals. The individual's revolt against historical Reason is inevitably motivated by a partial – and therefore merely apparent-understanding, by subjective and ultimately irrational notions. For Belinsky this argument was a dispensation from the moral duty to protest – something that enabled him to reject the heavy burden of responsibility. "Force is law and law is force," he wrote in a letter to Stankevich. "No, I cannot describe the feeling of relief it gave me to hear these words: it was a liberation."<sup>9</sup> After thus paying homage to Historical Reason and accepting that "freedom is not license but action in accordance with the laws of necessity," Belinsky, like Bakunin, proclaimed his "reconciliation with reality." A specifically Russian aspect of the idea of reconciliation with reality was the perception of Russian absolutism as a force embodying the universal idea of progress which, however, demanded sacrifice. It echoed Pushkin's poem *The Bronze Horseman* which granted Peter I's empire the prerogative of a superior historical reason to which a wronged individual must bow. Interpreting Pushkin's symbol of the "Bronze Horseman," Belinsky wrote:

We understand that it is not license, but rational will that has been incarnated in that Bronze Horseman [...] With a humble heart, we acknowledge the triumph of the general over the individual, without renouncing our compassion for the individual's sufferings.

In fact, Belinsky's reconciliation was an act of tragic self-denial. The enthusiastic glorification of Russian reality in his articles at that time did not adequately reflect his state of mind. This is clear from his private letters, where he spoke his mind more openly and revealed the painful doubts troubling him. He admitted that he had "forced" himself into reconciliation against his own nature, and by pushing aside his own "subjectivity." He believed that submitting to the inflexible laws of "rational necessity" would help him to gain a firm foothold on life, to become a "real" man rather than a "spectral" being.

In Bakunin's case, reconciliation with reality was based on a conservative romantic and mystical interpretation of Hegelianism. In Belinsky's writings, too,

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8 V. G. Belinsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Moscow 1953–9, vol. 11. p. 385.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 386.

we find elements of romantic conservatism (for instance, the cult of “immediacy” and of irrational elements in national tradition); but on the whole, anti-romantic motifs, such as emphasis on prosaic virtues, and rehabilitation of commonplace, “kitchen-sink” reality are more characteristic of him. For Bakunin, true reconciliation with reality was only possible through the mystical identification of the self with the divine essence of the universe. Belinsky was not so exacting: he was content to adopt the role of a man who did not indulge in sophistries but had both his feet firmly planted on the ground. His vindication of the “ordinary” – of simplicity and normality – expressed his desire to break away from the stifling atmosphere of the Stankevich circle, which he compared to a desert island. “Real life” as an ideal was to be an antidote to the vicious circle of “reflection,” to the interminable epistolary confessions and endless games of self-analysis. Any useful participation in society, however limited in scope, was better than “rotten reflection pretending to be idealism,” Belinsky maintained.

Belinsky seems to have abandoned reconciliation precisely because it did not – in fact could not – give him what he had expected from it. Far from providing him with a basis for reintegration, it intensified his feelings of alienation, his sense of being a specter rather than a real man. Having concluded that for him personally “rational reality” was something unattainable, Belinsky consoled himself for a time with belief in the rationality of the historical process as a whole – in a total “harmony” in which even dissonances have their place. However, these “philosophical consolations” could not arrest the influx of new ideas. In the years 1840-41 (when Stankevich and Bakunin were first beginning to toy with the idea of a “philosophy of action”), Belinsky underwent a profound process of inner liberation. This liberation came about as part of the struggle for the rights of the individual, for the radical reassessment of the anti-personalist implication of the idea of historical necessity, and for the vindication of *active* participation in history.

At first Belinsky rejected the “philosophy of reconciliation” on moral rather than theoretical grounds. In March 1841 he summed up his new attitude to Hegel in a letter to Botkin:

I thank you most humbly, Egor Fedorovich [Hegel], I acknowledge your philosophical prowess, but with all due respect to your philosophical cap and gown, I have the honor to inform you that if I should succeed in climbing to the highest rung of the ladder of progress, even then I would ask you to render me an account of all the victims of life and history, of all the victims of chance, superstition, the Inquisition, Philip II, and so forth. Otherwise I should hurl myself head first from that very top rung. I do not want happiness, even as a gift, if I cannot be easy about the fate of all my brethren, my own flesh and blood. They say that there can be no

harmony without dissonance; that may be all very pleasant and proper for music lovers, but certainly not for those who have been picked out to express the idea of dissonance by their fate [...]. What good is it to me to know that reason will ultimately be victorious and that the future will be beautiful, if I was forced by fate to witness the triumph of chance, irrationality, and brute force.<sup>10</sup>

Analogous ideas were put (several decades later!) by Dostoevsky in the mouth of Ivan Karamazov:

Like a babe, I trust that the wounds will heal, the scars will vanish, that the sorry and ridiculous spectacle of man's disagreements and clashes will disappear like a pitiful mirage, like the sordid invention of a puny, microscopic Euclidean, human brain, and that, in the end, in the universal finale, at the moment universal harmony is achieved, something so magnificent will take place that it will satisfy every human heart, allay all indignation, pay for all human crimes, for all the blood shed by men, and enable everyone not only to forgive everything but also to justify everything that has happened to men. Well, that day may come; all this may come to pass – but I personally still do not accept this world. I refuse to accept it! [...] Why, I certainly haven't borne it all so that my crimes and my sufferings would be used as manure to nurture the harmony that will appear in some remote future to be enjoyed by some unknown creatures.<sup>11</sup>

The analogy was not incidental. Not just because Dostoevsky had read the above-quoted letter of Belinsky to Botkin in the former's biography by A.N. Pypin (published 1976), but mainly because moral rebellion against undeserved suffering had become, since Belinsky's time, a typical attitude of the 19-century Russian intellectual – even when he found no *rational* arguments to support it.

Belinsky, however, was not satisfied with that attitude – it was not for nothing that he had gone through the Hegelian school: he found insufficient a purely moral description of his attitude to reality and searched for *objective historical justifications* of his own protest.

This emotional stand was not enough for Belinsky; his Hegelian training had not been in vain and he now felt he had to find an *objective, historical justification* for his protest. He was aided in this by his sense of solidarity with the masses, which helped him transcend his tragic sense of loneliness. The widespread public response to his articles and the growing force of public opposition to tsarist policies gave him the desired feeling that he was at last overcoming his "spectrality." He regained his faith in history – yet no longer as belief in the rational and historical justification of everything existing, but as belief in the rationality of general historical development.

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10 Ibid., vol. 12, pp. 22-23.

11 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, translated by A.R. MacAndrew, New York 2003, pp. 313, 325.

One of the essential components of the mature Belinsky's world view was his dialectical historicism, which led him to conceive progress as a law of history enacting itself in unremitting criticism and negation of fixed, anachronistic social patterns. Belinsky's dialectic was rationalistic (like Hegel's and unlike Schelling's). The essence of history, for him, was the movement of reason: "Reason does not recognize a truth, theory, or phenomenon as real unless it finds itself to be an intrinsic part of it."<sup>12</sup> Reason now demanded the total emancipation of the individual, just as the notion of "rational reality" implied the negation of existing reality. This shift of emphasis enabled Belinsky to reexamine his attitude to the French Enlightenment and to take as his new heroes mainly "destroyers of the old" such as "Voltaire, the encyclopedists, and the Terrorists." At the same time he made clear his rejection of anti-historical Enlightenment rationalism. "Do not suppose," he wrote to a friend, "that I base my arguments on abstract reason [*rassudok*]; no, I do not deny the past, I do not deny history, I perceive in them the inevitable and rational unfolding of the idea; I want a golden age, but not that of the past, not an unconscious golden age on the level of the brutes, but one prepared by society, law, marriage, in a word by everything that once was necessary and rational, but now has become stupid and trivial."<sup>13</sup>

His dialectical view of history showed Belinsky a way of reconciling the tragic conflict between the individual's struggle for change and established social norms. It ought to be possible, he suggested, to play an active part in the transformation of nature and history through an understanding of the laws governing these forces. Aware of the utopian character of many progressive ideals, he tried to anchor them in reality, to show that they were an inevitable part of the historical process. He attempted to formulate a "philosophy of action" that would be free of Fichte's subjectivism, that would resolve Kant's and Schiller's dualism of ethics and necessity, and that would heal the split between the abstract ideal and the concrete, objective world. The difficulty confronting him was the lack of objective criteria of historical progress; this posed the threat of an unintended subjectivism in which Historical Reason would be equated with the reasoner's own reason – i.e. with the ideas of the ideological avant-garde of the Russian intelligentsia.

Belinsky's intellectual evolution followed the prevailing trend in European thought and in particular that of the Hegelian Left in Germany, which by emphasizing Hegel's links with the rationalist heritage of the Enlightenment, was trying to bring about a synthesis of German philosophy and French

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12 Ibid., vol. 6, p. 279.

13 Ibid., vol. 12, p. 71.

revolutionary thought, to combine German “thought” with French “action.” Belinsky stressed that his rejection of the philosophy of reconciliation did not imply a complete break with Hegelianism. “Hegel,” he wrote in a passage that paraphrased certain ideas first put forward by Engels, “turned philosophy into a science. His method of speculative thought is the greatest contribution made by the greatest thinker the modern world has known. This method is so unflinching and superior that it alone can serve as a tool for demolishing those propositions of his philosophy which are now inadequate or erroneous.”<sup>14</sup>

One of the characteristic motifs in Belinsky’s world view after his rejection of reconciliation was his defense of the particular (the real, living individual) against the tyranny of the universal (the Absolute, Reason, and the Spirit). On a number of issues this brought him close to materialism as a philosophical system that saw mankind as a collection of individual, sensual human beings. This emphasis that men are creatures of flesh and blood was characteristic of the anthropological materialism of Ludwig Feuerbach, whose *Essence of Christianity* made a deep impression on Belinsky (although he only knew it from hearsay). In the *Review of Russian Literature for the Year 1846*, for instance, Belinsky declared that personality is “a man with a body, or rather a man who is a man thanks to his body,” and that “a mind without a body, a mind without a face, a mind that does not work on the blood and is not affected by it, is mere fantasy, a lifeless abstraction.”<sup>15</sup>

### *Aesthetic and Literary Critical Views*

Belinsky’s break with “reconciliation” also marked a significant reorientation of his aesthetic and critical literary views.

During the “reconciliation,” Belinsky rejected all “subjective” literary works as mindlessly produced against reality in the name of an “ideal” invented by a limited individual “reason.” Schiller was for him at that time a jejune, a “dandyish” daydreamer and an abstract escapist from reality. His “gods” became the great “objective” poets who restrained themselves from passing judgment on reality – the “Olympians,” Goethe and Pushkin. In Pushkin’s late works, Belinsky observed “a transition from the dandyish struggle into a harmony of a brightened spirit, reconciled with reality.”

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14 Ibid., vol. 7, pp. 49-50. These words clearly demonstrate the influence of the young Engels’s brochure *Schelling and Revelation*. Belinsky knew about this work through an article by Botkin on German literature in *Notes of the Fatherland* (1843), which repeated almost word for word whole passages from Engels’s pamphlet.

15 Belinsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 10, p. 27.

Belinsky's break with "reconciliation" was followed by his rehabilitation of "subjective" literary works, i.e. those that expressed protest against the actual social reality. At the same time, the critic worked out a new, superior concept of "subjectivity" which included "objectivity" and, rather than distort the picture of reality, recreated it faithfully and judged it from the perspective dictated by the general direction of social progress, rather than that of the artist's personal view. Belinsky thus became a propagator of ideologically committed, progress-oriented literary realism.

To him, the flagship representative of that literary trend was Nikolai Gogol. However, interpreting the work of the author of *Dead Souls*, Belinsky turns out to be largely biased, since he was prone to treating Gogol's satire as a faithful reflection of the Russian reality and ascribed to Gogol a consciously critical attitude toward the current social and political system of Russia. Belinsky's articles on Gogol did not inform the reader that Gogol himself had sympathized with the ideology of "Orthodoxy, autocracy and nationality" or that he had described the sense of his own works in terms of Christian morality, consciously distancing himself from social-political criticism.

Realist art ("natural art" in Belinsky's terminology) ought to faithfully and truthfully reproduce reality. However, faithful reproduction of reality was not synonymous with copying it. It depended on depicting the general in particular phenomena, on showing *typical* situations in which the essential was concentrated in the endless multifariousness of life, on generalizing the apparent chaos of facts. And generalization was inherent to evaluation. By gist of that logic, Belinsky concluded that "pure" art did not exist, since every work of art contained some ideological tendency; the only difference between "objective" and "subjective" literature was that the former expressed acceptance of reality, while the latter adopted a critical, active attitude toward it.

As for the generalization contained in a work of art, Belinsky emphasized that it must not have anything in common with "logical syllogisms" or "abstract patterns" – or it would contradict the very nature of art defined by the critic as "thinking in images." Generalization in art must proceed by vivid, concrete images, directly influencing the reader's feelings and imagination – otherwise, it produces a mere "rhetorical generalization."

Belinsky's philosophical evolution in respect to methodological issues was marked by a transition from "philosophical criticism" that applied "absolute" measures to literature, to "historical criticism" exposing the connection between literature and the "historical development of societies." Having broken with "reconciliation to reality," Belinsky concluded that the greatest value of Hegelianism lay in the method, rather than in the system, while the fundamental feature of that method was the "historical point of view." Belinsky thus rejected

abstract aestheticism, insisting that aesthetic criticism devoid of historical criticism was entirely erratic and fruitless.

This meant a conscious transfer to the side of methodological historicism. Yet, the weakness of that historicism, as Apollon Grigoriev has observed, was that it identified historical development with the teleological theory of progress, and too unceremoniously employed literature in the service of the progress so conceived.

There can be no doubt that Belinsky's aesthetic and literary-critical views constituted an outstanding achievement of Russian reflection on art, as well as a summary of the rich experience of the "Gogolian period in Russian literature" (Chernyshevsky's term). On the other hand, however, Belinsky's critical activity initiated an ideologically committed style in Russia that was hard to reconcile with the inner freedom of artists. Despite his many reservations, Belinsky demanded of writers that they manifest solidarity with social progress and endowed critics with the right to execute pedagogical supervision over artists, to appoint them tasks and to judge them by moral and civic criteria.

That attitude is manifest in Belinsky's famous letter to Gogol of the 15<sup>th</sup> of July 1847. Belinsky wrote it in the Lower Silesian spa of Salzbrunn, suffering from grave tuberculosis – almost on the eve of his death. The letter referred to Gogol's book *Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends*, in which the critic's beloved author of *The Government Inspector* and *Dead Souls* presented himself as an apologist of official Orthodoxy and the entire social and political system of Nicholas I's Russia. Belinsky considered this a betrayal of the lofty vocation of the Russian writer – his own society's sole defender against "the gloom of autocracy, Orthodoxy and nationality." For that reason, he appealed to Gogol, writing:

Devotee of the knout, apostle of uncouthness, defender of obscurantism and backwardness, glorifier of the Tartar way of life – what are you doing? Look down at your feet – you are standing on the edge of an abyss.<sup>16</sup>

Still, Belinsky did not give up Gogol – on the contrary: he expressed his hope that the writer would condemn his own errors and amend for them with new masterpieces. He tried to convince him in the following manner:

Russia sees that her salvation lies not in mysticism, or in asceticism, or in pietism, but in the progress of civilization, education and humanitarian values. What she needs are not sermons (she has heard enough of them) or prayers (she has babbled

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16 V.G. Belinsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Moscow 1953-59, vol. 10, p. 214.



enough) but an awakening of human dignity which has been dragged through mud and dirt for so many centuries.<sup>17</sup>

After Belinsky's death, illegal copies of his *Letter to Gogol* began to circulate throughout Russia, awakening and whetting rebellious feelings. The letter came to be universally considered the epitome of the attitude of the progress-oriented Russian intelligentsia – intelligentsia in the normative sense of the term, i.e., that part of the educated class who believed themselves to be the moral elite with a mission to commit themselves to the social emancipation of the people.

Different judgments of Belinsky started emerging during the anti-Positivist breakthrough in Russian culture and the ensuing crisis of the society-oriented values of the intellectuals. Alexander Blok, for example, described Belinsky's letter to Gogol as "a hysterical cry of condemnation," insinuating a certain parallelism between literature's ideological supervisor, Belinsky, and the head of the gendarmerie, Count Benckendorf.<sup>18</sup>

In the Soviet Union, Belinsky became an officially "canonized" authority, praised as the greatest theoretician of critical realism and a precursor to Socialist realism. Obviously, the opinion largely destroyed his image in the eyes of non-conformist writers and literature lovers. During the "Cold War" period, an objective and favorable judgment on Belinsky was therefore much more easily obtained in the West.

A judgment like that can be found, for example, in the essays by Isaiah Berlin, *The Glorious Decade* (published in 1955-56). "Crazy Vissarion" is portrayed therein not only as the all-European founder of "social literary criticism," but also as a thinker protesting against the justification of human suffering by means of Hegel's "historical necessity" – a fact that took on a new and terrifying actuality in the years of the Stalinist dictatorship.<sup>19</sup>

## Aleksandr Herzen

Unlike Stankevich, Bakunin, or Belinsky, ALEKSANDR HERZEN (1812-70)<sup>20</sup> and his closest friend, Nikolai Ogarev, thought of themselves even as adolescents as

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17 Ibid., p. 212.

18 See A. Blok, "Narod i intelligentsia," in: Belinsky, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, vol. 2, Moscow 1955, p. 89) and "O naznachanii poeta" (Ibid., pp. 353-354).

19 See Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, pp. 155-191.

20 Herzen was the illegitimate but much loved son of Ivan Iakovlev, a rich and cultured nobleman who was an admirer of Voltaire, and a German mother (Louise Haag). He was called "Herzen" by his father (from the German *das Herz* – "heart"). The best

the continuators of the revolutionary traditions of the Decembrists. Herzen relates how in the summer of 1827 (or 1828), during a walk in the countryside near Moscow, the two youths embraced each other and swore to devote their lives to the struggle for liberty. While attending Moscow University they founded a study circle that was to prepare them for the pursuit of this ideal. In his memoirs (written much later as an émigré) Herzen compared this circle with the Stankevich one: “They did not like our almost exclusively political interests, while we did not like their almost exclusive interest in abstractions. They considered us to be Frondists and Frenchmen, while we thought of them as abstract sentimentalists and Germans.”<sup>21</sup>

On closer examination this version of events does not entirely fit the facts. Despite their cult of the Decembrists and undoubted opposition to tsarism, Herzen and Ogarev were hardly less devoted to sentimentalism and abstraction than Stankevich. In the young Herzen’s world view, French influences (those of the Saint-Simonians, Ballanche, Buchez, and Pierre Leroux) coexisted side by side with equally influential ideas borrowed from Schelling and German romantic literature and philosophy. What attracted the young Herzen to Saint-Simonianism was not so much its political aspects as its philosophy of history and its revelation of a new religion, a new “organic epoch.”

The tsarist police were not, however, interested in such subtle distinctions. In July of 1834 Herzen and Ogarev were arrested, and after a slow investigation lasting nine months were condemned to banishment. Herzen spent more than five years in the provinces – two years in Viatka and three in Vladimir. His compulsory service as a clerk gave him firsthand knowledge of the venal world of the tsarist bureaucracy and the brutality of the serf-owners. At this time he became interested in religion and even mysticism. This fervor was partly the outcome of his correspondence with his extremely devout cousin Natalia Zakharina, whom he married secretly in 1838 in highly romantic circumstances (an elopement was arranged by friends).

Herzen returned from exile at the beginning of 1840, when the influence of Hegelian philosophy was at its peak. When he met the members of the Stankevich circle he was shocked by the gospel of reconciliation preached by Bakunin and Belinsky, which he considered a form of moral suicide. Nevertheless, since the philosophy of reconciliation claimed to have the authority of Hegel – the last word in “science” – behind it, Herzen was

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American book on Herzen is M. Malia, *Alexander Herzen and the Birth of the Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, Mass. 1961).

21 Alexander Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts*, trans. by Constance Garnett (London 1927), vol. 2, p. 114.

sufficiently interested to undertake a deep and systematic study of Hegelian philosophy. In the course of his work, he came to the conclusion that Bakunin's and Belinsky's interpretation was erroneous and that the best counterarguments were provided by Hegel himself. On the other hand, he perceived elements in Hegelianism that – if interpreted formalistically – could give rise to a cult of Historical Reason as an impersonal and cruel force, both alien to man and outside him. Herzen therefore undertook a reinterpretation (and critique) of Hegelianism that would vindicate independent action and the autonomy of the personality, two values he considered to be interdependent: “Action – is the personality itself,”<sup>22</sup> he wrote in his essay “Buddhism in Science.”

Reflection on Hegel opened a new chapter in Herzen's intellectual evolution and helped him outgrow his youthful romanticism and religiosity. New personal tragedies – another year's exile (1841-42; this time to Novgorod) as a result of careless phrases in his private correspondence, and the death of three of his children in rapid succession – did not bring about another attack of religious fervor but, on the contrary, helped to consolidate his new and “realistic” view of the world. In 1842 Herzen was ready to accept the main theses of Feuerbach's critique of religion and the atheistic conclusions to which they led.

The fruit of his reflections was an essay cycle, *Dilettantism in Science* (1843), of which the most important essay was the fourth, entitled “Buddhism in Science,” in which Herzen put forward an interesting theory linking action and personality. The main influences in these essays (apart from Hegel, of course) were August Cieszkowski and Ludwig Feuerbach. Herzen had come across Cieszkowski's *Prolegomena zur Historiosophie* in Vladimir, even before he undertook his study of Hegel.<sup>23</sup>

Following Cieszkowski, Herzen divided history into three great epochs, corresponding to the three dialectical moments in the evolution of the mind: the

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22 *Russian Philosophy*, vol. 1, p. 332.

23 In a letter to A. L. Witberg (July 1838) Herzen wrote about the Prolegomena: “It is surprising to what an extent I am in agreement with the author on all major points. That means that my ideas are correct, and I shall therefore work on them.” A. I. Herzen, *Sobranie sochinenii* (30 vols.; M, 1954-65), vol. 22, p. 38. Cieszkowski's pioneer role in transforming Hegelianism into a “philosophy of action” (or “philosophy of praxis”) is analyzed at length in N. Lobkowitz, *Theory and Practice: History of a Concept from Aristotle to Marx* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1967), pp. 193-206, 218-21. A detailed study of Cieszkowski's influence on Herzen is A. Walicki's “Alexander Herzen, August Cieszkowski, and the Philosophy of Action,” in A. Walicki, *Russia, Poland and Universal Regeneration*, Notre Dame-London 1991. Herzen's indebtedness to Cieszkowski was first discovered by Gustav Shpet in his *Filosofskoe mirovozzvenie Gertsena*, Petrograd 1921.

age of natural immediacy, the age of thought, and the age of action. In the first epoch individuals exist in a world of particular interests and cannot attain universality; their existence is individual but they lack awareness and are at the mercy of blind forces. The negation of the moment of natural immediacy comes with the advent of thought or science; thanks to science, individuality renounces itself in order to become a vessel of the impersonal truth and is thus raised to the sphere of the universal. This is not the ultimate aim, however: "To perish in the state of natural immediacy is to rise again in the mind and not to perish in the infinity of nothingness as the Buddhists do."<sup>24</sup> The abstract impersonality of science is in turn negated by conscious action; having transcended its immediacy, the self realizes itself in action, bringing rationality and freedom to the historical process. In Herzen's argument, therefore, personality is not just an instrument, but the ultimate goal of all development.

For the "formalists," or "Buddhists in science," as Herzen called them, it was enough to raise individuality to the sphere of the supra-individual or impersonal; they annihilated the self and were not interested in its rebirth or in self-realization through participation in history. Herzen conceded that this was not merely a matter of misinterpretation, but that Hegel himself was largely responsible for this "Buddhist" reading of his philosophy. He agreed with Cieszkowski that Hegelianism was the highest achievement of abstract thought, and therefore the prologue to the negation of the negation, when thought would be transcended in action. As a child of the "age of thought," Hegel was absorbed in the sphere of the universal – of logic – and had overlooked the concrete demands of the self; but now the "personality ignored by science demands its rights, demands a full and passionate life which can only be satisfied by free and creative action."

Herzen's attacks were directed not only against Hegel's "contemplativism" but also against his "pan-logism," i.e. his identification of the laws of history with those of logic. Apart from the capacity for logical reasoning, Herzen argued, man possesses will, which "may be called positive, creative reason." This Fichtean emphasis on the will was clearly taken over from Cieszkowski, who opposed Hegelian logic by the "entirely practical sphere of the will." In Herzen's view, the future age of action rather than the age of thought (which culminated in Hegelian philosophy) was to be the epoch of true history. In Herzen's conception, nature – where "everything is particular, individual, and separate" – corresponds to the moment of natural immediacy, whereas logic (in the Hegelian sense) is the moment of thought that negates immediacy; the

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24 All quotations from "Buddhism in Science" are from Herzen, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, pp. 64-88.

moment of action, which would in its turn negate the previous negation of logic, would express itself in history, which “transcends nature and logic and recreates them afresh.”

It is worth noting that in terms of the Hegelian triad, action here represents a dialectical return to immediacy. This was important to Herzen, who proposed something like a rehabilitation of nature and natural immediacy; he emphasized that, as part of nature, man is not only a thinking being but a creature capable of feeling, passion, and sensuality. In this case, Herzen used arguments borrowed from Feuerbach to support his own. *Dilettantism in Science* was, in fact, an attempt to reinterpret Hegelian motifs in the spirit of Feuerbach’s anthropotheism. Both Herzen and Feuerbach formulated their ideal in identical terms: reconciliation of the particular and the universal, existence and essence, heart and reason, individual and genus. Undue importance should not, however, be attached to this similarity of phrasing. Feuerbachian philosophy was only a passing stage in Herzen’s intellectual evolution, and the role it played was important but subordinate. The personalist ideal put forward by Herzen assumed a synthesis of materialism and idealism – of nature, in which “everything is particular,” and logic, the sphere of the universal. This ideal was to be realized through the much-desired reconciliation of the Feuerbachian “man of flesh and blood” with Hegel’s rationalist universalism.

Herzen’s chief philosophical work, the *Letters on the Study of Nature* (1845), would appear to be concerned with entirely different issues. It opens with a strictly epistemological problem – a discussion of empiricism (identified with materialism) and idealism (or speculative philosophy) as two different ways of understanding reality. Herzen argues that the study of nature requires a knowledge of philosophy, and that philosophy cannot exist in isolation from the study of nature. Experimental and speculative philosophy are two separate aspects of the same body of knowledge: speculation on its own (apart from “empiria”) and “empiria” unsupported by speculation are doomed to failure.

On closer examination it becomes clear that the argument about the relative merits of empiricism and idealism is of practical consequence and has some bearing on the ethical and socio-historical problems that interested Herzen and the rest of the Russian philosophical left. Empiricism (materialism), Herzen argues, proceeds from the particular and is incapable of organic synthesis; therefore it views society as the abstract sum of individuals and personality as the sum of mechanical processes and material particles. Idealism, on the other hand, proceeds from the universal, from the “idea” or impersonal “Reason,” and is likely to overlook the concrete, individual human being. The conclusion of the essay – that “empiria” and idealism should combine and supplement each other

– accords with the postulate for the harmonious “reconciliation of the particular and the universal” that was expounded in detail in “Buddhism in Science.”

Herzen agreed with Hegel that the logical process of the evolution of self-consciousness is essentially identical with the historical process; the difference is merely that logic describes this process in a form entirely purged of all fortuitous elements. In order to understand any important philosophical problem, it is therefore essential to show its history and to grasp the inner connection between the logic of actual movement and cognitive logic. The *Letters on the Study of Nature* were an attempt to follow this method, and present an outline of the history of philosophy in relation to the historical evolution of Europe from antiquity to modern times.

In Herzen’s dialectical view of history (as in Cieszkowski’s analogical scheme) antiquity corresponds to the moment of natural immediacy. Christianity initiated the epoch of idealism, of the rejection of nature, of painful dualism and reflection. Herzen did not believe that the Reformation brought about any essential changes; unlike Hegel, he looked on post-Reformation Europe not as the beginning of a qualitatively new age but merely as the last stage of the Middle Ages. He dismissed German idealism (including Hegelian philosophy) as “the scholasticism of the Protestant world.” Hegel, Herzen thought, had halted on the threshold of a new historical epoch – the “age of action” – whose role it would be to achieve a synthesis of the ancient and Christian worlds.

In Herzen’s scheme this synthesis corresponded to the synthesis of materialism and idealism. For Herzen (as for Feuerbach) idealism represented a continuation of Christian theology, whereas materialism represented the rehabilitation of the natural immediacy of the ancient world. The rediscovery of Greek and Roman civilization during the Renaissance foreshadowed the future synthesis. The Renaissance led to the rebirth of materialism and the victorious forward march of empirical inquiry, whereas the Reformation encouraged the development of idealism, which culminated in the philosophy of Hegel. The task of the new age was to bring about a synthesis of Bacon (the father of modern empiricism) and Descartes (the father of idealism) – a synthesis of enlightened materialism and Hegelian idealism. This synthesis would benefit not only science but also – even chiefly – the development of the human personality. Like the Saint-Simonians, whom he had read avidly in his youth, Herzen assumed that there was a close connection between synthetic and analytic modes of thought (idealism and empiricism) and processes of social integration or disintegration. The renaissance of materialism and the growing emphasis on analytical and empirical inquiry from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment was the counterpart of the growing assertion of the self against the tyranny of tradition and authority. This process was beneficial but also posed certain

problems. An undesirable side effect of the domination of a one-sided empiricism was social atomization or even the disintegration of the personality. Processes of disintegration had culminated in the philosophy of Hume, which deprived the personality of its substantial foundations and reduced it to a bundle of sensations and a sequence of moments in time.

“*Consummatum est!*” Herzen wrote,

The role of materialism as a logical moment has ended; in the sphere of theory it was not possible to advance any further. The world disintegrated into an infinite multiplicity of individual phenomena, our ego disintegrated into an infinite multiplicity of individual sensations. [...] The reality of reason, mind, substance, causality, even the awareness of self – all disappeared. [...] The vacuum that was the outcome of Hume’s philosophy must have given the human consciousness a severe shock.<sup>25</sup>

This quotation explains Herzen’s reluctance to make materialism into a cornerstone of his theory of personality. Since he equated materialism with empiricism and naturalistic materialism, he wished to protect the human personality against the latter’s “anatomical” and atomistic mode of thought. Idealism was to help in this defense.

Herzen did not complete his history of philosophy in the *Letters on the Study of Nature*, but there are good grounds for supposing that later letters would have been devoted to the philosophy of Hegel and Feuerbach. The main outline of his conception is clear: in the postulated synthesis of materialism (empiricism) and objective idealism, materialism was to protect the personality against the tyranny of “logic,” i.e. against the hypostatization of universals and the demand for the absolute submission of the self. Idealism, on the other hand, was to defend the personality against disintegration, to organize the environment into a rational structure and to prevent a situation where there were “atoms, phenomena, a mass of fortuitous facts, but no harmony, no wholeness, and no ordered universe.”<sup>26</sup>

What Herzen feared the most was the thought that the rational structure of historical process could be destroyed. He would not, in any case, quit the Saint-Simonian and Hegelian belief in the meaning of history. Whilst he criticized the Hegelian panlogism on the name of a personalistic “philosophy of action,” and opposed any form of capitulation against the Historical Necessity, he never undermined the idea of reasonable progress. Whereas he emphasised that individuals and nations are not merely instruments of the *Weltgeist* but also objectives in themselves, he would not negate the general purpose of human

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25 Ibid., p. 304.

26 Ibid., p. 307.

history. Having moved rational skepticism aside, he proclaimed a belief in the Future which was expected to finally resolve the afflicting contradictions of history.



## Chapter 8

# Belinsky and Different Variants of Westernism

In contrast to the Slavophiles, their opponents, the so-called “Westernizers” [*zapadniki*], did not form a homogeneous movement with a single cohesive ideology and social philosophy. Westernism was only a loose alliance of potentially divergent trends, a platform where democrats and liberals in the 1840s found common ground in their opposition to Slavophilism. The controversial issue that divided the two groups was the “idea of personality,” the key issue for the Philosophical Left, which the Slavophiles attacked as a Western misconception, the result of the false road taken by Western Europe. Slavophilism was therefore a philosophy that demanded an answer, especially since in the early 1840s the Slavophiles had already contributed an original interpretation of Russian history. The Westernizers, as Herzen later admitted, were increasingly aware of the need to “master the themes and issues put into circulation by the Slavophiles.”<sup>1</sup>

Contemporary commentators were unanimous in ascribing the main role in the public debate with the Slavophiles to Belinsky. Herzen confined himself to private discussions, which he sometimes noted down in his *Diary*. In his philosophical ideas – and especially in his conception of “action” and “personality” – he was a determined opponent of the Slavophiles, but he was not an unequivocal supporter of “Europeanism.” He was impressed, to some extent, by Slavophile criticism of Western Europe, which seemed to him to have much in common with socialist criticisms of capitalism. Herzen clearly felt that Belinsky’s attitude to the Slavophiles was too hostile. This is shown by an entry in his *Diary* for May of 1844. Belinsky says: “I am a Jew by nature and cannot sup at one table with the Philistines”; he suffers, and because of his suffering he wants to hate and revile the Philistines who have done nothing to deserve it. For Belinsky the Slavophiles are the Philistines:

I do not agree with them myself, but Belinsky refuses to accept the truth in the fatras of their nonsense. He cannot understand the Slavic world; they drive him to despair but he is not right; he has no presentiment of the life of the coming century. [...] A

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1 P. V. Annenkov, *Literaturnye vospominaniia* (M, 1960), p. 293.

strange situation, a kind of involuntary *juste milieu* on the Slavophile issue: in their eyes [i.e. the Slavophiles'] I am a man of the West and in the eyes of their enemies a man of the East. This means that such one-sided labels have become obsolete.<sup>2</sup>

## Belinsky's Westernism

### *Ancient and Modern Russia*

In his philosophical interpretation of Russian history, Belinsky was concerned with the same issues that interested the Slavophiles, above all with the role of Peter the Great and the antithesis of pre- and post-reform Russia. In his analysis, he made use of a dialectical scheme current among the Russian Hegelians, although he was the first to apply it to Russian history. Individuals as well as whole nations, he argued, pass through three evolutionary stages: the first is the stage of "natural immediacy"; the second is that of the abstract universalism of reason, with its "torments of reflection" and painful cleavage between immediacy and consciousness; the third is that of "rational reality," which is founded on the "harmonious reconciliation of the immediate and conscious elements."<sup>3</sup>

Belinsky developed this idea in detail as early as 1841, in his long essay on "The Deeds of Peter the Great," in which he wrote: "There is a difference between a nation in its natural, immediate, and patriarchal state, and this same nation in the rational movement of its historical development."<sup>4</sup> In the earlier state, he suggested, a nation cannot really properly be called a nation [*natsiia*], but only a people [*narod*]. The choice of terms was important to Belinsky: during the reign of Nicholas the word *narodnost'*, used – or rather misused – by the exponents of Official Nationality, had a distinctly conservative flavor; *natsional'nost'*, on the other hand, thanks to its foreign derivation evoked the French Revolution and echoes of bourgeois democratic national movements.

Belinsky's picture of pre-Petrine Russia was surprisingly similar to that presented by the Slavophiles, although his conclusions were quite different from theirs. Before Peter, the Russian people (i.e. the nation in the age of immediacy) had been a close-knit community held together by faith and custom – i.e. by the unreflective approval of tradition idealized by the Slavophiles. These very qualities, however, allowed no room for the emergence of rational thought or individuality, and thus prevented dynamic social change.

2 A. I. Herzen, *Sobranie sochinenii* (30 vols.; M, 1954-65), vol. 2, p. 354.

3 V. G. Belinsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Moscow 1953-9, vol. 5, p. 308.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 135.

Before Russians could be transformed into a nation it was necessary to break up their stagnating society. With considerable dialectical skill Belinsky argued that the emergence of every modern nation was accompanied by an apparently contradictory phenomenon – namely the cleavage between the upper and lower strata of society that so disturbed the Slavophiles. He regarded this as confirmation of certain general rules applying to the formation of modern nation-states: “In the modern world,” he wrote:

All the elements within society operate in isolation, each one separately and independently [...] in order to develop all the more fully and perfectly [...] and to become fused once more into a new and homogeneous whole on a higher level than the original undifferentiated homogeneity.

In his polemics with the Slavophiles, who regarded the cleavage between the cultivated elite and the common people as the prime evil of post-Petrine Russia, Belinsky argued that “the gulf between society and the people will disappear in the course of time, with the progress of civilization.” This meant “raising the people to the level of society,” he was anxious to stress, and not “forcing society back to the level of the people,” which was the Slavophiles’ remedy. The Petrine reforms, which had been responsible for this social gulf, were therefore, in Belinsky’s view, the first and decisive step toward modern Russia. “Before Peter the Great, Russia was merely a people [*narod*], she became a nation [*natsiia*] thanks to the changes initiated by the reformer.”<sup>5</sup>

The Petrine reforms thus represented the radical negation of the natural immediacy of ancient Russia; in accordance with the dialectical process, however, this antithesis had to be followed by a synthesis – that is, a dialectical return to “immediacy” on a higher plane. Peter the Great negated ancient Russian immediacy in the name of the universal human values represented by European civilization; these universal values had in turn to assume national form so that the negation of immediate instinctive nationality could lead to the positive emergence of a new conscious national awareness. This, in fact, is what happened in Russia. The Napoleonic campaign of 1812 was, in Belinsky’s view, the catalyst that helped to form this new national consciousness, which found expression in the poetry of Pushkin – the first great Russian poet, in whose work the national and universal elements were organically fused.

It would appear, from this argument, that the stage of negation of the national on behalf of the universal initiated by Peter could now be considered a closed chapter. In his “Review of Russian Literature for the Year 1846,” Belinsky in fact expressly supported this view and even conceded that the

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5 Ibid., p. 124.

Slavophiles deserved credit for certain aspects of their criticism of Westernization. He appeared to be struck most forcibly by their comments on the cleavage in Russian life and the lack of moral unity – in other words, by their criticism of the “superfluous men” and of “society torn forcibly away from its immediacy.”<sup>6</sup> Belinsky, with his own painful experiences in mind, was ready to agree that the consequence of loss of immediacy was alienation; he did not believe, however, that it was possible to return to an earlier stage of social development. Using Hegelian arguments to prove that Peter’s reforms had been historically inevitable, he pointed out the utopian character of the Slavophiles’ program and accused them of misinterpreting the concept of independent development: “To bypass the period of reforms, to leap over it, as it were, and to return to the preceding stage – is that what they call distinctive development? A really ridiculous idea, if only because it cannot be done, just as one cannot change the order of the seasons or force winter to come after spring, or autumn to precede summer.”<sup>7</sup>

Although Belinsky argued that the period of reforms had run its course, this did not mean that he no longer admired the type of historical leader represented by Peter. On the contrary, he continued to regard him as the personification of the idea of rational and conscious activity, without the faults of either unreflective traditionalism or “rotten reflection.” In 1847 he wrote to Kavelin: “Peter is my philosophy, my religion, my revelation in everything that concerns Russia. He is an example to great and small, to all who want to achieve something, to be in any way useful. Without the immediate element everything is rotten, abstract, and lifeless, but where there is nothing but immediacy everything is wild and nonsensical.”<sup>8</sup>

### *Narodnost’ and Natsional’nost’ in Literature*

Belinsky’s Westernism played perhaps an even more prominent role in his literary criticism. In his critical debut in 1834 (in the article “Literary Reveries”), he maintained outright that Russia was still without a literature of her own. His justification of this extreme point of view echoed the argument used by Chaadaev to show that Russia was a country without history: what was known as Russian literature, Belinsky wrote, was an imitative product without historical continuity or internal organic development.

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6 Ibid., vol. 11, p. 526.

7 Ibid., vol. 10, p. 19.

8 Ibid., vol. 12, p. 433.

Some years later he modified this view, but to the end of his life he would only recognize European-influenced literature, founded, according to him, by Lomonosov – the “Peter the Great of Russian letters.” He was convinced that everything valuable in Russian writing owed its existence to Westernization, and that anything that came before hardly deserved to be called literature.

To the Slavophiles these views were of course proof of Belinsky’s ignorance and of his contempt for Russia’s “native” cultural roots. They were equally shocked by his attitude toward folk poetry. He was ready to concede that it had its merits as a reminder of the “childhood of mankind,” “the age of natural immediacy when all was clear and no oppressive thoughts or uneasy questions disturbed us,” but at the same time he wholeheartedly disliked all forms of “folk-mania.” In his polemics he stressed the difference between unsophisticated popular writing [*prostonarodnost’*] and national individuality; in the heat of the argument he went so far as to claim that “one short verse by a sophisticated artist is of incomparably greater value than the entire body of folk poetry.”<sup>9</sup>

Writers who wished to express the true national spirit in their works were warned by Belinsky not to look for inspiration in folk poetry. Popular ballads were only capable of conveying the restricted particularism of tribal existence, whereas nations came about as a result of “individualization,” which required the negation of tribal particularism. The Petrine reforms, which broke with natural immediacy, represented such a negation. Their role was to bring Russia closer to the nations of Europe, which at that time were the only “historical nations” and true representatives of humanity.

The Hegelian notion of “historical nation” had an important place in Belinsky’s criticism. Although he frequently reaffirmed his faith in the great potential of the Russian “substance,” he also stressed that this potential could not be realized without “historical soil,” and that since the Russian nation “was still at the very early stage of its evolution” it could not claim to have “world-historical significance” in the intellectual life of mankind. That is why he argued that an old Russian epic such as the “Lay of the Host of Igor” was lacking in universal values and could not stand comparison with the medieval epics of chivalry. Even the work of his own favorite, Gogol (he maintained in a polemic with Konstantin Aksakov), was without universal significance and could not be compared to the work of such “world-historical” artists as James Fenimore Cooper and George Sand, let alone Homer and Shakespeare (to whom Aksakov had compared Gogol).<sup>10</sup>

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9 Ibid., vol. 5, p. 309.

10 Ibid., vol. 5, p. 649.

Nevertheless Belinsky was untiring in his efforts to further the cause of a national literature and was convinced that in future it would achieve universal significance. What he meant by “national character,” however, was influenced by his Westernism. He suggested that Pushkin was a truly national poet in *Evgeny Onegin* but not in his verse tales, which represented a conscious attempt to recreate the style and content of folk poetry. Of Lermontov’s “Song of the Merchant Kalashnikov” Belinsky wrote that though it was a work of great talent, it had exhausted all the potentialities of this kind of poetry, so that other poets would therefore do well not to try and imitate it.

Though he had his reservations about folk songs and ballads, there was no doubt about Belinsky’s special hostility to “pseudoromantic imitations of the folk style” that identified nationality with the external attributes of popular traditions and recommended that literature reproduce the life and language of the most backward sections of society.<sup>11</sup> “Nationality,” he wrote, “is not a homespun coat, bast slippers, cheap vodka, or sour cabbage.”<sup>12</sup> Whatever the Slavophiles might claim, the real national character of Russia was represented by the cultivated elite and not by the common people. “If the national character of poetry is one of its greatest values,” Belinsky wrote, “then truly national works should undoubtedly be sought among those depicting the social groups that emerged after the reforms of Peter the Great and adopted a civilized way of life.”<sup>13</sup>

In his uncompromising opposition to these “homespun-slippery” notions, Belinsky represented an extreme form of Westernism that occasionally disturbed even his closest friends. Herzen, for instance, thought some of his statements rash, smacking of contempt for people in homespun coats and bast slippers; he told Annenkov that there were times when he found it difficult to defend Belinsky against the attacks of the Slavophiles. Reservations of this kind (shared also by Granovsky) reflected the complexes of the educated progressive gentry, who were afraid of seeming to parade their social superiority. Thanks to his plebeian origins Belinsky did not suffer from such scruples. He knew that it was not the common people he despised, but the ignorance and backwardness idealized in the state-propagated doctrine of Official Nationality. When such works as Grigorovich’s *Anton the Unfortunate* and Turgenev’s *Sportsman’s Sketches* began to appear in the second half of the 1840s – books that did not

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11 This type of literature was encouraged by the government: *narod* in Russian means both “nation” and “people,” so that the “*narodnost*” of the triune slogan of Official Nationality conveniently covered a wide semantic field.

12 Belinsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 7, p. 435.

13 *Ibid.*

idealize native backwardness but looked at social conditions in the Russian village with a critical eye – Belinsky greeted them enthusiastically and defended them against pseudo-aristocratic readers who complained of the “invasion of peasants in literature.”

Belinsky’s views on “pseudo-romantic folklore” were closely linked with the critic’s extreme negative attitude towards literature in the Ukrainian language (at the time referred to as “Little Russian”), including the poetry of Taras Shevchenko.<sup>14</sup> Belinsky was convinced that the “Little Russian” language was merely a dialect of Russian, and that supporting the culture of “Little Russia” was the celebration of a peasant provincialism that was fixed in a stage of tribal “folksiness” and which inhibited the normal general-Russian process of nation building. His convictions were confirmed by the friendly interest in Little Russian folklore displayed on the pages of anti-Western periodicals: Pogodin’s *Moskvitianin* and the extremely reactionary *Maiak*. They combined this attitude with sympathy to the patriarchal customs of the Montenegrins, which led Belinsky in a fit of polemic fervor to write that all Montenegrins should be wiped out.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, Belinsky’s radically negative attitude to Taras Shevchenko and other Ukrainian writers was an example of the same extreme Westernism as his suggestions to erase Old Russian writings from historical literature and his lack of appreciation for the artistic value of *Slovo o polku Igorevĕ* (*The Tale of Igor’s Campaign*).

There was, of course, also a political aspect to this issue. As an enthusiast of Peter’s reforms, Belinsky was a decided etatist, firm in his belief that the only tool for profound reforms could be a centralized and united state, free from links to the patriarchal, tribal-clan structures of traditionalism. Etatism of this sort, being a characteristic feature of the Westernism of the 1840s,<sup>16</sup> was codified (as we shall see) in the historical views of Konstantin Kavelin, cofounder of the so-called “etatist” school of Russian historiography.

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14 A detailed analysis of this issue can be found in Andrea Rutherford’s article, “Vissarion Belinskii and the Ukrainian National Question,” *The Russian Review*, vol. 54, no. 4, October 1995, pp. 500-515.

15 Belinsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, pp. 287-288; vol. 7, pp. 60-65; vol. 12, pp. 440-441; cf. V. Shchukin, *Russkoe zapadnichestvo*, pp. 249-269.

16 See V. Shchukin, *Russkoe zapadnichestvo*, p. 178.

*The Polemic with Maikov*

It was a characteristic aspect of Belinsky's Westernism that he stressed the close connection between the emancipation of the individual and the emergence of modern nations from the constraints of "natural immediacy." This was shown very clearly by his angry response to an article by a talented young literary critic, VALERIAN MAIKOV (1823-47), who maintained that the emancipation of the individual meant the progressive shedding of national features.

Maikov was one of the first Russian pre-positivists and had not passed through the stage of enthusiasm for dialectical philosophy that was the common experience of the "superfluous" generation. He had been a member of the Petrashevsky circle,<sup>17</sup> but believed in the benefits of science rather than the utopian socialism of Fourier. In the controversy between "socialists" and "economists" (i.e. the representatives of liberal political economy), he tended to side with the latter. He called Belinsky a "semi-romantic," not trained in sober logical reasoning. In particular he thought him inconsistent and illogical on the problem of nationality; he himself was convinced that the ideal of the autonomous personality imbued by universal values was incompatible with national features. "There is only one true civilization," he wrote, "just as there is only one truth, and one good; therefore the fewer specific features there are in the civilization of a particular nation, the more civilized it is."<sup>18</sup> "Nationality" implied the subordination of the individual to the community, whose character was determined by external factors, whereas the flowering of personality depended on the autonomy of the individual.

The difficulty in this line of reasoning was to explain how the ideas of great emancipated individuals became diffused among the masses and pushed them forward toward a universal ideal of progress. Maikov suggested that this movement of ideas was the work of an educated minority who represented the active, progressive part of the nation. Participants in the great ideological discussion of the 1840s presumably had no difficulty in identifying Maikov's active minority with the Westernized "society" that had emerged after the Petrine reforms, whereas the passive majority was clearly just another version of the common people idealized by the Slavophiles. Maikov's law was therefore essentially a universalization of the Western view on the role of this "society" in Russian history (a view shared by Belinsky). Not having Belinsky's dialectical understanding of this process, however, Maikov proposed it as a universally

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17 See Chapter 9 below.

18 V. N. Maikov, *Kriticheskie opyty* (St. Petersburg, 1891), p. 389.



valid law and identified the overcoming of immediate national particularism with the elimination of nationality as such.

Maikov's views were expressed in a long article on the poetry of V. V. Koltsov that was, in fact, a hidden polemic with Belinsky. The latter reacted sharply. In the "Review of Russian Literature for the Year 1846" he made it clear that he disagreed utterly with the views of the "humanist cosmopolitans" (Maikov was not mentioned by name). "Nationalities," Belinsky wrote:

Are the individualities of mankind. Without nations mankind would be a lifeless abstraction, a word without content, a meaningless sound. In this respect I would rather join the Slavophiles than stay with the humanist cosmopolitans because even if the former make mistakes they err like living human beings, whereas the latter make even the truth sound like the embodiment of some abstract logic [...].<sup>19</sup>

Belinsky's declaration alarmed some of his friends, who suspected him of succumbing to Slavophile influences. In fact, in his argument with Maikov, Belinsky was merely defending views he had formulated in the early 40s (in articles on folk poetry), where he had made it clear that he was opposed both to the "nationalists" who stood for form without content and to the "supporters of undifferentiated universality" who wanted to divorce the universal content from its national form.

The minority [Belinsky argued], always reflects the majority, both in the positive and in the negative sense. [...] In the same way, great men are always children of their country, sons of their nation, for they are great just because they are representatives of their nation. The struggle between the individual genius and the masses is not a struggle between the universal element and nationality, but simply a struggle between the new and the old, between idea and empiricism, between reason and superstition. Folkways are founded on habit; the masses accept as reasonable, just, and useful whatever they have become accustomed to and fervently defend those *old* things that a century or less before they opposed equally fervently as *new*. Their resistance to genius is a necessary factor: it is a form of trial to which they subject him.<sup>20</sup>

An analysis of this argument suggests that Belinsky and Maikov were at least in agreement on one vital issue dividing Westernizers and Slavophiles: both regarded the masses as a conservative force and believed that progress was accomplished through individuals. On this issue Belinsky was sometimes doubtful, but he never abandoned the Westernist position. In the last year of his life (after Maikov's death), when the conflict with the Slavophiles had reached its climax (in connection with Samarin's article "On the Opinions of the

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19 Belinsky, *Pol. Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 10, p. 29.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

*Contemporary*”), he expressly rejected the “mystical faith in the people” – upheld by the Slavophiles as well as Herzen and Bakunin – in favor of an uncompromising reaffirmation of the contribution to progress made by outstanding individuals and the educated elite.

### *The Dispute over Capitalism*

The Westernizers emphasized the positive role of Western influences in the modernization of Russia and wished this process to continue. This did not mean, however, that they automatically accepted the capitalist system, whose obvious shortcomings were already being widely discussed and criticized in Western European progressive circles. Belinsky’s own outlook can best be described as a combination of belief in bourgeois democracy and dislike of the bourgeoisie itself, along with a vague, undefined trust in the “idea of socialism.” There was nothing strange about this mixture – any sincere democrat in a backward part of Europe who followed events in the more advanced countries would have found it difficult to be an apologist for the bourgeoisie and was bound to sympathize in one way or another with the aspirations of the downtrodden masses.

Belinsky expressed his own sympathies in an interesting article on Eugene Sue’s *Les Mystères de Paris* (1844).<sup>21</sup> His ideological position, however, was complicated by the fact that in Russia criticism of the bourgeoisie and belief in the common people were the prerogative of the Slavophiles, for they undermined confidence in social reconstruction along European lines and hence seemed to be incompatible with Westernism.

The problem of capitalism acquired more concrete meaning for Belinsky when he went abroad for medical reasons at the beginning of May 1847. From Salzbrunn in Lower Silesia he wrote to Botkin that he now understood for the first time “the terrible meaning of the words pauperization and proletariat.” At the same time he was becoming critical of the one-sided evaluation of the bourgeoisie by the French utopian socialists, and especially by Louis Blanc, whose *History of the French Revolution* he had started to read. “For Blanc,” he wrote to Botkin in July 1847, “the bourgeoisie has been the arch-enemy and has conspired against the happiness of mankind since before the creation; and yet his

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21 Here he wrote: “The people is like a child: but this child is growing rapidly and will soon become a man in full possession of his physical and mental powers. Misfortune has taught it sense and has shown up the trashy constitution in its proper light. [...] The people is still weak, but it is the only force in France to have preserved the flame of national life and the fresh enthusiasm of convictions which has been extinguished in the educated classes.” Belinsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 8, p. 173.

own work proves that without the *bourgeoisie* we would not have had the revolution he is so enthusiastic about, and that all the successes of that class were the fruit of its own labor.”<sup>22</sup>

When Belinsky arrived in Paris in July 1847, heated discussion of the role of the bourgeoisie raging among his Russian friends already there had reached its climax. Herzen and Bakunin were totally opposed to the bourgeoisie and thought that Russia’s future depended on the peasants and the intelligentsia, whom they considered to be classless; on the other side were Sazonov and Annenkov. Herzen’s viewpoint, formulated in the *Letters from the Avenue Marigny* (published in the *Contemporary – Sovremennik*), caused a good deal of consternation among the Westernizers in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Herzen’s most determined opponent was VASSILY BOTKIN (1811-69), himself the son of a merchant. In the 1840s, Botkin, who had been a member of the Stankevich circle, worked out a “practical philosophy” of his own in which he substituted the “iron law” of bourgeois political economy for the Hegelian *Weltgeist*. “The important thing is not to attack the existing state of affairs,” he wrote in 1846, “but to find out what causes it; in short, to discover the laws governing the world of industry.”<sup>23</sup> Applying this principle to Russia, Botkin came to an unambiguous conclusion: “Heaven grant us our own bourgeoisie!”

Belinsky’s immediate reaction to conditions in bourgeois France was not unlike Herzen’s. On his return to Russia, however, he had time to reconsider his one-sided condemnation. He stressed the bourgeoisie’s historical role and carefully distinguished between the “big capitalists who must be fought as the plague or cholera of contemporary France” and the rest of the middle class. Industry, he admitted, was not only the source of all evil, but also the source of public prosperity.<sup>24</sup> Later still, just before his death, he wrote to Annenkov:

The entire future of France lies in the hands of the bourgeoisie; all progress depends on it alone; the people can only play a passive auxiliary role in historical events. When I said in Paris that Russia needed a new Peter the Great, our believing friend [Bakunin] attacked this idea as heresy and maintained that the people must manage their own affairs. What a naïve, arcadian idea! [...] Our believing friend also tried to convince me that Heaven should preserve Russia from the bourgeoisie. And yet it has become obvious that the process of internal civic development will begin in Russia only when our gentry as become transformed into a bourgeoisie. Poland is the best example of what happens to a state without a bourgeoisie in full enjoyment of its rights.<sup>25</sup>

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22 Ibid., vol. 12, p. 385.

23 P. V. Annenkov *i ego druz'ia* (St. Petersburg 1892), p. 525.

24 Belinsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 12, pp. 448, 449.

25 Ibid., pp. 467-68.

Nevertheless, the similarity between Belinsky's views and those of Botkin and Annenkov was only superficial. Belinsky became reconciled to the bourgeoisie because it represented a specific case of historical necessity; his acceptance sprang not from spontaneous sympathy but from a wish to avoid a charge of quixotic subjectivism. It is characteristic that he supported Herzen and Bakunin in Paris but changed his mind when he returned home and was confronted by the gloomy realities of tsarist Russia. He became firmly convinced that socialism in Russia must remain a remote dream as long as the country had to pass through so many urgent reforms long since introduced in Western Europe. Because of Russia's backwardness, the masses were largely an inert peasantry kept in patriarchal subjection, among whom it was difficult to discern the nucleus of a proletariat or a force capable of building a system superior to capitalism. Belinsky was aware of the main internal contradictions of capitalism and of its transitional character, but he understood clearly its superiority as a social system over the semi-feudal Russia of Nicholas I. This clear-sighted understanding – as well as his consistent desire to see the process of Westernization completed by the adoption in Russia of bourgeois democratic reforms – was a positive aspect of Belinsky's Westernism. This was emphasized by Plekhanov, who wrote that Belinsky had the "intuition of a sociological genius" and a profound understanding of the basic principles of social development.

## **The Liberal Westernizers**

Using political categories, one might call Belinsky's brand of Westernism democratic, and Annenkov's and Botkin's liberal. In the 40s this distinction was not yet obvious. A definite split did not take place until the 60s, when the radical democrats (followers of the Belinsky tradition) represented the popular interest, whereas the liberals supported restricted reforms that would not affect the privileged position of the gentry. During Belinsky's lifetime, democrats and liberals differed mainly in their attitudes to religion (the liberals among the Westernizers rejecting Herzen's and Belinsky's atheism), in their assessments of the French Revolution (Belinsky's sympathies being with the Jacobins, whom Granovsky condemned), and in their attitudes to art (the liberals supporting "art for art's sake," the democrats, led by Belinsky, demanding social commitment). Although these differences sometimes led to angry and painful quarrels, they did not undermine the sense of common political aims.

*Timotei Granovsky*

One of the important representatives of liberal Westernism in the 1840s was TIMOTEI GRANOVSKY (1813-55), a former member of the Stankevich circle and professor of European history at Moscow University.

Granovsky's impact stemmed not so much from his writings as from his direct contact with audiences; his most important contribution to the cause of Westernism was an enormously popular course of public lectures on the Middle Ages held at Moscow University in 1842. "Granovsky," wrote Herzen, "turned the lecture hall into a drawing room, a meeting place of the *beau monde*." The end of the first course of lectures was greeted by a spontaneous ovation; ladies and "young people with flushed cheeks" wept; "amid prolonged clapping, there were enthusiastic shouts and requests for the lecturer's likeness."<sup>26</sup>

Granovsky's lectures were decidedly anti-Slavophile in content. This did not escape the notice of the Slavophiles and the apologists of Official Nationality, who hastened to counter Granovsky's impact with a course of public lectures on early Russian literature given by Shevrev.

In his polemics with the Slavophiles, Granovsky, like Belinsky, concentrated on a critique of their idealization of the common people. "A large party," he wrote, "has hoisted the standard of popular traditions in our time, exalting it as an expression of infallible collective reason." According to Granovsky, this trend, inspired by the German romantics, was hostile to any sign of progress in science or social relations.

The masses, like nature or the Scandinavian god Thor, are thoughtlessly cruel or thoughtlessly good-natured. They become apathetic under the burden of historical and natural determinations that only the thinking individual can throw off. This individualization of the masses through the power of ideas is the essence of historical progress. The goal of history is the moral, enlightened individual, emancipated from the fatalist pressure of external determinations, and a society founded on his postulates.<sup>27</sup>

With its emphasis on the autonomous personality and emancipation from the "determinations of immediacy," this quotation surely expresses the quintessence of the Westernizing philosophy of history as expounded by Belinsky and Herzen. Another liberal Westernizer was to take this thesis and apply it to Russian history. This was Granovsky's friend and disciple, the young Moscow historian KONSTANTIN KAVELIN (1818-85).

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26 Alexander Herzen, *My Past and Thoughts*, trans. by Constance Garnett (London 1927), vol. 2, p. 245.

27 T.N. Granovsky, *Sochineniia* (M, 1900), p. 455.

*Konstantin Kavelin*

Kavelin's essay entitled "A Brief Survey of Juridical Relations in Ancient Russia" was published with Belinsky's "Survey of Russian Literature for the Year 1846" in the first issue of the *Contemporary* in 1847, and fully deserved to become known as the true manifesto of the "Western party." Belinsky himself was greatly impressed by it and even called it the first philosophical interpretation of Russian history, undervaluing his own work in the field.

In his essay Kavelin developed the argument that the historical process in Russia consisted in the gradual replacement of community relations founded on kinship and custom with a system based on political and juridical legislation, and in the corresponding emancipation of the individual from traditional patriarchal bonds. This involved the dissolution of physical nationality dependent on outward and unchanging forms, and the gradual emergence of a spiritual nationality – nationality as a specific moral attribute to national existence and not as a mere matter of external physical features. This process achieved its climax in the Petrine reforms: "Not until the eighteenth century," Kavelin proclaimed to the outraged Slavophiles, "did Russia begin to live on an intellectual and moral plane."

In the person of Peter the Great, individuality in Russia entered upon its absolute rights, after throwing off the shackles of immediate, natural, and exclusively national determinations and subordinating them to itself. Both in his private life and in his political measures Peter represented the completion of the first phase in the realization of the personality principle in Russian history.<sup>28</sup>

In reply to Kavelin's essay and Belinsky's article published in the same issue of the *Contemporary*, Yury Samarin published a hostile review in the Slavophile *Muscovite* entitled "On the Historical and Literary Views of the *Contemporary*." In it Samarin accused Kavelin of equating personality with Western European individualism, failing to make a distinction between the peasant commune and the clan or kinship group, and exaggerating the positive role of the centralized state. He was especially indignant at Kavelin's attempt to rehabilitate Ivan the Terrible by presenting his brutal struggle against the boyars as a consistent effort to replace hereditary privileges by personal merit. The meaning of Russian history, Samarin suggested, lay not in the development of the personality principle but in the preservation of the Christian community principle, which was now attracting the attention of the West. To prove this point, Samarin drew attention to the interest in things Slavic that had been greatly stimulated by the Paris lectures of the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz: "In response to [his]

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28 K. D. Kavelin, *Sobranie sochinenii* (St. Petersburg 1897), vol. 1, p. 58.

eloquent appeal many eyes, those of George Sand among them, have turned toward the Slavic world conceived as a world based on the community principle; they have turned to us not from mere curiosity, but with a certain sympathy and expectation.”<sup>29</sup>

An examination of Kavelin’s and Belinsky’s views on Russian history shows that there was no essential difference between them: both believed that the historical process in Russia consisted essentially in the emancipation of the individual through the rationalization of social relations; both argued that nations developed from the stage of natural immediacy to that of a fully modern “spiritual” nationality. Kavelin, however, placed special emphasis on the role played in this process by the juridical and state apparatus: the emergence of the centralized Muscovite state, he suggested, was the decisive moment in the rationalization of social relations in Russia, and therefore also in the emancipation of the personality from the fetters of traditionalism.

This view – which sprang from Kavelin’s interpretation of 16th century Muscovite autocracy in terms of the rationalistic Hegelian state – was later to be developed as the basic thesis of the “etatist” school of Russian historiography. This school, one of whose representatives was the eminent historian S. Soloviev, argued that in Russia the state had always been the leading organizer of society and the main agent of progress, and concluded that in future, too, it must be responsible for the nature and implementation of reforms.

### *Boris Chicherin*

The leading theorist of the “etatist” school was BORIS CHICHERIN (1828-1904), philosopher, historian, jurist, and ideologist of right-wing gentry liberalism in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Chicherin was taught by Granovsky and Kavelin and was also a Hegelian, linked by many associations with the Hegelian period of the 40s (although his own contribution was made later). His philosophical work will be discussed in a later chapter; at present we are only concerned with giving a general outline of his position as a Westernizer.<sup>30</sup>

The Westernism expounded by Chicherin was a blend of the Hegelian cult of the powerful state and juridical order with the economic liberalism of the school of Say and Bastiat. This enabled Chicherin to defend the historical role of Russian autocracy (which, like Kavelin, he interpreted in terms of the Hegelian

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29 Yury Samarin, *Sochineniia* (M, 1877), vol. 1, p. 39.

30 A stimulating analysis of Chicherin’s Westernism is contained in Leonard B. Schapiro, *Rationalism and Nationalism in Russian Nineteenth-Century Political Thought* (New Haven, Conn. 1967).

state) while at the same time speaking up in favor of capitalism and civil rights. The weakness of the state apparatus, his argument ran, and the demands of defense and unification of Russian territory were responsible for the fact that in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries the Muscovite state was forced to deprive the members of all estates of their personal freedom. After political consolidation this process was reversed, beginning with the emancipation of the gentry (The Manifesto on Gentry Liberty, 1762), and it had to lead inevitably to the emancipation of the peasants and the granting of civil rights to wider sections of the population. In this way Chicherin established the historical legitimacy and necessity of liberal measures, while at the same time stipulating that reforms must be gradual and directed by the country's legal government, since their success – and indeed their initiation – depended on the stability and strength of the state.

Following Hegel, Chicherin made a sharp distinction between state and society but tended to interpret all social bonds as contractual bonds. His theory on the origins of the village commune gained wide acceptance: the present-day Russian commune, he argued, had nothing in common with a primitive patriarchal kinship organization; it arose in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, not as an “organic” product of the common people, but as an artificial product of the centralized state that wished to streamline its fiscal policies by forcing villagers to adopt a system of collective responsibility for all kinds of taxes and labor obligations.<sup>31</sup>

In 1856 this argument, which enraged the Slavophiles, initiated a long-drawn-out polemic between the Slavophile *Russian Conversation* [*Russkaia Beseda*] and the liberal *Russian Messenger* [*Russkii Vestnik*]. The controversy had a topical significance, since the basic argument was about whether the village commune was to continue to function or was to be abolished together with the institutions of serfdom and the *corvée*. Chicherin was of course a determined opponent of the *obshchina*: he was convinced – and repeated the argument to the end of his life – that as an institution hampering the normal functioning of economic laws and setting up a state within the state, the peasant commune was the greatest obstacle to the consistent Westernization of Russia.

As a politician Chicherin was less antagonistic to the Slavophiles – with whom he found much common ground on practical issues – than to the democratic opposition and in particular the revolutionary movement. His career

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31 This view was not correct, but it drew attention to the fact that the commune self-government was a very useful institution allowing the central government to exercise control over the villages. In the 1860s, therefore, Kavelin (unlike Chicherin) advocated its retention. The commune, he argued, slows down the development of agriculture, but at the same time it acts as a talisman that protects the peasants against social upheavals.



provides a good example of the evolution of Russian gentry liberalism. Granovsky and the young Kavelin had been close to Belinsky, but although Chicherin had been their student, the Belinsky tradition was alien to him and he actively opposed its continuators.



## **Chapter 9**

# **The Petrashevtsy**

On December 22, 1849, the inhabitants of St. Petersburg were witness to a curious spectacle: twenty-one political prisoners were brought from the Peter and Paul Fortress to Semenovskiy Square and lined up in front of a scaffold draped in crepe. An official read out the death sentences, a priest called on the prisoners to repent, and soldiers dressed each man in the white cloak and hood traditionally associated with executions. The first three men were tied to posts, their faces were covered, the drums began to roll, and the command was given for the soldiers to shoulder arms – but at that very moment an imperial adjutant appeared with a last-minute reprieve. The death sentences were commuted to hard labor in Siberia, prison, or banishment. The condemned men were now ordered to kneel on the scaffold and executioners in colorful robes began the symbolic ceremonial of breaking swords over their bare heads. The leading prisoner was immediately placed in shackles and put in the covered cart that was to take him to Siberia.

This was the method chosen by Nicholas I to deal with the secret discussion groups active in St. Petersburg in the years 1845-49. The main circle from which most of the others had branched off was founded and led by MIKHAIL BUTASHEVICH-PETRASHEVSKY (1821-66). It was he who was publicly shackled in Semenovskiy Square; the other two men who had to face the firing squad were two officers, N. P. Grigoriev and N. A. Mombelli, whom Nicholas could not forgive for “staining the honor of an officer.” Among the remaining eighteen “Petrashevtsy” who had to go through the agony of waiting for their own execution was a young man who was to become one of the greatest writers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – Fyodor Dostoevsky.

### **The Social and Political Ideas of the Petrashevtsy**

Unable to find any evidence of intention to overthrow the state, the imperial investigating commission characterized the Petrashevskiy movement as a “conspiracy of ideas.” For Nicholas I, who was terrified by the recent revolutions in Western Europe, this accusation was sufficiently serious to

warrant the most severe punishment. The suspicious terror aroused in government circles in Russia at that time by the mere shadow of ideas is shown by the fact that the main crime of which Dostoevsky was accused was reading aloud Belinsky's famous letter to Gogol at a meeting of the Petrashevsky circle.

The Petrashevtsy took the study of ideas very seriously. They began collecting books and shortly had the largest multilingual library of works on philosophy, economics, and sociopolitical thought in Russia. They were particularly interested in the French socialists, including Fourier and his followers (especially V. Considerant), Blanc, Proudhon, and Leroux. Books they had read, as well as their own ideas and plans, were systematically discussed at their meetings. The regular Friday gatherings were attended not only by members but by a large circle of invited guests. Unlike the meetings of the Stankevich circle, these were not spontaneous discussions among close friends, but organized regular encounters of people (who often did not even know each other) brought together by a community of interests and the wish to bring about much-needed reforms. Several hundred persons are known to have taken part in the discussions, so that their influence was considerable. The Petrashevtsy represented a far wider social spectrum than the homogeneous Decembrist movement, which had drawn its main support from the officer class. The circle included rich landowners and a number of eminent writers and professors,<sup>1</sup> but according to the report of I. Liprandi (an official of the Ministry of Internal Affairs) there were also "half-baked students, merchants, and even petty tobacconists."

The most important venture undertaken by the Petrashevtsy to propagate their ideas in print was a *Pocket Dictionary of Foreign Terms*,<sup>2</sup> two installments of which were published in 1845 and 1846. The first number was edited by the literary critic Valerian Maikov (with Petrashevsky's help), but the second, which was far more openly ideological in character, was edited by Petrashevsky alone. Many entries in the dictionary were in fact short articles skillfully slipping in various forbidden ideas. The entries "Nature," "Naturalism," and "Natural Philosophy" were used by Petrashevsky to expound his philosophical views; "Owenism," "Organization of Production," "Neo-Christianism," and "Normal State" were used to present socialist ideas; "Neology" and "Innovation" contained reflections on the role of revolutionary change in history; and a

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1 Other members of the Petrashevtsy included the poet A. Pleshcheev, the poet Apollon Maikov, Apollon's brother Valerian, the eminent economist V. A. Muliutin, and the young M. E. Saltykov-Shchedrin (the future satirist).

2 Owing to the intervention of the censor's office, the dictionary had to terminate with the letter "O".

number of other entries, such as “Nation” and “Opposition,” set out the author’s political convictions. The authorities realized too late what was happening – Uvarov, the minister of education, issued a severe reprimand to the censor and ordered the confiscation of the *Dictionary*, but it was too late to prevent the sale of the entire edition.

The prevailing mood of the discussion groups was socialist, and several members even thought of themselves as “communists.” The teaching of the French utopian socialist Fourier enjoyed special popularity. Petrashevsky himself was a convinced disciple of Fourierism and in 1847 even attempted to transform one of his villages into a “phalanstery” – a self-supporting Fourierite commune. His suspicious peasants, however, put an end to the scheme by setting fire to the buildings that were to house their utopian community. At a banquet to celebrate Fourier’s birthday organized by the most active Petrashevtsy in April 1849, speeches were made by Petrashevsky himself, as well as by Aleksandr Khanykov, Dmitry Akhsharumov, and Hipolit Desbout. Khanykov presumably expressed the assembled company’s general mood of enthusiasm and faith in the future regeneration of the world as foretold by Fourier when he called the occasion an “event foreshadowing the metamorphosis of our entire planet and the people dwelling on it.” “The transformation is at hand,” he is said to have called out, and Akhsharumov answered him: “We shall begin the task of transformation here, in Russia, and the whole world will complete it.”<sup>3</sup>

What attracted the Petrashevtsy to Fourier’s social philosophy was his defense of the laws of nature, of the free and harmonious play of human passions – his vision of a social system that would release human nature from all artificial restraints and allow human beings to lead “normal” lives for the first time in history. In this respect, their Fourierism was only another embodiment of the idea of the full emancipation and harmonious development of the personality central to the views of the Russian Westernizers. In view of their characteristically sharp criticism of Western European capitalism, however, it would be an error to classify the Petrashevtsy as Westernizers. Petrashevsky himself said that capitalism was against human nature because it stimulated antisocial instincts and benefitted only the rich while pauperizing the poor. Socialism, on the other hand, was for him not “an invention of modern times, a cunning trick thought up in the 19<sup>th</sup> century,” but something that had “always been a part of human nature and would remain part of it as long as humanity

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3 *Filosofskie i obschestvenno-politicheski proizvedeniia petrashevtssev* (M, 1953), pp. 514, 691.

retained the capacity to evolve and perfect itself.” Liberalism he dismissed as a doctrine defending capitalism, and therefore “the direct opposite” of socialism.<sup>4</sup>

These beliefs could be reconciled with different political programs. A. P. Beklemishev and N. Ia. Danilevsky (the future Pan-Slavist) thought that Fourierism was an apolitical doctrine the Russian government ought to adopt it in its own interest; Beklemishev suggested, for instance, that Fourierist associations could help to bring about a peaceful solution to the conflict between peasants and landowners. Views of this kind were, however, untypical – the overwhelming majority of the Petrashevtsy loathed autocracy and combined belief in socialist ideas with dreams of a democratic republic or, at least, a constitutional monarchy that would guarantee freedom of speech, a free press, and legal reforms, and that would reduce state interference in the private sphere. What was original about the Petrashevsky movement, in fact, was its adoption of a program blending socialist ideas with the struggle for democratic rights.

When it came to putting their program into action, the Petrashevtsy, unlike Fourier and his followers in France, did not condemn or dismiss the possibility of overthrowing the government by force. In practice, however, they believed that there was little hope of a victorious revolution in Russia, and they were afraid that a revolutionary movement might turn into another primitive *Jacquerie*, like the Pugachev revolt. Hence they adopted a policy of legal struggle for partial reforms. Petrashevsky, who was more faithful to the spirit of Fourierism, supported reformism on principle: “Fourierism,” he wrote, “leads gradually and naturally to the same goal that communism wants to introduce at once and by force. [...] It does not aspire to lose in one brief moment of diseased and feverish upheaval – no matter how magnificent – the results of thousands of years of human effort.”<sup>5</sup> Petrashevsky therefore placed greater emphasis on juridical reforms – which would provide at least minimal conditions for the legal struggle for social reforms – than on the abolition of serfdom and the granting of land to the peasants, although he was fully aware of the extreme importance of these latter measures.

The reformist camp was opposed by a radical group led by NIKOLAI SPESHNEV (1821-82), the prototype of Stavrogin in Dostoevsky’s *Demons*. His aim was to convert the movement into a revolutionary organization that would prepare the ground for an armed revolt appealing – unlike the Decembrists – directly to the peasants. Speshnev was not a follower of Fourier but thought of himself as a communist: his reading included Dezamy, Weitling, and Marx’s

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4 This view largely concerned economic liberalism as a doctrine advocating unrestricted competition and opposing government interference in the economic sphere.

5 *Filosofskie i obshchestvenno-politicheskie proizvedeniia petrashevtssev*, p. 379.

*Poverty of Philosophy*. While traveling abroad he established contact with democratic Polish émigré circles.

It was characteristic of the most active Petrashevtsy (among them Petrashevsky himself and Speshnev) that they looked beyond limited national goals and saw cosmopolitanism as a necessary precondition of true progressivism. Petrashevsky's views on the subject, expressed in the entry for "Nation" in the *Pocket Dictionary of Foreign Terms*, did not differ from Maikov's. Elsewhere he wrote that socialism "is a cosmopolitan doctrine standing above nationalities – for the socialist, national differences disappear and only people are left."<sup>6</sup> Though it was not part of the Petrashevtsy's program to encourage the artificial disappearance of national differences, they proclaimed the absolute primacy of universalist aims (although they approved of the principle of self-determination for the subject nations of the Russian empire). At one of their meetings, a leading Polish member, Jan Jastrzębski, declared that he was "body and soul a Pole and would give the last drop of his blood for Polish independence, but if he was convinced that Polish independence would harm the evolution of the universal idea, he would be the first to cut off its head with one blow of the ax."<sup>7</sup>

In the history of the progressive movement in Russia the Petrashevtsy hold a distinct place as an intermediate link between the gentry revolutionaries and the radical movements of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in which the non-noble intelligentsia played a leading part. A typical survival of Decembrist ideas was the tendency of certain Petrashevtsy (Khanykov, for instance) to idealize the "republicanism" of ancient Russia. On the other hand, comparisons between the village commune and Fourier's "phalanstery," and the suggestion that the village was an embryonic socialist community (views of this kind were expressed by Petrashevsky, Golovinsky, Khanykov, and Balasoglo), clearly foreshadowed Populist ideas. The social philosophy of the Petrashevtsy, with its reinstatement of the Enlightenment view of human nature and "natural" social relations, paved the way for the "enlighteners" of the 1860s. Finally, the role of the Petrashevtsy in pioneering socialist ideas in Russia can hardly be overestimated: it is significant, for instance, that the young Chernyshevsky first absorbed socialist ideas from Khanykov in discussion-group meetings that took place at the home of Irinarkh Vvedensky, a friend and in many respects a disciple of Petrashevsky himself.

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6 Ibid., p. 432.

7 *Delo petrashevtssev* (M – L, 1951), vol. 3, p. 431.

## The Philosophical Ideas of the Petrashevtsy

The transitional nature of the Petrashevsky movement is also apparent in their philosophical views. The movement came at a time when philosophical idealism in Europe was giving way to naturalism, as manifested in biological materialism and the positivist cult of science. In Russia, too, the “age of philosophy” was drawing to a close. Leading Russian thinkers such as Belinsky and Herzen were moving beyond Hegelian idealism with the help of Feuerbach’s materialist philosophy.

The entry on “Naturalism” in the second installment of the *Pocket Dictionary of Foreign Terms* can be regarded as Petrashevsky’s most succinct lecture on philosophy. The entry for the term “naturalism” reads:

A science which holds that by thought alone, without the help of tradition, revelation, or divine intervention, man can achieve in real life a state of permanent happiness through the total and independent development of all his natural faculties. In the lower phases of its evolution, naturalism considers the appearance of the divine element in positive religions to be a falsehood, the result of human rather than divine action. In its further evolution, this science – having absorbed pantheism and materialism – conceives divinity as the supreme and all-embracing expression of human understanding, moves toward atheism, and finally becomes transformed into anthropotheism – the science that proclaims that the only supreme being is man himself as a part of nature. At this stage of its rational evolution, naturalism considers the universal fact of the recognition of God in positive religions to be a result of man’s deification of his own personality and the universal laws of his intellect; it considers all religions that reflected the historical evolution of mankind to be a gradual preparation for anthropotheism, or – in other words – total self-knowledge and awareness of the vital laws of nature.<sup>8</sup>

This was no doubt the brand of philosophy favored by Petrashevsky himself, just as there is little doubt that “anthropotheism” in this context stands for the philosophy of Feuerbach. The category of “nature” in Petrashevsky’s philosophy was not derived from 18<sup>th</sup> century rationalism, which he considered to be a lower phase of naturalism. An intermediate phase, superior to the latter in his view, was Fourier’s materialistic pantheism and Hegel’s idealistic pantheism, in which God was conceived as the “universal and supreme formula of human understanding” (Petrashevsky saw nothing contradictory in regarding Hegelianism as a phase of “naturalism,” because he thought of the latter as the antithesis of supra-naturalism, i.e. the standpoint Hegel combated in the name of the immanence of God). The highest phase of “naturalism,” represented by

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8 *Filosofskie i obshchestvenno-politicheskie proizvedeniia petrashevtssev*, pp. 183-84.



Feuerbach, was seen therefore as a culmination of the development of German philosophy.

Speshnev's conception was similar, although he thought atheism rather than anthropotheism was the final negation of "supra-naturalism." In a long letter to the Polish émigré Edmund Chojecki we find the following passage:

The whole of 19<sup>th</sup> century German idealism – the great body of German philosophy from Fichte onward – strives solely toward anthropotheism until, having achieved its culmination in the person of its last standard-bearer and chorus leader – Feuerbach, to be precise – it calls out with him: *Homo homini deus est*, "Man has become a god to men." This doctrine, which originated in Germany, also spread among other nations, though not, of course, as widely as in its homeland. I am thinking here not of those who slavishly imitated Hegelian philosophy outside Germany, but only of the independent intellect of Proudhon in France and Kamieński in Poland. Both were trained in Hegelianism, and the fact that in the case of both these neighbors of Germany Hegelianism appeared as anthropotheism (and moreover at the same time as in Germany), and that both came to this point not knowing Feuerbach, just as Feuerbach did not know them, demonstrates most convincingly that the premises of the deification of man are to be found in Hegel himself, and that the Feuerbachian school is his legitimate heir in Germany.<sup>9</sup>

Feuerbach's "anthropotheism" depended on his "substitution of the human for the divine being," and his promotion of "anthropology to the rank of theology."

The Christian religion, linked the name of man and the divine name in one name, that of God-Man, and in doing so, raised the name of man to the dignity of being an attribute of the supreme being. In keeping with the true state of affairs, the new philosophy transformed attribute into substance, predicate into subject.<sup>10</sup>

The God-Man was thus replaced by the Man-God: "God is man, man is God."<sup>11</sup> Feuerbach expected his message to have a liberating effect – man would straighten his limbs and be reborn, he would reabsorb the divine element that had become alienated from him and focused in the Kingdom of Heaven. At the same time he lost no opportunity of stressing that man as a creature with a body was also subject to the laws of nature. This arose from his violent opposition to spiritualism, which only valued the soul, and Hegelian idealism, which saw man

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9 Ibid., pp. 494-95. Henryk Kamieński (1813-65), philosopher and important ideologist of the radical wing of the Polish national-liberation movement, wrote the book *Philosophy of the Material Economy of Human Society* (in Polish, two vols.; Poznań 1843-45). He claimed in it that working, historically developing mankind was the only Absolute for man.

10 L. Feuerbach, *Vorläufige Thesen zur Reform der Philosophie* (1842).

11 L. Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot, introduced by Karl Barth (New York 1957).

only as a thinking being. Anthropantheism was to be a rehabilitation of nature and of man as a part of that nature, a sensual and passionate being of flesh and blood.

This brief comment makes it easier to understand the combination of Feuerbachian and Fourierist elements so characteristic of the ideology of the Petrashevtsy. It was easy to reject Fourier's pantheistic fantasies and replace them by anthropantheism, since Feuerbach agreed with Fourier on issues that were of prime importance to the Petrashevtsy: the rehabilitation of nature and sensuality, the free and harmonious development of the passions, and the vision of a renaissance of mankind founded on the liberation of human nature and the flowering of all its potentialities. Akhsharumov's speech at the banquet in honor of Fourier is a good example of the organic fusion of Fourierism with the "anthropantheistic" motif of the restoration of divine attributes to man:

We ought to remember what a great task we have undertaken: to restore the laws of nature trampled underfoot by ignorance, to reinstate the divine aspect of man in all its greatness, to liberate and organize his lofty and harmonious passions, which have been curbed and inhibited. To tear down towns and capital cities; to use their bricks and mortar to erect other buildings; to transform a life full of pain, unhappiness, poverty, shame, and humiliation into a life full of splendor, harmony, joy, wealth, and happiness; to cover the face of the earth with palaces and fruits; to adorn it with flowers – behold, that is our goal, our great goal, the greatest of all goals that the earth has ever known.<sup>12</sup>

As this passage shows, Feuerbach's materialism (unlike the vulgarized version developed by Vogt and Moleschott, for which it paved the way) was not bound to be accompanied by positivist "sober-mindedness." On the contrary, it bore the stamp of the age of "social romanticism,"<sup>13</sup> of intense faith in the universal and total regeneration of mankind. On the other hand, Feuerbachian philosophy also contained a tendency that might be called pre-positivism. If the key to an understanding of philosophy (that is idealist philosophy) is theology, and the key to an understanding of theology is anthropology, then the study of human nature must be the most important branch of knowledge. But if we accept that man is a part of nature, subject to the strict causality of universal laws, then the study of human nature is part of the natural sciences and requires the use of scientific methods. This line of reasoning explains why the Petrashevtsy placed so much reliance on the natural sciences, were convinced of the need to study human

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12 *Filosofskie i obshchestvenno-politicheskie proizvedeniia petrashevtsyev*, p. 690.

13 The term applied to various social and religious conceptions of a rebirth of mankind so popular in France in the period 1815-48. One of these was Fourierism, especially the maximalistic ideas of Fourier himself, which easily passed into pure fantasy.

physiology and psychology, and were generally sympathetic to positivist trends in European thought. This “pre-positivism” was especially apparent in the articles by the publicist Valerian Maikov, who was one of the first men in Russia to study the works of Comte, Littré, and John Stuart Mill.

It seems pertinent to ask why this pre-positivist tendency did not oust the romantic flights of anthropotheism and utopian socialism in the Petrashevtsy’s thought. It probably would have done so in the long run, but their discussion groups were only active for a couple of years, too short a time for members to become aware of the potentially conflicting elements in these two trends. A characteristic expression of this duality was Mombelli’s declaration that people would not become “gods on earth” until they had divested themselves entirely of “superstitions and prejudice.”<sup>14</sup> This argument – which echoes Feuerbach’s conviction that men would only be free when they had rejected all illusions – would seem to lead naturally to the conclusion that “superstitions” could only be fought through the use of strict scientific reasoning and through constant reference to the latest discoveries of the natural sciences. In this way the Petrashevtsy became the direct precursors of the rationalism of the 60s, including the “realism” of Dmitry Pisarev. Their world view harmonized with the prevailing trend in Russian literature – at that time represented by the “natural school” – which emphasized the cognitive function of art and favored literary works that would provide a “physiological analysis” of society. The psychologism of the young Dostoevsky also derived from the Petrashevtsy’s postulate of a psychological analysis of human nature.

In order to define the Petrashevtsy’s role in the history of Russian thought, it is necessary to consider the reception of their ideas in the mature writings of Dostoevsky. The polemic with socialism that forms a background to all his great novels is to a large extent an argument carried on with the ideas of the companions of his youth. The main theme of this polemic – the argument that socialism was founded not so much on the desire for social justice as on the vainglorious attempt to put man in the place of God – was no doubt influenced by the anthropotheism Dostoevsky heard about at the discussion groups he attended in his youth.

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14 *Filosofskie i obshchestvenno-politicheskie proizvedeniia petrashevtssev*, p. 623.



# Chapter 10

## The Origins of “Russian Socialism”

Herzen’s “Russian socialism” grew out of the polemics on the roles of Russia and Europe conducted in the 1840s by the Slavophiles and the Westernizers. The Slavophiles claimed to represent the intrinsically “Russian principles” embodied in the village commune, and rejected the rationalism and individualism that, for them, were the hallmarks of Western civilization. The Westernizers, for their part, defended the autonomy of both reason and personality and argued that the emancipation of the individual was closely bound up with the rationalization of social relations. The history of modern Europe seemed to offer a prototype of the individual’s emancipation from external authority and unquestioned traditions, so that it was logical for Westernizers to accept the principle of bourgeois development.

Herzen’s doubts about the correctness of this latter conclusion gave rise to his “Russian socialism.” As a convinced believer in the personality principle, Herzen supported the Westernizers; but even in the first half of the 1840s he was sufficiently influenced by socialist criticisms of capitalism to doubt whether the “Western” way would really lead to the victory of this principle. His first personal contacts with Western Europe convinced him that it was in the grip of a severe crisis and that Russia ought to look for its own, “native” evolutionary road. This was, of course, tantamount to a complete break with Westernism.

### The Evolution of Herzen’s Views

#### *The Crisis of Belief*

After leaving Russia in January of 1847, Herzen made for Paris. Brought up under the influence of French culture from his earliest years, his arrival in the “political and social” capital of Europe meant the fulfillment of a dream. Disillusionment set in quickly: even his first letter to his Moscow friends showed that the middle-class vulgarity of the Paris theater had shocked his aesthetic sensibilities. This aesthetic revulsion, which was not without a tinge of aristocratic superiority, was accompanied by deep moral revulsion. In his *Letters*

from the Avenue Marigny (1847), Herzen defined the social role of the bourgeoisie thus:

The bourgeoisie has no great past and no future. It was good only for a moment, as a negation, as a transition, as an opposite, when it was fighting for the recognition of its rights. [...] The aristocracy had its own social religion; you cannot replace the dogma of patriotism, the tradition of courage, and the shrine of honor by the rules of political economy. There is indeed a religion that is the opposite of feudalism, but the place of the bourgeoisie is between these two religions.<sup>1</sup>

The religion that was the opposite of feudalism was, of course, socialism, the only worthy adversary, in Herzen's view, of the social religion of the nobility. On the other hand, socialism was defeated in the 1848 revolutions, and the bourgeoisie once again emerged victorious. It seemed to Herzen that the failure of the revolutions sealed the fate of Europe, that the bourgeoisie was safely established for many years, and that even Western socialists had become imbued with bourgeois traits – which was why they had failed to seize their great chance. This left Slavdom – and above all Russia – as the last hope of mankind. Herzen now came to see Europe as the reincarnation of Rome in its decline, the European socialists as the persecuted early Christians, and the Slavs as the barbarian tribes who were destined to destroy the Roman Empire and make their own contribution to history, while at the same time becoming standard-bearers of the Christian ideals taken over from Rome.

Herzen's loss of faith in Westernism led him to reappraise Hegelian philosophy. When he left Russia he still thought of himself as a Hegelian, albeit in a very broad sense of the word; he may have attacked man's submission to the *Weltgeist* and put forward a voluntaristic and personalistic interpretation of Hegelian philosophy, but he still retained his faith in the inevitable forward march of history and the rationality of the historical process as a whole. The triumph of the bourgeoisie in 1848 – in fact the very existence of the bourgeoisie – undermined this optimism. The fact that the "social religion" of the aristocracy had been replaced not by the noble faith of socialism but by the mundane and aesthetically repulsive world of shopkeepers seemed to him a glaring contradiction of historical reason.

The crisis of belief Herzen experienced at this time bore fruit in one of his most interesting works, *From the Other Shore*, published in German in 1850. In it the former Hegelian proclaimed that history had no goal, that it was an eternal improvisation, and that each generation was an end in itself. History was guided not by reason but by chance and blind forces. Therefore, "to subordinate the

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1 A. I. Herzen, *Sobranie sochinenii* (30 vols.; M, 1954-65), vol. 5, p. 34.

individual to society, nation, humanity, and an abstract ideal is to go on making human sacrifices, to slaughter the lamb in order to placate the Almighty, to crucify the innocent for the guilty.”<sup>2</sup>

Although history could not be called “rational,” this did not mean that it was not subject to the laws of cause and effect. Only a moralist or sentimentalist would resent history, since whatever happened was clearly necessary. “Necessity,” on the other hand, should not be confused with “rationality” – on the contrary, it was often unreasonable. History was in the grip of blind forces of nature that were necessary in a causal sense, but that did not imply any kind of teleological order. History “rarely repeats itself [...] she uses every chance, every coincidence, she knocks simultaneously at a thousand gates – who knows which may open?”<sup>3</sup> Nothing was predetermined and therefore everything was possible in history.

This new interpretation led inevitably to a questioning of accepted myths: It now appeared to Herzen that to believe in inevitable historical progress was to believe in “a Moloch who [...] as a consolation to the exhausted, doomed multitudes crying *morituri te salutant*, gives back only the mocking answer that after their death all will be beautiful on earth.”<sup>4</sup> After asking what slogans and banners he should now support, Herzen declared simply that he was not looking for a banner, but trying to get rid of one. His new advice was unambiguous: “If only people wanted to save themselves instead of saving the world, to liberate themselves instead of liberating humanity, how much they would do for the salvation of the world and the liberation of humanity.”<sup>5</sup>

This was not the final answer, however. Although Herzen now proclaimed the total destruction of all myths and “faiths,” he was already preparing to take up a new one – faith in Russia and Slavdom, in a “Russian socialism” based on the village commune idealized by the Slavophiles. This faith derived from a voluntaristic philosophy of history that enabled Herzen to reject the Russian Westernizers’ conviction that Russia must pass through the same historical evolution that Western Europe had experienced before her. Although the premises on which “Russian socialism” was founded contradicted the extreme skepticism and pessimism of *From the Other Shore* and its clear message of non-commitment, this contradiction should be seen in dialectical terms. Herzen’s pessimism was that of a Westernizer who had lost his faith in the

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2 Alexander Herzen, *From the Other Shore, and the Russian People and Socialism*, trans. by Moura Budberg, introduction by Isaiah Berlin (London 1956), pp. 134-35.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 36.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 128.

future of Europe. In a discussion between a skeptical observer “from outside” and a disillusioned but emotionally committed idealist, Herzen himself called his despair “the whim of a sulky lover.” Intellectually he supported the skeptic, but in practice he preferred the position of the idealist whose loss of faith in Europe drove him to place his hopes elsewhere: “I can see judgment, execution, death, but I can see neither resurrection nor mercy. This part of the world has done what it had to do; now its strength is exhausted; the people living in this zone have accomplished their mission, they grow dull and backward. The stream of history has evidently found another bed – that is where I am going.”<sup>6</sup>

### *The Concept of “Russian Socialism”*

Herzen elaborated on his concept of “Russian Socialism” in a number of works written mainly in French and destined predominantly for the West European reader – among them: *La Russie* (1849, an open letter to the German Socialist Georg Herwegh), *Lettre d’un Russe a Mazzini* (1849), *Du developpement des idées revolutionnaires en Russie* (1850), *Le Peuple russe et les Socialisme* (1851, an open letter to J. Michelet), *To the Editors of “The Polish Democrat”* (1853, in Polish), *La Russie et le vieux monde* (1854, letters to W. Linton). Writing all those, Herzen was already a political emigrant, having decided to remain abroad and organize free Russian press. He started putting the idea into practice in 1853, by founding the “Free Russian Print Shop” in London (with the help of the Polish Democratic Society). There, since 1855, he published the almanac *Polarnaya Zvezda* (its title referring to the almanac of the Decembrists, published 1823-25), as well as – since 1857 – the periodical *Kolokol* [*The Bell*.] In spite of strict prohibitions and confiscations, Herzen’s publications quickly gained an enormous popularity in Russia, finding access to a wide range of readers, from high school students to employees of the tsarist court.

Herzen’s “Russian Socialism” was, above all, a philosophy of Russian history. It originally combined three concepts: that of the Socialists, that of Chaadaev, and that of the Westernizers of the 1840s, especially Belinsky and Kavelin.

Another powerful influence was that of “the Slavonic idea” as interpreted by Polish Romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz whose lectures on Slavonic literature Herzen discovered in 1844.<sup>7</sup>

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6 Ibid., p. 78.

7 An exhaustive analysis of this issue (ignored by Russian scholars) is proposed in my essay “Alexander Herzen’s ‘Russian Socialism’ as a Response to Polish Revolutionary Slavophilism”, in: A. Walicki, *Russia, Poland and the Universal Regeneration. Studies*



It was from the Slavophiles that Herzen borrowed his view of the peasant commune being the germ of a new, higher form of social life and the conviction that collectivism (in Herzen's terminology: "Socialism" or, indeed, "Communism") was a native feature of the Russian people.

Do not the Slavophiles accept, just as we do, that Socialism has so definitively, so deeply, divided Europe into two hostile camps? It is the bridge on which we can shake hands.<sup>8</sup>

Just like the Slavophiles, Herzen emphasized that the heritage of Roman law with its inherent individualistic idea of ownership was alien to the Russian people; just like them, he appreciated the village commune's self-government, as well as the spontaneity and directness of the human relations within it, doing very well without contracts and written law. Last but not least, just like the Slavophiles, Herzen believed that Russian Orthodoxy was more faithful to the Gospel than Catholicism and that religious isolation was beneficial to the Russian people, since it allowed them to separate their fate from that of the ageing European civilization. It was only thanks to that separation that the Russian people could preserve its community spirit which had saved it from "Mongolian barbarism" and "imperial civilization," allowing it to resist the schemes of authority and to "happily survive to see the development of Socialism in Europe."<sup>9</sup> Socialism, that ultimate result of European thought, came as a "natural immediacy" to Russia. Boastful of its civilization, Europe could learn a lot from the inhabitant of a poor, chimneyless hut, the Russian peasant, who had preserved faith in the principle of community and the "antediluvian" notion of every man's right to a share of the earth and its fruits.

The inspiration of Mickiewicz affirmed that Slavophile influence, while simultaneously altering its meaning, in both a historical-philosophical and political sense. Herzen learned from Mickiewicz that the institution of the village community, treated as a specifically Russian phenomenon by both the Russian Slavophiles and Baron von Haxthausen, had, in fact, a Pan-Slavic genesis.<sup>10</sup> But, above all else, Mickiewicz's vision of the Slavs as a people stigmatized with "the stamp of expectation" and destined to bring rebirth to the falling West, has superimposed itself in Herzen's mind on the visions of crisis

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*on Russian and Polish Thought of the Romantic Epoch*, Notre Dame-London 1991, pp. 1-72.

8 A. Herzen, *Sobranie sochinenii* (30 vols., Moscow 1954-65), vol. 7, p. 118.

9 *Ibid.*, s. 288.

10 See entrances in Herzen's Diary of 1844, with the remarks on "reading the lectures of Mickiewicz at College de France, 1840-1842" (*Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, pp. 333-334 and vol. 7 pp. 241-242).

and rebirth that he had found in the writings of French Romantic Socialists (particularly the followers of Saint-Simon and Pierre Leroux), as well as in Ballanche's theory of social palingenesis, and in August Cieszkowski's philosophy of history, sanctifying futurological divagations. This gave quite a new dimension to the Slavophile issue: the contrast between the Russian past and the Russian present, as well as between ancient Russia and the West, was transformed into a contrast between the old and crumbling Western world and the world of the future which was to be represented by Slavism. The "Slavic idea" could thus be combined with the idea of revolution, which had not been possible with the retrospective, conservative Slavophilism of Kireevsky, Aksakov and their like. It can thus be said that the Polish poet enabled Herzen to transform Muscovite Slavophilism into its revolutionary version, merged with the idea of Pan-Slavic solidarity and harmonious with Western Socialism.

At the same time, however, Mickiewicz's belief in Poland's Messianic leadership evoked Herzen's firm protest. To justify that protest, Herzen recalled the old Orthodox stereotype of "Latinized" Poland that could not represent the true Slavic spirit. He claimed to have discovered proof of that stereotype in Mickiewicz's deep, mystical religiousness which he interpreted (quite wrongly) as an expression of anachronistic Catholic traditionalism. The obvious conclusion was that whatever Mickiewicz said about Poles, was, in fact, true of Russians.<sup>11</sup> For only Russians represented the Slavic values in their unspoiled shape, and only they (unlike Poles) refrained from any meaningful connections or common interests with the crumbling Western world, which allowed them to identify completely with revolutionary hopes.

The conception was thus a kind of response to the two versions of "Slavic ideology" familiar to Herzen. It opposed the Muscovite Slavophilism with the revolutionary one, related to numerous concepts of Mickiewicz. It rejected, however, Mickiewicz's idea of Poland's leading mission in Slavdom, replacing it with a Russo-centric vision in which the role of the "country of the future" and the natural leader of the Slavic peoples was accorded to a revolutionarily reborn Russia.<sup>12</sup>

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11 Herzen expressed the idea directly, observing that only Russia (rather than Poland) could and should realize the Messianic hope: "Etu storonu upovania i gostei, tverdoi nadezhdy v povidimomu biezykhodnom polozenii, dolzhny po pryemushchestvu osushchestvit' my" (*Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, p. 339 – Herzen's diary entry of Marc 5, 1844).

12 See A. Walicki, "Adam Mickiewicz's Paris Lectures and Russian Slavophilism," in Walicki, *Russia, Poland and Universal Regeneration* (Notre Dame-London, 1991).

The element taken over from Chaadaev was the view of Russia as a “country without history” and the conviction (in line with Chaadaev’s *Apology of a Madman*) that this was a matter for congratulation, since it made possible the construction of a future without concern for the past. The absence of deep-rooted traditions (apart from the village commune, which had remained outside history, as it were) and the lack of a “ballast of history” that might have proved a burden to the present generation suggested to Herzen that Russia would find it easy to make a radical break with the “old world.” The Russian monarchy was not part of the European royal tradition; the bureaucratic and alien regime imposed on Russia was a Napoleonic type of despotism and could not even be called conservative, since it destroyed tradition instead of protecting it. Modern Russian history began with the “negation of the past” forced through by Peter the Great, which destroyed “all traditions so thoroughly that no human effort would be capable of restoring them.”<sup>13</sup> Educated Russians had nothing in common with their country’s past; brought up in a cosmopolitan atmosphere and not fettered by any historical traditions, they were the most independent men in Europe. “We are free,” Herzen wrote, “because we start with ourselves [...] we are independent because we possess nothing; we have hardly anything to love, all our memories are steeped in bitterness.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore Russians had everything to gain and nothing to lose in a social upheaval. In fact, in a travesty of Marx’s comment on the proletariat, one might say that Herzen regarded Russia as a proletarian among countries, which had nothing to lose in a revolution but its chains.

There was one other dynamic country that was not held back by its feudal past:

Just look at these two enormous land masses stretching out on both sides of Europe. Why are they so huge? What are they preparing for? What does this devouring appetite for action, for expansion mean? These two worlds that are so unlike, but in whom one cannot but perceive certain analogies, are the United States and Russia.<sup>15</sup>

In 1835 de Tocqueville had already suggested that the future belonged to America and Russia. Herzen agreed, but with the proviso that only Russia would contribute a truly new principle to the history of mankind. America, he wrote, only appeared to be without a history – in reality she was merely Protestant Europe transposed to a new continent. Above all she lacked the Russian

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13 Herzen, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 7, p. 332.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., vol. 12, pp. 136-39.

“courage of negation” that Herzen described with such a mixture of pride and bitterness in his open letter to Michelet:

There are already enough impositions that we are forced to endure, without our making the position worse by imposing new ones on ourselves of our own free will [...] we bow to brute force; we are slaves because we have no way of freeing ourselves; but whatever happens, we shall accept nothing from the enemy camp.

Russia will never be Protestant.

Russia will never choose the *juste-milieu*.

Russia will not stage a revolution with the sole aim of ridding herself of Tsar Nicholas only to replace him by a multitude of other Tsars – Tsar-deputies, Tsar-tribunals, Tsar-policemen, Tsar-laws.<sup>16</sup>

In his articles at this time, Herzen did not suggest that the absence of history combined with the native communism of the Russian peasant were sufficiently strong in themselves to bring about the expected and desired social upheaval. Left to itself, the village commune was a static and conservative institution that stifled individuality and personal independence. In his concern for individual freedom, at least, Herzen remained consistently faithful to his earlier ideals. What was needed, therefore, was an active force capable of awakening the peasant and breathing new life into the commune. This force was the “principle of individualism,” embodied for the first time in Peter the Great, the “crowned revolutionary,” the Tsar-Jacobin who had denied tradition and nationality.<sup>17</sup>

This view of Peter the Great clearly harked back to the Westernizing conceptions of the 40s: to Belinsky’s argument that the Petrine reforms had contributed a dynamic element to Russian reality, and to Kavelin’s interpretation of the reforms as “the first phase in the realization of the personality principle in Russian history.” Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Herzen argued, the tsarist system had exerted a civilizing influence and had encouraged the emancipation of the individual by creating a Westernized elite that began by supporting the government but later turned against it. The turning point was the Decembrist uprising: whereas Peter’s autocracy had been a “progressive dictatorship,” the bureaucratic and “German” despotism in post-Decembrist Russia became an unmistakably reactionary force. This meant that the new carriers of the personality principle were the enlightened gentry, who had helped the government create “a European state within the Slavic state,” and who had experienced all the successive phases of the evolution of European self-

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16 Herzen, *From the Other Shore*, p. 200.

17 Herzen, *Sobraniie sochinenii*, vol. 12, p. 156.

consciousness.<sup>18</sup> Herzen made the point that in Russia the “educated middle class” – and indeed anyone who was “no longer part of the common people” – should be considered part of the gentry. The section of society that was to be the “hotbed and intellectual focus of the future revolution”<sup>19</sup> was, therefore, not the gentry as a landowning class but its educated members – the intelligentsia of the gentry – whose “universalist upbringing” had uprooted them from the “immoral soil” and, by alienating them from their own social class, turned them into opponents of official Russia.<sup>20</sup>

The future of Russia thus depended on whether it would prove possible to fuse the communism of the common man with the personality principle represented by the intelligentsia. For Herzen, this was tantamount to fusing native Russian principles with European achievements, especially with the individual liberty characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon countries. As the carrier of the personality principle, the Russian intelligentsia was a product of Westernization and heir to European civilization. Although certain quotations taken out of context have been used to suggest otherwise, Herzen’s Russian socialism was to be not merely the antithesis of Europe but also a synthesis preserving everything that was best in the European heritage.

Herzen did not suppose that Russian socialism was historically inevitable. There were other possibilities, he suggested: perhaps communism, that “Russian despotism in reverse,” would be victorious; perhaps the tsarist system would transform itself into a “social and democratic despotism.”<sup>21</sup> Or perhaps Russia would swoop on Europe, destroy the civilized nations, and perish together with them in a universal holocaust. History, Herzen stressed, had no predestined paths; it allowed humanity to select one among a number of possible choices and to fight for its implementation.

The motto of Russian socialism – “preserve the community while liberating the individual”<sup>22</sup> – was essentially a restatement of Herzen’s long-standing concern with the problem of achieving freedom without alienation, of reconciling a sense of autonomy with a sense of belonging. In the 1840s he had postulated the reconciliation of the particular with the universal in Hegelian terms; a few years later the same problem occurred in a different context, but we may safely assume that in both instances Herzen was concerned with satisfying the same psychological need.

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18 Ibid., vol. 7, p. 297.

19 Ibid., vol. 6, p. 215.

20 Ibid., vol. 12, pp. 155, 188-89.

21 Ibid., p. 197.

22 Ibid., p. 156: “Censerver la commune et rendre l’individu libre.”

*The Destiny of the "Old World"*

Herzen's reflection on Russia's history and future was closely connected with his bitter visions of the present and the future of the "old world."

In his article *La Russie* (published August 25, 1849), as an open letter to Georg Herwegh in the German version of *From the Other Shore*, Herzen declared that he was ashamed of his quite recent idealization of Western Europe and was not going to tolerate the unfairness of those publicists who saw despotism only in Russia. For however awful life in Russia might be, life in Europe was by no means less awful.<sup>23</sup> Following the experience of the revolutionary years 1848-49, it was a disgrace to "stop at the viewpoint of narrow liberal constitutionalism, that platonic and jejune love of politics."<sup>24</sup> Constitutional and political freedom was a mere fiction, while freedom of the individual and social freedom was not obtained anywhere – not even in the United Kingdom or Switzerland. Republicanism was thus an illusion, preached to divert attention from the crucial issue, namely, the impossibility of further existence of the "old world" and an urgent need for a resuscitating catastrophe.<sup>25</sup>

Herzen signed the text with the cryptonym "The Barbarian," making an obvious allusion to the idea of "new barbarians" developed, among others, by Mickiewicz in his Paris lectures. In Herzen's mind, Europe came to resemble the falling Rome, with the European Socialists as a modern version of persecuted Roman Christians, and the Slavs – of the barbarians who were destined to destroy the Roman Empire in order to inject history with their own element,

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23 Ibid., p. 44-45.

24 Of the fruitlessness of "political revolutions," aimed merely at a change in political systems (unlike the "social revolution," i.e., a radical change of ownership relations and the social hierarchy that was based upon them, Herzen had been convinced by P.J. Proudhon. On Herzen's close contacts at that time with Proudhon and his periodical *La Voix du Peuple*, see: R. Labry, *Herzen et Proudhon*, Paris 1928; M. Malia, *Alexander Herzen*, pp. 322-325 and 391-392; Judith E. Zimmerman, *Midpassage: Alexander Herzen and European Revolution 1847-1852*, Pittsburgh 1989, Chapter 5.

25 Herzen's profound disillusionment with the West had also a personal dimension, namely, a love-affair between the letter's addressee – German revolutionary poet Georg Herwegh – and Herzen's beloved wife, Natalia. Despite the principle of women's liberation which he preached himself, and notwithstanding Natalia's own expectations, Herzen refused to accept that liaison. Herwegh was outraged, accusing Herzen of keeping his wife in "bourgeois fetters" and attacking him as a representative of the "old world." The tension caused by Herwegh's aggressiveness-cum-cowardice provoked in Herzen a general dislike of Western people, especially Germans. See, E.H. Carr, *The Romantic Exiles. A Nineteenth Century Portrait Gallery*, Boston 1961 (first printed in London, 1933), Ch. III-IV.

while simultaneously becoming the bearers of the Christian idea, taken over from Rome.

A somewhat paradoxical argument in support of the idea, uneasy to reconcile with anarchy-oriented traits of “Russian Socialism,” was Herzen’s high opinion of the power of a Russian national movement that manifested itself in a state-building instinct and lively expansionism. In his brochure *On the Development of Revolutionary Ideas in Russia*, Herzen proudly observed that the Russians were the only Slavs to “distinguish themselves by a persistent striving toward establishing an independent, powerful state.”<sup>26</sup> To support his thesis with facts, Herzen observed that the Russian statehood idea „could be rediscovered, a thousand years later, in Tsar Nicholas” and was easily recognizable in the “*penchant* for conquering Byzantium.”<sup>27</sup> In *A Russian’s Letter to Mazzini* (November 1849), he was persuading the Italian revolutionist that the dream of Byzantium expressed the historical validity of Russia’s Slavic mission – that it was just an instinct, a physiological law, a destiny.<sup>28</sup> Tsar Nicholas was afraid of that mission – “instead of appealing to the kindred nations, he rejects them; instead of heading the Slavs’ movement, he offers his help and gold to the Slavs’ executioners.”<sup>29</sup> And yet, the conquest of Constantinople was Russia’s irrevocable destiny, an “organic natural teleology” of Russian statehood. The mission was at that moment the only *raison d’être* for the tsarist empire, but its fulfillment would open a new era in the history of Russia and Slavdom:

When the imperial eagle returns to its old motherland, it will never show up again in Russia. The conquest of Constantinople will mark the beginning of a new Russia, of a democratic and social Slav federation.<sup>30</sup>

Let us note that Herzen resumed this topic on the eve of the Crimean War. His brochure *Russia and the Old World* ends with the statement:

In either case, the war will be an *introduzione maestosa e marziale* [a glorious, military entrance] of the Slavic world into universal history, and *una marcia funebre* [a funeral march] for the old world.<sup>31</sup>

On the grounds of such statements, many Western revolutionaries, Karl Marx included, began to treat Herzen as a Pan-Slavic imperialist<sup>32</sup> – obviously

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26 A. Herzen, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 7, p. 28.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., vol. 6, pp. 224-225.

29 Ibid., p. 228.

30 Ibid., p. 230.

31 Ibid., vol. 12, p. 200.

oversimplifying the case, since the term “Pan-Slavism” should be reserved for right-wing ideologies analogous to “Pan-Germanism.” In Herzen’s ideology, however, the accent is placed on the universally defined social question, rather than on the national one. The fact by no means weakens the anti-Occidental character of his “Russian Socialism.” On the contrary – *Russia and the Old World* summarizes Herzen’s project by combining the Russian question with the global one and thus postulating Russia’s central place in universal history.<sup>33</sup>

Herzen’s diagnosis was based on his conviction that, following the defeat of the 1846-47 revolutions in Europe, Russia remained the only hope for mankind:

Raw simplicity has replaced complications; there are only two really important questions:

the social question,

the Russian question.

And the two, in fact, come down to one.<sup>34</sup>

Since Western nations had exhausted their vitality, the only chance for further development was “the emergence of new barbarians, calling out the *memento mori* to the old world.” In other words, “if revolutionary Socialism does not put an end to the falling society, Russia will put an end to it.”<sup>35</sup>

Russia’s crushing defeat in the Crimean War, however, cut short those hopes. Herzen promptly arrived at the conclusion that a common future for Europe and Russia could not be counted upon – not only because the potential “new barbarians” had demonstrated their weakness but, above all, because Europe turned out to be a stabilized civilization, rather than a civilization in crisis: it was fully mature, far from collapse and rid of any trace of revolutionary negation.

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32 In 1855, Marx refused to take part in a rally organized by the Chartists because he did not wish to appear in Herzen’s company, and in the annex to the first German edition of *Capital* he described Herzen as “a half-Russian, but a complete Muscovite” who prophesied the need to “rejuvenate Europe by means of a knout and a forced injection of Kalmuk blood” (quoted from *Pierepiska K. Marksa i F. Engelsa s russkimi politicheskimi dieyatelami*, Moscow 1951, p. 293). The words were removed from later editions of *Capital*.

33 According to Mikhail Agursky, the combination of national patriotism and Socialism was precursory to “national bolshevism” (the ideology he considered to be his own). See M. Agursky, *The Third Rome. National Bolshevism in the USSR*. With a Foreword by Leonard Shapiro, Boulder and London 1987, pp. 11-15.

34 A. Herzen, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 12, p. 177.

35 Ibid.



Herzen gave an elaborate justification of his new judgment on the current state of Western civilization in a series of articles entitled *Endings and Beginnings* (1862-1863) which constituted a polemic with Ivan Turgenev – a writer who became the flagship figure in the Russia of the day, as well as the leader of the liberal Westernizers. Herzen tried to convince the author of *Fathers and Sons* that a belief in the West no longer had sense in Russia, since all the European ideas – of progress, republic and democracy – crumbled in 1848. Philosophy was no longer absolute, constitution turned out to be a lie. There were no more ideals in the Western world, no more utopias that might incite people to perform mighty deeds – only the conflicts of national egotisms had remained, and the bare interests of states.

It all happened because Western nations had nearly attained maturity, reaching the state of equilibrium and stabilization which terminates the process of development. This “mature age” of European civilization was associated by Herzen with *the middle class*. The victory of the middle class meant the victory of “a thousand-headed hydra, ready to listen to anything, look at anything, wear anything, devour anything” – it was a victory for a “self-governed crowd, a tightly knit mediocrity; of that *conglomerated mediocrity* that had awed J.S. Mill.<sup>36</sup> The victory had a profound justification. The crowd that “buys everything and therefore controls everything,” “breaks all the dams, fills everything to the brim, overflows its banks,” “is satisfied with everything and never has enough of anything” epitomizes success and power: the middle class kills beauty and blurs personality, but it augments prosperity. People who like merchandise become wholesale, common, cheap and inferior as individuals, but they are more numerous and powerful as a mass. This social promotion of the masses is the reason why “the middle class shall win and should win.” You cannot say to a hungry man: “hunger becomes you better, do not look for food.”<sup>37</sup>

That diagnosis distinguished Herzen from both the West-idolizing Westernizers, and the ideologists of Russian Populism. To the Populists who were, in this respect, Marx’s disciples, capitalism equaled forced expropriation and proletarianization of the small producer – an increasing contrast between “national wealth” and misery of the people; nothing was more alien to them than the notion of capitalism as a state of stabilization and balance achieved thanks to the social advancement of the masses. The Populists were horrified by the cruelties of primitive accumulation and by the high price paid for capitalist industrialization, whereas Herzen, in his somewhat aristocratic criticism of

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36 Ibid., vol. 16, p. 141.

37 Ibid., p. 138.

middle-class civilization, viewed capitalism as if from the other end: from the perspective of the *result* of industrialization, i.e., economical production of cheap goods, mass consumerism and their social consequences. Countering the common conviction of an increasing pauperization of the proletariat, he argued that, in Western countries, the worker was a future member of the middle class – an undoubtedly original cognitive perspective back in the 1860s.

Herzen obviously presumed that the Russian Turgenev-type liberals, originating from the idealist generation of the 1840s, would not be willing to take part in the transfer of middle-class patterns to Russia. He therefore believed that he would discredit Westernism in the eyes of the Russian intelligentsia by showing the indissoluble connection between Europeanism and the self-satisfied middle-class mentality.<sup>38</sup>

### *Freedom and Necessity*

As was mentioned earlier, Herzen's theory of "Russian socialism" was preceded by an intensification of the voluntaristic elements in his world view. Both before and after 1848, he rebelled against a teleologically conceived historical necessity, against allegedly objective laws of history that appeared to force individuals and nations to take a predetermined path. He developed his new ideas in the book *From the Other Shore*: here his passionate denial of the "rationality" of the historical process and his emphasis on the role of accident and "improvization" were expressions not only of the collapse of his previous optimistic view of history but also of the urge to create a philosophy of history that would leave a larger margin for free and conscious personal choice.

At the same time, certain themes associated with philosophical naturalism also made their appearance in *From the Other Shore*. Having rejected belief in the guidance of events by a rational spirit, Herzen now turned history into a battleground where man struggled against the blind forces of nature. Some years

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38 As for Turgenev himself, the expectation was erratic since he no longer cherished any illusions, either for Europe, or for mankind in general. He never questioned Herzen's description of the Western middle class, observing however that the pessimistic judgement of the West ought to be extended to "all the two-legged creatures" and advising Herzen to study Schopenhauer. Herzen's hopes for Russia were, in Turgenev's opinion, illusory, since Russia belonged to the genus *europaeum* and there was no reason to assume that its future developments would be different from those of Europe. The Russian peasant had the makings of "a bourgeois in a tanned sheepskin coat" – a type far more repulsive than the West-European bourgeois (see *Pis'ma K.D. Kavelina i I.S. Turgeneva k A.I. Gercenu*, ed. by M. Dragomanov, Geneva 1892, pp. 169-172).

earlier, in his philosophy of action, Herzen had been drawn to the naturalism of Feuerbach as a philosophy that defended natural immediacy against the one-sided domination of the universal. But after 1848, under the influence of positivist trends in Europe, he came to regard naturalism as a philosophy that demanded a scientific explanation of all phenomena. In the 1860s, he therefore attempted (especially in *Ends and Beginnings*) to provide a scientific groundwork for his theory of Russian socialism. By emphasizing that his conceptions were supported by the “natural, physiological approach to history,” he was in fact trying to cut the ground from under his opponents’ feet.

In support of his own theories Herzen now stressed the *multiplicity of evolutionary choice in nature*, which (he insisted) was proof that there was no “law of physiology” requiring Russia to develop along the same lines as Europe: “The overall evolutionary design permits an infinite number of unforeseen modifications like the elephant’s trunk or the camel’s hump.”<sup>39</sup> Different animal species evolved until they achieved their final form. By analogy, Europe had evolved into its finished form – the bourgeois state. Russia, on the other hand, was an organism whose evolution was not yet completed and whose future shape was still uncertain. Western Europe had adapted itself to the bourgeois system, just as fish had adapted themselves to life in water and breathing through gills; this did not mean that Russia’s fate was already determined, even if she showed certain early symptoms of capitalist developments. Herzen used the evolution of the duck to illustrate this point: “There was a moment of hesitation when the aorta did not form a downward loop but branched outwards, showing a certain tendency to form gills; however, backed by its physiological inheritance, habit, and evolutionary opportunity, the duck did not remain at the stage of the less complex system of respiratory organs but developed lungs.”<sup>40</sup> With such examples drawn from natural history, Herzen – several years before Nikolai Danilevsky – tried to oppose the dominant unilinear and Eurocentric concept of social evolution.

However, in contrast to Danilevsky, Herzen was not quite consistent in his ideological pursuit. The naturalistic theory of history played an auxiliary and subordinate part in his worldview; he could not set it as a foundation as it would have thus collided with his axiology.

Herzen’s ideal was a human and universal one. The universalistic motif played a very important part in his arguments on behalf of “Russian socialism.” Thinking Russian people must oppose the development of capitalism in Russia, he insisted, one of the reasons being that humanity had already found a higher

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39 A. Herzen, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 16, p. 196.

40 *Ibid.*, pp. 196-197.

ideal – the ideal of socialism – and “the work done, the effect achieved, have been done and achieved on behalf of all who understand them; that is the solidarity of progress, humanity’s entailed estate.”<sup>41</sup> This argument ran counter to the naturalistic premises of the philosophy of history put forward in *Ends and Beginnings*, which assumed that no thing such as “solidarity of progress” could in fact exist; frog and hen evolved along different lines, and so did Russia and Western Europe; there was no common yardstick by which their development could be measured and compared; each species developed its own “entelechy” and forged ahead according to the laws of its own “organic natural teleology.”

Furthermore, and no less importantly, the naturalistic philosophy of history was based on a strictly “physiological” determinism and thus clashed with Herzen’s conviction that human beings were, or should be, masters of their own fate. If historical evolution was only an “extension of organic evolution,” and if the development of a given society, nation or civilization could essentially be compared (as Herzen compared it) to the evolution of a reptile or bird whose final shape was predetermined (even taking into account all possible permutations) by the properties of the embryo or egg, then it was hardly possible to talk of the “sovereign independence of the individual” or of the conscious and creative guidance of the course of history.

During his years as a political émigré, Herzen was too absorbed by his day-to-day political work to have time to consider and systematize his theoretical views. It must occasionally have occurred to him, however, that a naturalistic philosophy of history and a positive belief in scientific solutions could not easily be reconciled with earlier and more essential elements in his world view. In his later years, at least, he showed increasingly that he was aware of this potential conflict.

An interesting document in this respect is the letter to his son (who was a naturalist) written in 1868 with a view to publication and usually referred to as the *Letter on Free Will*. This document shows that Herzen’s ideas had changed significantly, and in particular that he had come to question the adequacy of the natural sciences as a tool for understanding social developments, especially the philosophy of history. “Physiology,” Herzen wrote to his son, “has more than adequately fulfilled its task by taking man apart into innumerable actions and reactions and reducing him to a web, a welter of reflexes. Now it should allow sociology to recreate him in his totality. Sociology will snatch man from the dissecting room and restore him to history.”<sup>42</sup>

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41 Ibid., vol. 12, p. 159.

42 Ibid., vol. 20, p. 439.

The fundamental difference between a naturalistic and sociological conception of man, Herzen argued, lies in the issue of free will. From the “physiological” point of view a sense of free will is only a delusion, whereas from the point of view of sociology it has far greater significance. In contrast to the physiological self, which is only a certain “fluid form of organic functions,” the sociological self “postulates the existence of consciousness, and the conscious self can neither react to stimuli nor engage in activity unless it assumes that it is free, i.e. that within certain limits it has the choice of doing or not doing something.” This sense of freedom is a necessary attribute of the consciousness of men who have “awoken from a brutish dream” and become the substance of history. The idea of freedom, therefore, must be understood as the “phenomenological necessity of human reason, as a psychological reality.”<sup>43</sup>

It is fairly obvious that Herzen’s line of argument did not aim to do away with the contradiction between physiological determinism and human freedom – on the contrary, this contradiction was raised to the status of an insoluble Kantian antinomy. Not only did Herzen put aside the notion of the reconciliation of theory and practice he had held in the 40s, but he now found philosophical arguments in favor of the very dualism – the split between “theoretical” and “practical” reason – he had once opposed. Nevertheless, Herzen followed Kant in recognizing the primacy of “practical reason” and thus remained faithful to the basic intentions of his philosophy of action. Objective truth – the thing in itself – was still the *magnum ignotum*, but at least moral freedom was an “anthropological reality.” As such, it was no less real to human beings than time or space.

For all its weaknesses, this solution encouraged the rejection of all theories that advised radicals in the name of “objective laws” of physiology, history, or economics to become reconciled to inevitable facts and abandon the struggle to realize their “utopian” aims. At a time when science was frequently quoted in support of the thesis that socialism would only be possible in Russia in the distant future, Herzen’s interpretation of the problem of freedom and necessity had great appeal to the majority of Russian socialists. In fact, it was this theory that was at the root of the so-called “subjective” method in sociology developed at about the same time by Petr Lavrov and Nikolai Mikhailovsky, the leading theorists of Russian Populism.

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43 Ibid., p. 443.

*To an Old Comrade*

Herzen's political outlook was to undergo yet another significant shift after the Russian reforms of the 60s. Before the death of Tsar Nicholas I, as an armchair philosopher unable to influence the course of events, Herzen found it easy to preach unswerving radicalism, prophesy imminent disaster, and proclaim proudly that Russia would never choose the *juste-milieu*. After 1855 he was more willing to compromise: he appealed to the new emperor to take the chance of furthering "bloodless progress"; he welcomed every step forward, however minor; he adopted a number of "half measures" or "makeshift" postulates in his political program; and he was even ready to accept the continued existence of the monarchy provided the most urgent reforms were put into effect. Thanks to this change of front, Herzen now found supporters among a far wider cross section of society – among people who were in favor of reforms but certainly not of revolutionary changes. At the same time, under the impact of its large readership *The Bell* was inevitably obliged to become a mouthpiece of public opinion; this introduced an eclectic note, and a compliance with currently prevailing moods and the accepted views of the "reform camp" in the widest sense of the word.

Understandably enough, all this brought about a rapprochement between Herzen and the Russian liberals, which was further encouraged by certain differences Herzen had with the radicals. Herzen felt that Chernyshevsky and Dobroliubov were too sharp in their rejection of the liberal traditions of the progressive gentry, and guilty of a dogmatic judgment in their dismissal of the "superfluous" generation of the 1840s. These differences, however, should not be exaggerated: on all political issues Herzen sided with Chernyshevsky's young radicals rather than with the gentry liberals. When the first revolutionary organization since the Decembrist movement was set up in 1861, it included among its founders Herzen and Ogarev as well as Chernyshevsky, and it called itself "Land and Freedom" [*Zemlia i Volia*] after the motto of Herzen's *The Bell*.

Soon, however, events were to put an end to Herzen's great popularity and widespread influence inside Russia. The most important of these events was the Polish uprising of 1863. Herzen had always accepted as "dogma" the Polish nation's unquestionable right to independence and the "need for a revolutionary Russo-Polish alliance." By his unswerving loyalty to this principle in 1863, Lenin was to write later, he saved the "honor of Russian democracy." Although he had serious doubts about the likelihood of its success, Herzen at once put his entire moral and political authority behind the insurrection and placed his energy and journalistic talent at the disposal of the Polish cause. His pessimistic forecasts were soon to be proved correct. In Russia the uprising stimulated a

wave of chauvinism that – thanks to the government’s skillful propaganda and the violently anti-Polish campaign unleashed by the nationalistic press (led by Katkov’s *Moscow News*) – even affected certain sections of progressive circles. Formerly enthusiastic readers of *The Bell* became susceptible to demagogic arguments portraying the uprising as a reactionary movement among the gentry aimed at imposing Polish rule over the Ukraine and Belorussia and at preventing land reform in Poland. Objective observers who understood the justice of the Polish demands and agreed with Herzen were forced to remain silent while *The Bell* was loudly attacked (from all sides) for its betrayal not only of the national interest but even of socialism and democracy. Its circulation fell rapidly and never again reached its previous high level.

As a matter of fact, Herzen’s attitude towards the Polish uprising was not free from deep ideological contradictions. His desire for an alliance of Russia and Poland was combined with his seeing the Poles at “Latinized” Slavs, too overburdened with the traditions of the Catholic nobility to be able to truly break off from the “old world.”<sup>44</sup> Herzen’s reflections on the failure of the uprising are an eloquent example of this. He decried the great human tragedy, moral catastrophe and brutal suppression of legitimate aspirations for freedom, but at the same time called it a defeat of the “old” gentrified world, and so saw it as historically justified and deserved. He supported the Polish insurgents for moral reasons but believed that the Russian peasantry represented the “new world” – including in his vision peasants in tsarist military uniforms. He was convinced that “historic Poland” had fallen for good and would only be reborn as a “people’s Poland” – as a result of the Russian revolution and with Russia’s help.<sup>45</sup>

After the uprising had been quelled and passions had died down, further disappointments were in store for Herzen. In particular he was embittered by misunderstandings and quarrels with the group known as the “young emigration.” There were many grounds for mutual suspicion. The young radical

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44 The Polish democrats reacted negatively to this view and it hindered the practical realisation of the idea of a “Polish-Russian revolutionary alliance.” Herzen devoted much attention to this difficulty in his memoirs (*My Past and Thoughts*, trans. by Constance Garnett (London 1927), not sparing even his great friend Stanisław Worcella (who completely did not deserve the characteristic of being a traditional Polish patriot attributed to him). Despite the good will and generosity of both sides, the cooperation of Herzen with the Polish democratic émigrés was beset with misunderstandings and even conflict. See my book, *Russia, Poland and Universal Regeneration*, Notre Dame-London 1991, pp. 39-72.

45 See Herzen’s article “What Now?” written in 1864 (in Herzen, *Sobranie Sochinenii*, vol. 18, pp. 302-304).

*raznochintsy* accused Herzen of aristocratic high-handedness, lukewarm liberalism, and a reluctance to make personal sacrifices for the sake of revolution. Herzen, for his part, accused them of political recklessness and dishonest tricks in obtaining money for irresponsible ventures. He was offended by their lack of manners and “unceremonious brusqueness” which showed, he thought, that they had not succeeded in shaking off the bad habits of their early environment. Despite many attempts to reach some kind of mutual rapprochement, a final split proved unavoidable.

Herzen’s bitterness and sense of isolation were aggravated by the fact that his attitude to the young émigrés was not always understood by his closest collaborators. Bakunin’s authority and influence increased rapidly, although his views were sharply attacked by the Russian Section of the First International. Even Ogarev felt more at home among the young émigrés than Herzen (indeed, he largely shared their views). In the year before Herzen’s death this difference once more became sharply accentuated in the Nechaev affair.<sup>46</sup> Despite appeals by both Bakunin and Ogarev, Herzen refused to hand over money to Nechaev that had been left with him by a certain Bakhmetiev for use in the revolutionary cause. The outcome of the Nechaev affair convinced even Bakunin that his friend’s skepticism had been justified, but by then Herzen was no longer alive.

Herzen’s critical and profoundly skeptical view of the Russian revolutionaries of the late 60s, as well as his intimate knowledge of the organizational successes of the labor movement in Western Europe, prompted him to change his mind once more. He analyzed the motives that led him to this in the cycle *Letters to An Old Comrade* (1869), ostensibly addressed to Bakunin

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46 Sergei Nechaev (1847–82), the founder of the highly centralized and clandestine revolutionary organization known as “The People’s Vengeance,” pretended to be a representative of the International and a member of an All-Russian Revolutionary Committee; he was helped in this by Bakunin, who gave him a special warrant with the stamp of a nonexistent “Alliance Revolutionnaire Europeenne, Comité General.” Nechaev’s *Catechism of a Revolutionary* advocated ruthless and unscrupulous methods of struggle. The revolutionary, it declared, despises and hates the existing social ethic: “for him, everything that allows the triumph of the revolution is moral, and everything that stands in its way is immoral” (quoted in F. Venturi, *Roots of Revolution* [London 1960], p. 366). This rule was applied in the case of Ivan Ivanov, a member of Nechaev’s organization, who was “sentenced to death” and killed in 1869 because he suspected Nechaev’s credentials and protested against his methods. His assassination enabled the police to pick up the trail of “The People’s Vengeance” and to arrest its members. The trial in St. Petersburg in 1871 aroused great indignation in both Russia and the West. The reactionary press (and also Dostoevsky in *Demons*) utilized it to discredit the revolutionary movement as a whole.



but essentially a polemic against the views he himself had held after the tragic events of 1848-49, when his disappointment with Western Europe was at its height.

The doctrine of Russian Socialism stemmed from Herzen's unusually strong conviction that his own age was some kind of decisive turning point. It seemed to him that the old world was about to collapse and that Western Europe, like ancient Rome, would go under in a great historical catastrophe in which the Russians would play the role of the new barbarians. In his *Letters to an Old Comrade*, this catastrophic vision has given way to a far more moderate judgment. In fact, Herzen no longer prophesies the imminent collapse of bourgeois society: the newly emerging world is not yet complete, he argues, and the old order is still soundly established on strong moral as well as material foundations; attempts to overthrow it by force will only result in ruin, stagnation, and disorder.

After you have blown up bourgeois society, when the smoke has settled and the ruins have cleared away, what will emerge – with certain modification – is just *another form of bourgeois society*.<sup>47</sup>

This new view of the future involved a characteristic shift in Herzen's philosophy of history from voluntarism to renewed emphasis on necessity and the internal consistency of historical processes. Every historical formation, he now argued, was once the "supreme truth" of its age:

Private property, Church, State – all were once powerful training grounds serving the liberation and development of mankind; they will be left behind when they cease to be necessary.<sup>48</sup>

Only enterprises that were in harmony with the internal rhythm of historical evolution were likely to succeed. In the heat of the argument with Bakunin, Herzen went so far as to quote Hegel's paradox that even slavery could be a step toward freedom.

Herzen accepted the decisive role played by economic processes, but unlike Bakunin concluded that social changes must ripen slowly and could only be accelerated to the extent that a midwife helps to hurry up the birth of a child. His determinism was not, however, purely mechanical and only appeared to contradict his earlier view put forward in the *Letter on Free Will*: it was not a return to Hegelian idealism, but neither was it a concession to "economism," which assumed that changes took place automatically, without the participation of human will or consciousness. Economic changes, Herzen argued, make

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47 Herzen, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 20, part 2, p. 577.

48 Ibid., p. 580.

headway *solely* by impressing the will and consciousness of the masses, so that will and consciousness form an indispensable link of the chain we call the historical process. Bakunin's revolutionary anarchism was unacceptable not because it exaggerated the role of human will and consciousness in history, but on the contrary because it ignored them and attempted to impose the revolutionary's own will on the masses. This "petrograndism," as Herzen called it, could at best lead to the "galley slave equality" of Babeuf, or the "communist serfdom" of Cabet. Herzen's new view of history entailed not belief in "*objective*" (or in other words immutable) laws determining the movement of events, but only recognition of the fact that the conscious will of even the most emancipated individual is of far less significance than the historically conditioned consciousness and will of the masses.

The practical implication of this view was that Herzen came to favor gradual reform rather than revolution. Since economic changes (and the changes in outlook accompanying them) take place gradually, and "it is not possible to liberate people further in their external circumstances than their *inner* freedom permits,"<sup>49</sup> the most urgent task was to influence the consciousness of the masses, to hasten – but without omitting necessary stages – the process of "inner liberation." Argument ought to replace "crude force," Herzen wrote; "apostles are of more use to us than officers of the advance guard."<sup>50</sup> He was determined to make his meaning quite clear:

I do not believe in the old revolutionary ways and try to understand the *human pace* in the past and in the present; this means not being left behind but not running ahead either, far ahead where people will not and cannot keep up with me.<sup>51</sup>

This reappraisal was part of Herzen's renewal of faith in Europe and, in particular, in the European working class. In the *Letters to an Old Comrade* Herzen made several references to the International Workingmen's Association, suggesting that it was an early bud of the new system growing within the body of the old world. This "turning of his gaze to the International,"<sup>52</sup> as Lenin described it, was not inconsistent with his rejection of the "old revolutionary ways"; Herzen's reaction to the First International was influenced by Bakunin, who accused it of recognizing the bourgeois state and abandoning revolution in favor of legal and peaceful opposition. The difference, of course, was that what Bakunin found grounds for criticism Herzen found grounds for approval. Thus

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49 Ibid., pp. 589-90.

50 Ibid., pp. 592-93.

51 Ibid., p. 586.

52 V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works* (Eng.-lang. ed.; M, 1960-66), vol. 18, p. 27.

we can see that the *Letters to an Old Comrade* represented, at least partially, a rejection of Russian socialism: though they did not assume that progress could only be in one direction – obliging Russia to pass through a capitalist phase – they nevertheless rejected the historical diagnosis of Russia as “the chosen people of the social revolution.”<sup>53</sup>

After the 1905 Revolution, the *Letters* were interpreted in liberal circles as evidence of Herzen’s conversion to the liberal point of view – although it is difficult to agree with this conclusion. Herzen neither embraced bourgeois reformism nor gave up the ideal of a total and worldwide transformation of society. What he attempted to do was to reconcile the conception of such a radical transformation with historical and cultural continuity. If he was now reluctant to “burn to the ground the whole field of history,”<sup>54</sup> it was because he no longer believed this would bring about a real and revolutionary eradication of evil: the scorched fields would become overgrown with weeds and the realization of the humanist ideals of the revolution would be doomed to failure or at least greatly delayed.

In any case, the *Letters to An Old Comrade* do not change Herzen’s place in Russian intellectual history. As a political leader he represented a link between the Decembrists and the “superfluous men” (gentry revolutionaries and gentry liberals), on the one hand, and the radicals democrats of the 60s, on the other. As a theorist he stood between the Westernizers and Slavophiles of the 40s and the ideologists of Populism.

## Nikolai Ogarev

The loose definition applied to Herzen above is equally true of his closest friend and collaborator, Nikolai Ogarev (1813-77). His career and Herzen’s were closely parallel from their student days to later years in emigration. In their youth they went through a romantic phase of friendship founded on mutual sympathy and shared ideals (to which they swore allegiance on the Vorobov Hills). They were students at Moscow University at the same time and together founded a student study circle in which they discussed the ideas of the Saint-Simonians and other exponents of the “new palin-genetic period of history.” In 1834, Ogarev was arrested with Herzen and banished to Panza Province. On his return, he, like Herzen, eagerly took up German philosophy; he studied in

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53 A phrase used by Engels in his afterword to the article “On Social Relations in Russia” (1894).

54 Herzen, *Sobraniie sochinenii*, vol. 20, p. 589.

Germany from 1841 to 1846. Although the two friends were separated at this time, Ogarev's intellectual evolution continued to be strikingly similar to Herzen's: like the latter he began to feel his way toward a "philosophy of action," tried to "overcome" Hegelian idealism, and carefully read the works of Feuerbach (indeed, it was Ogarev who introduced Feuerbach to Herzen and his other Moscow friends during a brief visit to Russia in 1842). Afterward the two friends' paths diverged for a time: while Herzen was beginning to work out the theory of Russian socialism abroad, Ogarev settled on his estates, freed his peasants, and tried out a number of innovations aimed at raising the standard of living in the countryside by rational farming methods. However, as soon as Ogarev was able to obtain a passport (after the death of Nicholas I) he left Russia and joined Herzen at the Free Russian Press. He became joint editor of *The Bell* and shared in all its successes and failures.

As a political thinker, Ogarev in principle shared Herzen's outlook, although on a number of *issues* he differed over details or even disagreed with his friend. Although he also wrote poetry, Ogarev was primarily interested in practical problems such as the organization of the revolutionary movement and the economic aspects of Russian socialism. Even in 1857, when, like Herzen, he still believed it possible to achieve essential democratic and social reforms without the use of force, he wrote about the advisability of organizing a secret society in Russia (*Zapiska o tainom obshchestve*). Disappointed by the limited scope of the land reforms introduced by Alexander II, he devised plans for overthrowing the government by means of a military-cum-peasant revolution. These plans were based on a careful study of the lessons of the Decembrist revolt and anti-feudal peasant rebellions: the army was to make the first move and supply the disciplinary backbone, whereas the armed peasants would provide the battalions.

Ogarev was more readily inclined to appeal to the revolutionary peasantry than Herzen, who was more skeptical of the chance of a peasant revolution and who tended to stress the need for preserving the cultural achievements of the educated elite. Ogarev also found it easier to get on with ordinary rank-and-file sympathizers and in 1862 undertook to edit a new periodical – *Obshchee Veche* – intended for a more plebeian readership than *The Bell* (peasants, workers, soldiers, and Old Believers). One of Ogarev's letters in the 60s gives characteristic insight into this aspect of his personality: "If a Pugachev were to appear I should volunteer to be his adjutant, because the Polish gentry does not arouse even one hundredth of the hatred in me that the Russian gentry does – paltry, despicable, and inevitably committed to the Russian government."<sup>55</sup>

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55 *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 61 (M, 1958), p. 824.

If Herzen was concerned to establish the historiosophical groundwork of Russian socialism, Ogarev was more interested in socialism's economic aspects. With the help of a detailed analysis of concrete economic factors, he attempted to prove that in Russia capitalism was an artificial phenomenon and had no hope of success. The existence of the peasant commune, on the other hand, showed that socialism was not a mere "literary idea" – as in Western Europe, which was corroded by economic individualism – but a notion with real roots in the agricultural economy and in folkways, requiring only a transition from communal ownership of the land to communal cultivation to become established. The Russian peasantry's spontaneous inclination toward socialism was a guarantee that a federal system of government could be established, thus avoiding centralization or regimentation from above, which were the main weaknesses of the revolutionary communism of Babeuf.

Ogarev was well aware that what he was discussing was agrarian socialism, and he was consistent in the conclusions he drew from this. For instance, he declared that towns were unnecessary in Russia, he accused Chernyshevsky of representing "urban" socialism, and he reproached socialists in Western Europe for not understanding that the abolition of private ownership of the land was a *conditio sine qua non* of a socialist system.

Ogarev's philosophical views evolved from the religiously tinged romantic idealism of his youth by way of Hegelianism to materialism and atheism. He was also influenced by positivism: the distinction between materialism and positivism, he suggested, was that the latter system did not attempt to define the universal "principle" of existence, which for the materialist was matter; in practice, however, he felt this to be of little importance, since both systems were grounded in "positive knowledge." In Ogarev's views on society mechanistic materialism was combined with historical idealism: on the one hand, he stressed that the historical process is part of natural history; on the other, he shared the Enlightenment's view that the prime mover of progress is the development and dissemination of scientific knowledge. Hegelian influence can be traced in his belief that the course of progress was along a spiral rather than a linear path. Also characteristic of Ogarev was a strict "physiological" determinism formed under the influence of the eminent Russian physiologist I. M. Sechenov; in keeping with the latter's teaching, he rejected free will as an idealistic superstition and attempted to replace the "fatalism of predestination" by the "fatalism of cause and effect."

This standpoint differed from the more complex conception put forward by Herzen in his *Letter on Free Will*. Despite his determinism, however, Ogarev tended (rather more than Herzen) toward voluntarism in his political activities. One aspect of this was his lack of critical distance from the political adventurer

Nechaev. Today we know that Ogarev collaborated closely with Nechaev and wrote most of the proclamations circulated by the latter's organization. It is also interesting to note that Ogarev supported Bakunin in the discussion Herzen undertook in the *Letters to an Old Comrade*.

## **Part III**

### **Social and Political Ideologies of the Reform and Countreform Period**





# Chapter 11

## Nikolai Chernyshevsky and the “Enlighteners” of the Sixties

When Russian historians write about “the 60s,” what they usually have in mind is not the actual decade from 1860 to 1870 but a crucial period in modern Russian history beginning in 1855 with Russia’s defeat in the Crimean War and ending in 1866 with Karakozov’s unsuccessful attempt on the life of Tsar Alexander II. The key year of this decade was 1861, which not only saw the proclamation of the emancipation and land-settlement edicts, but also marked the high tide of the tense revolutionary mood of the previous two years. The first all-Russian revolutionary society, “Land and Freedom” [*Zemlia i Volia*], was also founded at the end of 1861. By 1862 the chances of a successful revolution began to recede, and reaction was strengthened by the mood of chauvinism following the Polish insurrection of 1863. The government nevertheless continued to carry out social reforms: early in 1864 local self-government institutions known as *zemstvo* assemblies were set up, and later in 1864 far-reaching legal reforms were introduced. At the same time, however, radicals pressing for further changes were persecuted with increasing vigor and the general climate of opinion became unfavorable to the democratic camp. After Dmitry Karakozov’s attempt on the emperor’s life, a hysterical campaign against “nihilists” was unleashed by both the liberal and conservative press.

The land reform of 1861 did not go far enough: it failed to satisfy the peasants’ hunger for land, took away some of the acreage peasants had previously cultivated, and burdened them with heavy redemption payments to cover the compensation paid by the government to former serf owners. In short, the agrarian problem was not finally solved and the structure of tsarist absolutism remained unchanged. However, even granting all this, the fact remains that Russia now embarked on a phase of rapid capitalist development and that profound changes took place in the country’s intellectual climate.

After the disastrous defeat at Sevastopol – a defeat all the more galling in view of the undoubted heroism of the Russian army – the feudal and bureaucratic empire that until recently had seemed to be the most powerful support of the Holy Alliance was seen to be nothing but a giant with feet of clay.

The death of Nicholas I, who had symbolized all the evil of the old regime, was welcomed by most with a sense of relief and the hope that the new emperor's reign would usher in an age of political and social change. Even government circles realized that certain reforms – chief among them a solution to the peasant problem – were long overdue. Alexander II felt compelled to embark on a course of partial concessions, which included sounding out public opinion on ways of introducing the most urgent reforms without detriment to the existing system. The period of great hopes and spontaneous civic activity that followed Alexander's accession to the throne became known as the "thaw."

The government's new policies were both inconsistent and fragmentary, thus arousing mingled hopes and doubts. The concessions went far enough, however, to help bring about a superb flowering of social thought – the "golden age" of serious Russian journalism. The outburst of creativity after 1855 is particularly striking when we contrast it with the almost total stagnation of the last seven years of the reign of Nicholas I, the years after the death of Belinsky, Herzen's emigration, and the trial of the Petrashevtsy. From 1848 to 1855 the reform movement was deprived of men of ideas; under the impact of the revolutionary tide in Europe, the authorities increased their persecution of all independent thought, the press languished under a repressive censorship, and the universities were treated as centers spreading infection. So fearful were the authorities of the specter of "intellectual unrest" that they closed down the university philosophy departments and handed over the teaching of philosophy to Orthodox theologians. The vivid memory of the unrelieved repression of these last years gave rise to exaggerated faith in the new emperor's liberalism; there was widespread hope that progress would be achieved by the willing cooperation of government and public, without disorder or outbreaks of violence. Representatives of almost all social and political trends appeared to be united in a general desire for reform and for the liberalization of public life. The emperor's announcement of the impending emancipation edict was greeted with enthusiasm. "Man of Galilee, you have triumphed!" was how Herzen put it.

This mood of high-minded optimism and national harmony was soon over. The inner logic of events brought about a growing polarization of attitudes: as democratic circles became increasingly disappointed in the government's actions, they also became increasingly susceptible to revolutionary ideas. In the political field, the most important change was the emergence of a strong and separate radical camp. The alliance of radical democrats and liberals broke up when it became clear that they differed not only on the methods to be used to achieve social change, but also on ultimate aims. Liberals as well as radicals were working for changes within the capitalist system, but each represented different interests. As Russia lacked a strong bourgeoisie capable of challenging

absolutism, neither liberals nor radical democrats can be called spokesmen of the bourgeoisie in the strict sense of the word. The liberals were “gentry liberals” who represented the reformist tendency of that section of the landowning class anxious to adapt itself to the new age; the radical movement, by contrast, expressed the desires and interests of the “people” in the widest possible meaning of the word – in Russia this of course meant the peasantry.

The statement that the radical democrats represented the interests of the peasantry should not be understood too literally. The Russian peasants were not in a position to engage directly in the ideological struggle. Members of the democratic groups came not from the peasantry as such but from the *raznochintsy*, men of mixed, non-noble background, who were mostly sons of petty officials, priests, or impoverished gentry families, and who had to earn their living by their brains. The emergence of this new group in public life brought about a significant intellectual and cultural revolution.

Among Russian Marxists the dominant ideology of the radical democrats of the 60s came to be known as *prosvetitel'stvo* – a term for which it is difficult to find any other translation than “enlightenment,” which must, of course, also make do for the 18<sup>th</sup> century Russian Enlightenment. The representatives of the movement were simply referred to as “enlighteners” [*prosvetiteli*]. Plekhanov stressed the connection between the “enlightenment” of the 60s and 18<sup>th</sup> century historical idealism. For Lenin *prosvetitel'stvo* was chiefly a democratic ideology supporting bourgeois progress and attacking the survivals of feudalism. The common element in both Plekhanov’s and Lenin’s views was the movement’s links with 18<sup>th</sup> century rationalism, although Plekhanov drew attention to the theoretical weakness of this rationalism, whereas Lenin stressed its progressive and anti-feudal function.

The similarity between the “enlightenment” of the 60s and French 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment philosophy can also be traced in philosophical attitudes (“human nature” as opposed to various feudal “superstitions”) and in the movement’s philosophical style, which was deliberately critical, aggressive, and always eager to underline the contrast between “what was” and “what should be.” The “enlighteners” themselves were aware of this. As one of them, Nikolai Shelgunov, wrote:

The 60s were a period of unusual spiritual intensity, of remarkable concentration of mental effort and remarkable sharpening of our critical faculties [...]. There was not a single field of knowledge that the critical faculty did not penetrate, not a single social phenomenon untouched by it. Earth and heaven, paradise and hell, problems of personal and public happiness, the peasant’s hut and the nobleman’s mansion – all these were scrutinized and subjected to critical appraisal. [...] The intellectual

revolution we experienced in the 60s was not less in scope than the one France experienced after the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup>

## Chernyshevsky's Anthropological Materialism

### *Biographical Note*

The key figure of the "60s" was undoubtedly Nikolai Chernyshevsky (1828-89).<sup>2</sup> The son of a priest at the Church of St. Sergius in the city of Saratov, he was intended for the priesthood but, after graduating from the seminary, entered the faculty of history and philology at St. Petersburg University instead of continuing his theological studies. At the university he immediately plunged into the study of prohibited books that were not available in public libraries. At the time of the 1848 revolutions he eagerly read French and German newspapers in order to be abreast of the latest happenings. Aleksandr Khanykov (one of the Petrashevtsy) introduced him to Fourier and utopian socialism. With his characteristic thoroughness, Chernyshevsky set out to master the chief works of Fourier and Saint-Simon, Cabet, Leroux, Considerant, Proudhon, and Blanc. His ideas on literature and the arts were formed under the marked influence of Belinsky. Another formative influence on the young Chernyshevsky was the discussions held at the home of Irinarkh Vvedensky, who taught Russian literature at the Artillery School. Vvedensky had been a friend of Petrashevsky and thus represented another link between Chernyshevsky and the Petrashevsky circle.

To begin with, Chernyshevsky attempted to reconcile "the ideas of the socialists and communists, the radical republicans and montagnards" with his Christian faith; in 1848, for instance, he prayed for the souls of the defeated revolutionaries condemned to death. Later, under the influence of the Saint-Simonians and Pierre Leroux, he tried to link utopian socialism to the concept of a "new Christianity," of a "new Messiah, a new religion, and a new world." Later still, new doubts assailed him. "The methods adopted by Jesus Christ were not, perhaps, the right ones," he wrote in his diary. It might have been more useful if he had invented a self-regulating mechanism, a kind *perpetuum mobile*

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1 Quoted from *V. I. Lenin i russkaia obshchestvenno-politicheskaia mysl' XIX-nachala XX veka* (L, 1969), p. 42.

2 Three books on him have recently been published in English: F. B. Randall, *N. G. Chernyshevskii* (New York 1967); W. F. Woehrlin, *Chernyshevskii: The Man and the Journalist* (Cambridge, Mass. 1971); N. G. Pereira, *The Thought and Teachings of N. G. Chernyshevskii* (The Hague 1975).

that would have freed mankind from the burden of worrying about its daily bread.<sup>3</sup>

Comments of this kind suggest that the young Chernyshevsky's Christianity sprang not from a transcendental experience, but from a passionate belief in the Kingdom of God on earth. This belief easily underwent a process of secularization: from concluding, after Feuerbach, that the secret of theology was anthropology, it was an easy step to interpreting the Kingdom of God on earth as a kingdom of emancipated human beings in full control of their fate.

After graduating from the university in 1851, Chernyshevsky was appointed to a post as teacher of literature at the Saratov Lycee. He was a talented teacher and soon became popular with his students. His radical views created difficulties for him, however, and he left his native Saratov for St. Petersburg after only two years, in 1853. In St. Petersburg, Chernyshevsky set about writing a master's dissertation entitled *The Aesthetic Relations between Art and Reality*,<sup>4</sup> He also began to contribute articles and literary criticism to the press, and in 1855 he joined the editorial staff of Nekrasov's *Contemporary*. After Belinsky's death the *Contemporary* had come under the influence of a group of liberal critics of aestheticist leanings (A. V. Druzhinin, P. V. Annenkov, and V. P. Botkin), so that it no longer represented a homogeneous and well-defined ideological line. With the addition of Chernyshevsky, though, it once again took up the cudgels on behalf of an ideologically committed, critical realism.

Chernyshevsky wrote most of his literary criticism between 1854 and 1857. In the fall of 1857 he handed over the editorship of the literary section of the *Contemporary* to his younger colleague Nikolai Dobroliubov in order to devote himself to history, philosophy, and political economy. In the articles he wrote subsequently he put down the basic principles of a new and revolutionary radicalism that departed totally from the world view of the Russian liberals and their gentry sympathizers. In his "The Anthropological Principle in Philosophy" (1860), Chernyshevsky expounded his views on philosophy and ethics; in "Capital and Labor" (1859), the lengthy "Notes on the Founding of Political Economy by J. S. Mill" (1860),<sup>5</sup> and other economic articles, he subjected economic liberalism to critical analysis from the point of view of the "political economy of the working masses." In many articles, and especially in the "Critique of Philosophical Prejudices Regarding the Communal Ownership of the Land" (1858), he defended the peasant commune against attacks by the

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3 See Chernyshevsky's *Diary* for the years 1848-50.

4 In prerevolutionary Russia the degree of "master" entitled one to hold a professorial appointment.

5 These were highly praised by Marx.

advocates of capitalist development. Of special interest are a group of articles dealing with the revolutions in France (“Cavaignac,” “The Party Struggle in France in the Reigns of Louis XVIII and Charles X,” “The July Monarchy,” etc.). In his work at this time Chernyshevsky stressed the vacillation and cowardice of the liberal politicians and attacked the half measures they proposed; he also contrasted the liberals’ program, with its emphasis on the issue of political liberties (which, he argued, largely benefited the economically prosperous sections of society), with that of the radicals, with its emphasis on the welfare of the people. It should be noted that the outlook of an entire generation of Russian revolutionaries was formed by these articles.

As the revolutionary mood in Russia gained momentum, Chernyshevsky’s role as the intellectual leader of the radical camp grew in importance. His rooms were a meeting place of revolutionary activists (among whom were N. Shelgunov, M. Mikhailov, N. Utin, and the brothers Serno-Solovievich), and students came to see him to discuss their political demonstrations. According to M. Sleptsov, Chernyshevsky showed great interest in the work of the revolutionary *Zemlia i Volia* society, which also benefited from his advice. Even a revolutionary society of Polish officers, founded by Zygmunt Sierakowski, a close friend of Chernyshevsky, was under his influence (one of the members of the society was Jarosław Dąbrowski, who was to suffer a heroic death as the commander-in-chief of the Paris Commune).

Chernyshevsky was thoroughly at home with conspiratorial methods of struggle and was an expert at covering his tracks. As a result, we know very little of his links with the revolutionary organizations; indeed, there is no evidence that he was a member of the *Zemlia i Volia* group. We do know, however, that he was responsible for the proclamation “To the Peasants of the Landlords, Greetings from Their Well-wishers,” which explained the shortcomings of the emancipation act.<sup>6</sup> It also seems likely that he was the main source of inspiration of the secret periodical *Great Russian (Velikorus’, 1861)*, which appealed to the educated sections of society to take social and political reform into their own hands.

The tsarist authorities had long been eager to get rid of this thorn in their flesh and were glad to find a suitable pretext in an intercepted letter from Herzen

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6 For reasons that have never been established, this proclamation, which was written on the eve of the emancipation edict, was not printed. Perhaps the peasant uprising in Bezdna convinced Chernyshevsky that the former serfs themselves understood that they had been cheated of part of their land, or perhaps he felt that in the absence of an organized revolutionary movement the proclamation would only unleash undisciplined riots directed against the entire educated elite rather than just the landowner class.

that appeared to provide evidence of Chernyshevsky's contacts with Russian émigré circles in London. In July 1862 he was arrested and held in custody in the Peter and Paul Fortress. No incriminating papers were found in his rooms, however, and hopes that he would break down in prison proved misplaced. The prosecution was therefore forced to base its case on circumstantial evidence and forged documents and testimony. The trial dragged on for almost two years before Chernyshevsky was condemned, despite insufficient evidence, to fourteen years' hard labor and banishment for life to Siberia. The emperor confirmed the sentence, but halved the period of hard labor to seven years.

While he was in prison Chernyshevsky wrote his famous novel *What Is to Be Done?* This paints an idealized portrait of the generation of "new men," the radicals of the 60s, who represented a new morality as well as a new rationalist and materialist outlook. The novel's heroes – Lopukhov, Kirsanov, and Vera Pavlovna – stand above social conventions, being guided not by irrational beliefs but by positive self-interest or "rational egoism," i.e. the identification of their own interests with the interests and welfare of society as a whole. An entire section of the book is devoted to a rather curious character, the revolutionary Rakhmetov, a "superior nature" whose devotion to the common good is even greater than that of Chernyshevsky's other heroes. Although Rakhmetov is a scion of the wealthy gentry, he is familiar with the people's lot, has measured the whole of Russia on foot, and has worked at cutting timber, quarrying stone, and hauling riverboats. He is one of a select band, the "salt of the earth": in order to train his willpower and resistance to pain, this perfect knight of the revolution even sleeps on a bed of nails.

Thanks to a strange oversight on the part of the censors, *What Is to Be Done?* was allowed to be serialized in the *Contemporary*. The authorities realized their mistake too late. The censor concerned was dismissed and new editions of the novel were forbidden, but these measures were not enough to halt its impact. The issues of the *Contemporary* in which it had been printed were preserved with immense piety, as though they were family heirlooms. For many members of the younger generation the novel became a true "encyclopedia of life and knowledge." In her memoirs, Lenin's wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya, relates that her husband recalled the work in every slight detail. Plekhanov was not exaggerating when he declared that "since the introduction of printing presses into Russia no printed work has had such a great success in Russia as Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?*"<sup>7</sup>

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7 G. V. Plekhanov, *Izbrannye filozofskie proizvedeniia* (M, 1956-58), vol. 4, p. 160.

Chernyshevsky spent his first years of exile near the Chinese frontier. Having obtained a medical certificate exempting him from work in the mines, he devoted himself to writing and research. The autobiographical novel *The Prologue*, written at this time, throws an interesting light on Russian history in the revolutionary 60s. After he had served the first seven years of his sentence, he was bitterly disappointed to find that the place where he was to spend the rest of his life in exile was an isolated Yakut settlement lost in the taiga of eastern Siberia. He faced this new disappointment bravely, and three years later firmly dismissed a suggestion that he appeal for a remission of his sentence.

One of the reasons for Chernyshevsky's banishment to such a remote place was the authorities' fear of a forcible rescue attempt, something that was often discussed in revolutionary circles. The first such attempt was made by the exiled revolutionary Herman Lopatin, a friend of Marx.<sup>8</sup> An equally unsuccessful attempt was undertaken in 1875 by the radical Populist Hipolit Myshkin. Chernyshevsky's situation did not improve until the 1880s. In 1883 he was given permission to settle in Astrakhan with his family, and in 1889, shortly before his death, he was allowed to return to his native Saratov.

### *Aesthetics*

The master's dissertation of Chernyshevsky on *The Aesthetic Relations between Art and Reality* contains the first mature exposition of his world view. Chernyshevsky's highest philosophical authority was Ludwig Feuerbach. In view of the censorship he could not at first openly refer to Feuerbach; but he did so after his return from banishment, in his preface to the third edition of the thesis, published in 1888.<sup>9</sup> There he wrote that "the author made no claim whatever to saying anything new of his own. He wished merely to interpret Feuerbach's ideas in application to aesthetics."<sup>10</sup>

In making this disclaimer, Chernyshevsky was, of course, being unduly modest. To begin with, his aesthetics do not derive entirely from Feuerbachian philosophy; moreover, Feuerbach did not actually write about aesthetics, so that

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8 Lopatin decided to try and help Chernyshevsky escape under the influence of his conversations with Marx, who often said that "of all contemporary economists Chernyshevsky is the only original mind; the others are just ordinary compilers" (G. A. Lopatin, *Avtobiografiia* [Petrograd 1922], p. 71).

9 It was the mention of Feuerbach that prevented this edition from receiving the censor's imprimatur.

10 N. S. Chernyshevsky, *Selected Philosophical Essays* (M., 1953), p. 416.



the application of his ideas to aesthetic arguments was in itself something novel and original.

Following Plekhanov, most scholars have argued that Feuerbachian influence is most apparent in Chernyshevsky's thesis that the purpose of his aesthetics was to provide "a defense of reality against fantasy." This point of view is only partly correct: the materialist assumption concerning the primacy of reality over art has nothing *specifically* Feuerbachian about it. What was original in Feuerbach's philosophy – and Chernyshevsky's aesthetics – was something different, namely the fusion of materialism and anthropocentrism.

The "anthropocentric" theme in Chernyshevsky's thought is most apparent in his theory of beauty. Beauty, he argued, is something objective, and a matter of content rather than form. Hegel understood this when he called beauty a manifestation of the Absolute spirit. But the Hegelian conception of the Absolute was overthrown by Feuerbach, who demonstrated that man himself was the only absolute value. From this thesis Feuerbach drew the conclusion that for man "the supreme good, the supreme being" is life itself: "Man makes a god or divine being of what his life depends on only because to him life is a divine being, a divine possession or thing."<sup>11</sup> These ideas of Feuerbach are clearly at the root of Chernyshevsky's definition of beauty, which reads as follows: "Beauty is life; beautiful is that being in which we see life as it should be according to our conceptions; beautiful is the object which expresses life, or reminds us of life."<sup>12</sup>

Immediately after this definition of beauty in general, Chernyshevsky undertook a detailed analysis of the aristocratic and peasant ideals of feminine beauty. A man of the people, he pointed out, regards as beautiful everything that is a sign of robust health and balanced physical development; an aristocratic beauty, on the other hand, must be pale, weak, and sickly – all signs of a life of leisure and indeed of an incapacity for work. This argument goes beyond Feuerbachian "anthropologism" and shows an understanding of the relationship between the aesthetic imagination and the social circumstances that help to determine it. Nevertheless, Chernyshevsky went on to insist that only one aesthetic ideal can be considered "true" and "natural." The aristocratic ideal is "the artificial product of an artificial life," and only the ideal of men living in "normal" conditions (i.e. laboring and in touch with nature) is in harmony with man's true nature. This switch from historical relativism to normative aesthetics was of course important to Chernyshevsky, since it enabled him to justify the

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11 L. Feuerbach, *Lectures on the Essence of Religion*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York 1967), p. 52.

12 Chernyshevsky, *Selected Philosophical Essays*, p. 287.

aesthetic ideals of the common man and the demand for the widest possible democratization of art.

The notion “life” also has two different meanings attached to it in the dissertation. In the first, narrow sense of the word, life appears to mean the abundance and richness of vital forces. More characteristic, however, is a wider meaning that also embraces the moral sphere. “True life is the life of the heart and mind,”<sup>13</sup> Chernyshevsky wrote, and the supreme ideal of beauty is thus a human being in the full flowering of his faculties – a definition that comes close to the great humanist tradition in Germany represented by Goethe, Schiller, and Hegel. It is true that Chernyshevsky rejected Hegel’s and Vischer’s thesis concerning the superiority of artistic to natural beauty; but he did agree with them that beauty in nature is significant only insofar as it relates to man. “Oh, how good Hegelian aesthetics would be if this idea, beautifully developed in it, were the basic one, instead of the fantastic search for the perfect manifestation of the Idea!”<sup>14</sup>

The reinstatement of matter, which in Chernyshevsky’s aesthetics takes the form of a rehabilitation of the beauties of nature, was linked to a characteristically Feuerbachian “rehabilitation of the individual.”

In the Hegelian view, only ideas are truly real; individuals seen in isolation from the “universal” (the Idea or Spirit) are pure abstraction. For Feuerbach, on the other hand, it is individuals that are real, and the universal that is an abstraction. Chernyshevsky – who was in complete agreement with Feuerbach – set out to demonstrate in his thesis that “for man the general is only a pale and lifeless extract of the individual.”<sup>15</sup> When applied to aesthetics, this belief was bound to lead to a denial of the generalizing function of art, to the view that the “universal types” allegedly created by literature are actually only copies of individual human types, and that in real life we meet typical characters who are far truer and more attractive than the “generalizations” of literature and art. Art in this view can only be a surrogate for reality. As has been aptly pointed out, this was a “reaction, typical of Feuerbachian materialism against Hegelian abstraction (the “universal”) and led to the metaphysical antithesis in which the universal was identified with abstraction and the particular with concrete reality.”<sup>16</sup>

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13 Ibid., p. 288.

14 Ibid., p. 290.

15 Ibid., pp. 349-50.

16 A. Lavretsky, *Belinsky, Chernyshevsky, Dobroliubov v bor'be za realizm* (M, 1941), p. 221.

Chernyshevsky's dissertation must therefore be seen as a passionate defense of individuality, of the concrete human being ignored by the idealist philosophers, who had treated man as a mere instrument of the Absolute. Where Chernyshevsky went astray was in the excessive oversimplification and abstract rationalism of his arguments. He failed to see the dialectical relationship between art and reality and, like Feuerbach, treated the comprehension of reality as a mechanical act not unlike the passive reflection of external objects in a mirror. The theory that resulted from this would have served better to underpin a naturalistic rather than a realistic conception of art. It ran counter to Chernyshevsky's own critical perception and clearly conflicted with the views on the role and significance of art put forward elsewhere in the dissertation. The function of art, he wrote, is not only to reproduce reality, but also to explain and evaluate it – to “pass judgment” on the real-life phenomena that have been recreated. In the light of this definition, art cannot be a surrogate, for a surrogate of real-life phenomena cannot add to our knowledge of reality or help us to pass judgment on it.

When Pisarev said that Chernyshevsky's thesis stood for the “total abolition of aesthetics,” he showed that he had quite misunderstood its central argument. The thesis was not directed against aesthetics as such, but against aestheticism. Because man's spiritual and material natures are one, Chernyshevsky argued, purely spiritual activity springing solely from the aspiration toward beauty is inconceivable. Love of beauty is disinterested, but it never appears in isolation from other human aspirations or needs; therefore, the sphere of art cannot be narrowed down to the sphere of aesthetic beauty. Chernyshevsky did not intend to belittle the role of art; quite the contrary, he thought “art for art's sake” was a dangerous theory just because it might lead to art's being relegated to an unimportant margin of human life. An artist who created solely for the sake of beauty would be an incomplete, and indeed crippled, human being.

From the first, Chernyshevsky's aesthetic notions suffered from one-sided interpretations and misunderstandings. They were attacked not only by critics who defended uncommitted “pure art” (Druzhinin, Annenkov, and Botkin) but also by the great Russian realist novelists. Turgenev, who was particularly incensed by them, called *The Aesthetic Relations between Art and Reality* the “stillborn offspring of blind malice and stupidity.” Despite numerous hostile critics and frequently misguided supporters (e.g. Pisarev), Chernyshevsky's aesthetic ideas exerted a considerable influence on Russian literature and art. The main theses of the *Aesthetic Relations* were adopted as the fundamental tenets of progressive Russian criticism, and radical as well as Populist writers (Nekrasov, Saltykov-Shchedrin, Gleb Uspensky, and Vladimir Korolenko) tried to apply Chernyshevsky's ideas to their own creative work. Ilya Repin, the most

accomplished of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian realist painters, wrote in his memoirs that young painters, too, read Chernyshevsky with keen interest. One of the leading advocates of Chernyshevsky's aesthetics was Vladimir Stasov, the chief Russian theorist of realism in the visual arts.

### *The Anthropological Principle*

The title of Chernyshevsky's main philosophical work – “The Anthropological Principle in Philosophy” (1860) – pays homage to Feuerbach's “anthropologism.” For Chernyshevsky the “anthropological principle” supplied the theoretical foundation for the integral wholeness of man, the abolition of the eternal dualism of body and soul. He formulated his ideas as follows:

What is this anthropological principle in the moral sciences? [...] It is that man must be regarded as a single being having only one nature; that a human life must not be cut into two halves, each belonging to a different nature; that every aspect of a man's activity must be regarded as the activity of his whole organism, from head to foot inclusively, or if it is the special function of some particular organ of the human organism we are dealing with, that organ must be regarded in its natural connection with the entire organism.<sup>17</sup>

An interesting supplement to the “Anthropological Principle” is the article on the “Character of Human Knowledge,” written after Chernyshevsky's return from Siberia. In this article he put forward an epistemological theory based on a conception of the human organism as both knower and object of knowledge – and thus positing the indivisibility of matter and consciousness. For man, the “Archimedes principle” on which everything rests, he suggested, is not “I think” but “I am”; since our knowledge of our own existence is immediate and not open to doubt, our knowledge of the material world of which we form a small part is equally reliable.

Chernyshevsky did not take this theory of the oneness of human nature a step further to the conclusion that all human characteristics can be explained in terms of physiological properties. Psychology cannot be explained in terms of physiology, he declared, any more than physiology can be explained in terms of chemistry, or chemistry in terms of physics, because in such cases a quantitative difference becomes a qualitative difference. The important thing, he stressed, is to stop man from being “split up,” and to prevent any one of his functions (either “spirit” or “nature”) from being raised to the rank of an absolute. Man is an indivisible being, and only as such can he represent an absolute value to other men.

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17 Chernyshevsky, *Selected Philosophical Essays*, pp. 132-33.

It was these arguments that underpinned Chernyshevsky's ethical theory of "rational egoism," which was based on the premise that – however interpreted – the guiding principle of men's conduct is egoism. In the normative sphere this theory gave preference to utilitarianism, rationalism, and egalitarianism. It postulated that the standard by which human actions must be judged is the benefit they bring – that good is not a value in itself but only a lasting benefit, "a very beneficial benefit." Egoism may be rational or irrational, numerous cases of apparent unselfishness and self-sacrifice being in fact expressions of a rational conception of egoism: "To argue that a heroic act was at the same time a wise one, that a noble deed was not a reckless one, does not in our opinion, mean belittling heroism and nobility."<sup>18</sup> The rational egoist accepts other people's right to be egoists because he accepts that all men are equal; in controversial issues, where there is no unanimity, he is guided by the principle of the greatest good of the greatest number:

The interests of mankind as a whole stand higher than the interests of an individual nation; the common interests of a whole nation are higher than the interests of an individual class; the interests of a large class are higher than the interests of a small one.<sup>19</sup>

Egoism that is truly rational makes men understand that they have interests in common and ought to help each other. This is what Feuerbach had in mind when he wrote "To be an individuality means to be an egoist and therefore – willingly or unwillingly – a *communist*."<sup>20</sup> Chernyshevsky could have used this sentence as the motto for his novel *What Is to Be Done?*, a story of "rational egoists" who also believe in a socialist system.

Even from this short account it becomes clear that this "rational egoism" differs widely from what we normally understand by egoism. Chernyshevsky used the term "egoism" for his ethical theory as a challenge to those who, in the name of transcendent values, condemned as "egoism" all attempts by the oppressed to better their lot; it was a symbol of his distrust of ideologies that called on men to sacrifice themselves for the sake of allegedly higher aims – higher, that is, than man himself conceived as a living concrete human individual.

As early as the Enlightenment the materialist philosophers – Helvetius and Holbach – regarded rational egoism as a logical outcome of materialism. Chernyshevsky extended the theoretical foundations of "rational egoism" by a

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18 Ibid., p. 123.

19 Ibid., p. 125.

20 See L. Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christenthums in Beziehung auf den "Einzigsten und sein Eigentum."*

Feuerbachian critique of such idealistic hypostases as supra-individual Reason or Spirit. Feuerbach claimed that the universal did not have a separate independent existence; it existed only as a “predicate of the individual.” This led to the rejection of organicist and historicist theories treating society as a supra-individual organic whole subject to rational laws of historical necessity. “The life of society,” Chernyshevsky wrote, “is the sum of individual lives.”<sup>21</sup> The laws to which man is subject are the laws of nature – laws of his own organism. He dismissed as unscientific the suggestion that there might be separate laws governing the evolution of society on the lines of Hegel’s Historical Reason: society was not a biological organism and therefore could not behave like a real being.

Chernyshevsky again returned to the same theme in his article “What Caused the Downfall of Rome?” Apropos Herzen’s comments on the “senility” of Western Europe and the “youth and robust energy” of the Russian nation, he suggested that to talk of societies growing, maturing, and aging was sheer anthropomorphism. Since civilizations are not organisms, they cannot experience a process of organic evolution; therefore one cannot talk of the inevitable decline of civilizations as if they were human beings subject to the laws of mortality. Chernyshevsky was especially impassioned in his attacks on Hegel’s notion of the “rational necessity” of historical processes. There is no such thing as Historical Reason, he declared; “rationality” is introduced to history by rational human beings, by men creating knowledge: “Progress is the fruit of knowledge.”<sup>22</sup> It is not guaranteed as the inevitable outcome of history; its achievements are fragile, just as fragile as human life and human intellectual achievements. The fall of Rome in fact was an excellent example of the fragile nature of progress, for it illustrated the downfall of a civilization under the impact of barbarian invaders.

This interpretation could give rise to pessimistic as well as optimistic conclusions. If we accept that progress is not inevitable, then the course of events can be determined by mere coincidence; on the other hand, no “rational necessity” can stand in the way of human effort to impose a rational shape on history. It may be very difficult to bring about “what should be,” but it can never be ruled out altogether. Chernyshevsky thought that objective, scientific criteria determining “what should be” could be deduced from the laws governing “human nature,” the totality of man’s “natural” (i.e. material and spiritual) needs. From the “anthropological” point of view, he argued, human nature is constant; what varies are “artificial” needs arising out of man’s partial

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21 N. S. Chernyshevsky, *Izbrannye filosofskie sochineniia* (L, 1950-51), vol. 2, p. 484.

22 *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 314.

denaturalization in conditions that are no longer “normal.” By means of this Feuerbachian argument Chernyshevsky arrived back at the abstract rationalism of the “natural law” of the Enlightenment.

This was undoubtedly a departure from the dialectical and historical view that Belinsky had worked out with such difficulty, but there were good historical reasons for this. The radical democrats of the 60s – representatives of the critical “intellect” of a new, emerging social force – preferred absolute criteria to historical arguments that were inevitably relative. After breaking with the conservative interpretations of Hegelianism, Belinsky, too, reaffirmed the ideals of Voltaire and the Encyclopedists; Chernyshevsky went even further in this direction because, like the French Enlightenment philosophers, he lived under an absolutist system that was experiencing a crisis, and in such conditions appeals to “human nature,” reason, and a rationally based autonomous morality have greater resonance than appeals to history.

### *Russia's Future Development*

Criticism of blind reverence for Necessity and the transcendent Laws of History is one of the characteristic and recurring motifs in Chernyshevsky's thought. Even in his aesthetics, he criticized the Hegelian conception of tragedy because it raised historical necessity to the rank of an absolute principle. In fact, this tendency did not always lead him to such sweeping conclusions as those put forward in the “Downfall of Rome.” Other articles show that his rejection of idealistic hypostases did not mean that he considered it pointless to look for objective laws of social change.

Of particular interest in this respect is his article “A Critique of Philosophical Prejudices against the Communal Ownership of the Land” (1858). Although he declared that there were no features typical of society that could not be deduced from the characteristics of individuals. Chernyshevsky nevertheless posited the existence of a universal evolutionary law, which he summed up as follows: “As far as form is concerned, the highest stage of development everywhere represents a return to the first stage which – at the intermediate stage – was replaced by its opposite.”<sup>23</sup> Since individuals can “skip” the intermediate stage, he argued, why should not societies – which are only aggregates of individuals – be able to do so as well? If individuals can evolve at a faster pace symbolized in the progression 1, 4, 64, [...], then social development can follow the formula 1A, 4A, 64A [...].

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23 Ibid., vol. 2, p. 473.

This argument was used by Chernyshevsky to prove that Russia could bypass the capitalist stage and that the communal ownership of the land could serve as a basis for the socialist development of agriculture. In many respects Chernyshevsky's arguments in support of this thesis were in advance of those used by the diffusionists in their polemics with the evolutionists. The factor speeding up social change, he suggested, was cultural contact "between the man who is yet to attain a higher stage in a given process and the man who has already attained this stage."<sup>24</sup> In this accelerated process the intermediate stages only existed theoretically, as logical moments of change. If they achieved real existence, it was only on such an infinitesimal scale that no practical significance could be attached to them. The evolution of forms of ownership progressed from the communal property of the tribe through private ownership (which reached its culmination under capitalism) to modern communal ownership by associations; Chernyshevsky had no doubt that this last stage would soon replace capitalist property relations in the developed countries. Communal landholdings in Russia, Chernyshevsky thought, were a form of ownership corresponding to the first phase of the universal development of mankind; since a direct transition to the third phase – that of post-capitalist collectivism – seemed likely, there was no point in abolishing the village commune and thus destroying the collectivist traditions alive among the Russian people. On the contrary, attempts should be made to modernize the commune and to transform it along rational lines into an association similar to the workers' associations existing in Western Europe.

The issue of capitalist versus non-capitalist development is today one of the chief problems engaging the attention of economists and social scientists, and has obvious practical signification for the Third World countries. In relation to Russia, Herzen raised this issue some years before Chernyshevsky, but the latter was the first to formulate a general theory of accelerated social change based on non-capitalist methods.

It is interesting to note that the importance of the problem was recognized by Marx, who made a careful study of the "Philosophical Prejudices against the Communal Ownership of the Land." It is even highly probable that this article influenced his views on the future development of Russia.<sup>25</sup> For instance, in his detailed drafts for a letter to Vera Zasulich dated March 8, 1881,<sup>26</sup> Marx argued

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24 Ibid., p. 482.

25 See V. N. Shteyn, *Ocherki raxvitiia russkoi obshchestvenno-ekonomicheskoi mysli XIX-XX vekov* (L, 1948), p. 236.

26 For an analysis of these drafts see A. Walicki, *The Controversy over Capitalism: Studies in the Social Philosophy of the Russian Populists* (Oxford 1969), pp. 189-92.



that the situation in Russia was exceptionally favorable, since primitive communism had survived to see the day when economic, technical, and intellectual conditions in the West were ripe for modern communism. Russia was not an isolated country but part of the international market economy, and she could thus take advantage of all the achievements of modern civilization and technology, assimilating the fruits of capitalist production but rejecting its *modus operandi*. In these circumstances, there was no reason why Russia should have to go through the capitalist stage; an argument that could be used against the advocates of capitalism, who alleged that no stage could be bypassed, was that Russian capitalism itself was skipping various phases by adopting the finished products of foreign capitalism in the form of modern machinery, railways, and a banking system. The similarity with Chernyshevsky's arguments is striking.

#### *Chernyshevsky's Place in the History of Russian Thought*

The Chernyshevsky tradition was continued in the 1870s by the revolutionary Populists. Chernyshevsky himself might be called a Populist in the broad sense of the word, but if we want to establish his place in the history of Russian revolutionary ideas we must not overlook the important differences that divided him from classical Populism.

Populist elements in Chernyshevsky's ideology were his defense of the peasant commune and non-capitalist development. Unlike the later theorists of Populism (especially N. K. Mikhailovsky), Chernyshevsky did not romanticize the "natural economy of the common people" or ancient "native" folkways; not surprisingly, he could not agree with the historian A. Shchapov, who regarded commune self-government as an invaluable survival of ancient Russia and a guardian of patriarchal traditions. Whereas Mikhailovsky thought of the commune as the embryo of a new civilization that would be both different from and qualitatively superior to capitalism, Chernyshevsky felt that the commune represented an evolutionary stage incomparably lower than capitalist property relations. The essential difference was that Chernyshevsky hoped Russia would be able to *catch up* with Western Europe by building on the latter's achievements and that she would overtake her and become a model for others: "Europe has her own understanding – an understanding that is much better developed than ours – and need not look to us for either theory or assistance."<sup>27</sup>

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27 Chernyshevsky, *Izbrannye filosofskie sochineniia*, vol. 3, p. 336.

While the Populists of the 70s hoped that Russia would take a course quite different from that of Western Europe, Chernyshevsky insisted that the Westernization of Russia ought to be completed by the eradication of “Asiatic conditions, the Asiatic social structure, and Asiatic habits.”<sup>28</sup>

Another characteristic difference concerned the relative importance of social and political goals. The Populists of the 70s equated political revolution with bourgeois revolution, and a parliamentary system with government of the bourgeoisie; this led them to conclude that extending political democracy would only benefit the privileged classes and thus contribute still further to the impoverishment of the masses. At one stage Chernyshevsky shared this belief: “Tsar or no tsar, constitution or no constitution, it makes no difference,” he wrote as a young man. What matters is “how to prevent the situation in which one class sucks the blood of another.”<sup>29</sup> As late as 1858 he suggested that democracy was a function of the people’s prosperity and that therefore Siberia whose population was relatively well off, was more “democratic” than England, which was suffering from “pauperization.”<sup>30</sup> Soon afterward, however (during the revolutionary years 1859-61), he returned to this problem and came to entirely different conclusions. Undemocratic methods used to prepare the abolition of serfdom convinced him that political freedom was in Russia a necessary condition of true social progress. Thus in his “Letters without Addressee” (1862) he sided with the gentry liberals of Tver’, who demanded a liberal constitution for Russia.<sup>31</sup>

Chernyshevsky’s new standpoint was best explicated in *Letters without an Address* that were to be published in the February issue of *Sovremennik*, 1861. Observing the methods by which the land reform was being prepared, Chernyshevsky arrived at the conclusion that the greatest Russian evil was

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28 Ibid., vol. 2, p. 668.

29 Ibid., vol. 3, p. 821.

30 See Chernyshevsky’s article “The Party Struggle in France in the Reigns of Louis XVIII and Charles X.”

31 The “Letters Without Addressee” were intended for the February number of the *Contemporary* (1861), but the censor stopped their publication. Despite the title, they were clearly addressed to Alexander II. Chernyshevsky confessed that he himself hardly believed it likely that he would be able to convince the emperor of the need to place limits on his own absolute powers. Presumably, the real aim of the “Letters” was to convince the journal’s educated readers that they must exert pressure on the government. In the same year the clandestine journal *Great Russian* (Velikorus’) made similar proposals advocating a campaign of this kind. For an analysis of the position of the gentry liberals of Tver’, see T. Emmons, *The Russian Landed Gentry and the Peasant Emancipation of 1861* (Cambridge, Eng. 1968).

autocracy which – for censorship reasons – he euphemistically named “bureaucracy.” In the absence of political liberties, the rule of centralized bureaucracy prevented normal social progress, thwarted public opinion and ignored the advice of specialists.

A bureaucratic system has absolutely no need for the minds, competence and experience of those who have been entrusted with a case. The people act like machines deprived of an opinion of their own; they proceed on the basis of accidentally overheard information or presumed opinions of someone or other who is in no way concerned with the issue.<sup>32</sup>

Political form *does* matter, after all: it would be incomparably better if the reforms were conducted by freely elected representatives of social forces, rather than by bureaucrats – even if the social forces were, in practice, limited to the gentry.

Having drawn that conclusion, Chernyshevsky abandoned his contemptuous attitude toward constitutionalism, siding with the liberal Tver gentry who had been making constitutional demands. From the perspective of the history of liberalism in Russia, it had a symbolic meaning: the Tver *zemstvo* remained a stronghold of the constitutional movement which was to bear fruit in the following century when the Constitutional Democrats’ Party [*Kadets*] emerged.

The real addressee of the *Letters* was Emperor Alexander II whom Chernyshevsky wanted to convince of the necessity of further reforms, both social and political. The argumentation contained in the *Letters* was also an appeal to the enlightened classes, urging them to win political freedom for themselves (in keeping with the *Velkorus* program) and use it to work on a thorough transformation of the country. Chernyshevsky fully realized that it was a reformist, rather than a revolutionary, option; he even declared that he considered it a “betrayal of the people” who would have profited more from the revolutionary way. He admitted that he was committing that “betrayal” out of fear for the fate of European civilization in Russia. The dumb people, he argued, “make no difference between those who wear German clothes” – a popular revolution would not shrink from destroying all the cultural achievements of Europeanized Russia.”<sup>33</sup>

The *Letters* were prohibited by the censors and Chernyshevsky was sent to Siberia where he could no longer influence the ideology of the Russian revolutionary movement. Nevertheless, he remained faithful to the beliefs

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32 Ibid., vol. II, pp. 214-215.

33 Ibid., pp. 189-191. An analysis of that “betrayal of the people” by a leader of the radical intelligentsia is proposed by T. Shanin in his book, *Russia as a Developing Society*, vol. 1, Yale UP, New Haven-London 1985, pp. 207-210.

expressed in his *Letters*: the conviction about the primary importance of political freedom, and the choice of the reformist way of development for Russia.<sup>34</sup>

The Russian Marxists considered themselves the benefactors of Chernyshevsky's ideological heritage. Plekhanov, who so vehemently combated the anti-Westernism of the Populists, treated Chernyshevsky with the utmost reverence. Lenin, in a conversation with Valentinov (in 1904), confessed that Chernyshevsky had been his favorite writer when he was young:

Under his influence, hundreds of men became revolutionaries [...]. He had, for instance, enchanted my brother, he had enchanted also myself. He plowed me through and through, very deep.<sup>35</sup>

The importance of such testimonies must not be ignored. They confirm that the moral-intellectual revolution of the 1860s in which Chernyshevsky had played the central role, had paved the way for social revolution. The content of Chernyshevsky's ideology, however, made its interpretation and continuation possible in various ways. The Populist revolutionaries claimed that it proved the possibility of "omitting the capitalist stage"; Plekhanov appreciated its Westernizing motives, manifested in the faithfulness to the "enlightened," rationalist ideals of the radical bourgeois democracy; Lenin focused on the criticism of the liberals which was so radical in Chernyshevsky's articles written before 1861.

Yet, Chernyshevsky's political testament was *Letters without an Address*, rejecting the revolutionary option in favor of a reformist compromise between the radicals, the liberals and the men of current authority. Thus, the ideas of the author of *What Is to Be Done?* were not only of benefit to the revolutionaries, but also to the non-revolutionary intelligentsia, both Populist and Westernizing, Socialist and leftist-liberal. Soviet historiography which presented

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34 The populist revolutionaries who had been taught by Chernyshevsky that political freedom was only important for liberals and had no significance for the social emancipation of the people, were astonished to hear their mentor's new political credo when they met him in Siberian exile. According to Stachevich, it ran as follows: "You, gentlemen, are saying that political freedom cannot feed a hungry man. But can the air feed a hungry man? Of course, it cannot. And yet, man is able to survive for a few days without food, whereas without air he will not survive even ten minutes. As air is indispensable for the life of an individual man, so political freedom is indispensable for the proper functioning of a human society" (*Diary of S. Stachevich*, quoted in: Y. Steklov, *N.G. Chernyshevsky, ievu zhizn i deiatelnost'*, vol. 1. Moscow-Leningrad 1928, pp. 448-449).

35 N. Valentinov, *Vstriechi s Leninim*, New York 1953.

Chernyshevsky as a precursor of Bolshevism was thus a drastic falsification of reality.

## Nikolai Dobroliubov and The Dispute over the “Superfluous Men”

Chernyshevsky’s most talented disciple and closest friend was NIKOLAI DOBROLIUBOV (1836-61). Not only the outlooks but the personal histories of both men were strikingly similar: Dobroliubov, too, was the son of a provincial priest (in Nizhnii Novgorod), attended a theological seminary, and came under the powerful influence of progressive Russian literature and literary criticism. There were important differences as well, but these can largely be attributed to the fact that Dobroliubov’s intellectual development was more rapid and less complex than Chernyshevsky’s since the way had already been paved by the older man.

It is a characteristic fact that the liberal writers of his day found the younger critic far more irritating. “You are an ordinary viper,” Turgenev once told Chernyshevsky, “but Dobroliubov is a cobra.”<sup>36</sup> In another conversation, also with Chernyshevsky, Kavelin made a similar distinction:

You have something in common with us [that is, the liberals of the 40s]; you also have something in common with Dobroliubov’s generation, but we have nothing in common at all – it would seem – with Dobroliubov. What can we do about it? We regret it, but it is all part of progress.<sup>37</sup>

There is a good deal of truth in Kavelin’s remark. Chernyshevsky, like the “men of the 40s,” had lived through the period of intense philosophical speculation and had studied Hegel. Dobroliubov, on the other hand, was totally uninterested in the problems raised by idealist philosophy and only read the Young Hegelians and Feuerbach for the sake of their atheist arguments. On political issues he was sometimes more uncompromising than his older teacher. It was he who brought about the split on the editorial board of the *Contemporary*, despite Nekrasov’s efforts to prevent a final break. After reading Dobroliubov’s article “When Will the True Day Come?” (1860), Turgenev told Nekrasov that either Dobroliubov must go or he, Turgenev, would. Nekrasov chose Dobroliubov, and Turgenev –

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36 Quoted in V. Poliansky [P. I. Lebedev], *A. A. Dobroliubov, Mirovozzrenie i kriticheskaiia deiatel’nost’* (M, 1933), p. 18.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 9. On the split between the generation of “the 40s” and that of “the sixties,” see E. Lampert, *Sons Against Fathers* (Oxford 1965); and I. Berlin, “Fathers and Children,” in his *Russian Thinkers* (New York 1978).

followed by Tolstoy, Goncharov, and D. Grigorovich – severed his connection with the periodical.

Although Dobroliubov regarded Chernyshevsky as his highest authority on philosophical matters, he differed from him on certain details. Like Chernyshevsky, he believed in the “anthropological principle”; and though a materialist, he rejected the “vulgar” materialism of Buchner and Moleschott (unlike Pisarev). At the same time, however, he attached less importance to philosophy and history than to the natural sciences, so that his world view was more inclined toward naturalism.

In his social philosophy Dobroliubov was a typical “enlightener” who judged historical phenomena according to the unchanging standards of a rational “human nature.” The disturbing gulf between his rational, commonsense ideal and reality led him to ask: “Where is the source of that incomprehensible dissonance between things as they ought to be, according to the natural rational course of events, and things as they actually are?”<sup>38</sup> To say that he regarded lack of education and the exploited majority’s insufficient understanding of its strength and natural rights as the only source of this dissonance would be an oversimplification; on the other hand, arguments along these lines were typical of him. He had a rather naive view of the class struggle as the struggle of “working people” (representing the “natural” needs and ideals of humanity) against “spongers” (whose very existence was a deviation from the “natural” norm). “Humanity’s natural inclination,” he wrote:

reduced to the simplest terms, can be put in a few words: ‘Everyone should prosper.’ In endeavoring to reach this goal people were at first bound, in the nature of things, to move away from it; by trying to look after his own well-being, every man interfered with that of others; no one knew how to arrange matters otherwise.<sup>39</sup>

Dobroliubov also differed somewhat from Chernyshevsky in his view on the role of the masses. Like the Westernizers of the 40s, Chernyshevsky regarded the common people as an essentially conservative force acting from habit; nonetheless he differed from the liberals in believing that in exceptional circumstances the masses were capable of deviating from routine and playing a creative part in history (making a revolution for instance; see his article “Could This Be the Beginning of Change?”). Dobroliubov went further than this; in his article “A Contribution to a Character Sketch of the Russian People” (1860), he stressed the common people’s ability to break out of the daily rut, their characteristic love of liberty, their noble emotions, and their inexhaustible store

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38 N. Dobroliubov, *Sobranie sochinenii* (M – L, 1961-64), vol. 7, p. 847.

39 *Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 307.

of creative energy. This idealized view would have been quite foreign to Chernyshevsky.

Dobroliubov called his own type of literary criticism “real criticism” – “real” presumably because it consisted first in analyzing a literary work as if it were an objective sociological document and then in drawing conclusions that entirely disregarded the author’s subjective intentions. Dobroliubov frequently and indeed ostentatiously rejected the critic’s normative role and condemned attempts to judge literary works by previously established critical standards; what he himself prized most highly was not ideological content but the faithful reproduction of reality.

Some of the critic’s formulations suggest that the role of “real criticism” was only to show how accurately a given work measured up to reality and not to assess the merit of literary works or “pronounce judgment on the aspects of reality reproduced in them,” as Chernyshevsky had demanded. This, however, would be too hasty a conclusion. Dobroliubov was quite sincere in rejecting “diverse maxims and judgments based on God knows what theories”: this was his reaction to the obtrusive moralizing and didacticism that were the hallmarks of the liberal “literature of exposure”; it was also his way of declaring his indifference to judgments based on various aesthetic canons. At the same time there was no doubt in his mind that there are “natural rules deriving from the nature of things,” that “we know certain axioms without which thinking is impossible,” certain “general concepts and rules which every man undoubtedly takes into consideration when arguing on no matter what theme.”<sup>40</sup> The system of these axioms and norms is what Dobroliubov called “human nature.” His condemnation of subjective judgments sprang, therefore, from a firm belief in the existence of an entirely objective and absolute system of values; he demanded that the writer confine himself to showing “facts,” because he was convinced that facts contained their own meaning and that the presentation of unadorned and undisguised reality must itself suggest an appropriate judgment to the reader. Indeed only strict adherence to facts would liberate men’s minds from the “unnatural notions that make it difficult to bring about the universal welfare.”<sup>41</sup>

Despite Dobroliubov’s rejection of aesthetic canons, the criterion of “human nature,” when applied to literature, certainly implied authority on philosophical matters, he differed from him on certain details. Like Chernyshevsky, he believed in the “anthropological principle”; and though a materialist, he rejected the “vulgar” materialism of Buchner and Moleschott (unlike Pisarev). At the

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40 Ibid., p. 304.

41 Ibid., p. 309.

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42 N. Dobroliubov, *Sobranie sochinenii* (M – L, 1961-64), vol. 7, p. 247.

43 *Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 307.



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Despite Dobroliubov's rejection of aesthetic canons, the criterion of "human nature," when applied to literature, certainly implied the superiority of uncompromising realism and the rejection – or at best neglect – of all literary conventions. Realism in literature, Dobroliubov wrote, is one of the "incontrovertible and universally recognized axioms."<sup>46</sup> Moreover, insisting on the criterion of conformity with human nature and "natural" human needs led, in Dobroliubov's interpretation, to a view of literature as a "handmaiden whose importance depends on propaganda and [...] who is judged by what she advocates and how."<sup>47</sup> "We judge the merit of a writer or a particular work," he wrote, "by the extent to which it expresses the natural aspirations of a given

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44 Ibid., p. 304.

45 Ibid., p. 309.

46 Ibid., p. 305.

47 Ibid., p. 309.

epoch or nation.”<sup>48</sup> It was only a short step from this to the concrete identification of “natural” aspirations and ideals with the aspirations and ideals of the common man. In the essay on “The Role of the Folk Element in the Development of Russian Literature” (1858), the critic interpreted the history of Russian literature as a gradual process of drawing closer to “naturalness” and “*narodnost*,” and concluded with an appeal for a “people’s party” in literature.

From a historical perspective, the weakness of Dobroliubov’s theoretical assumptions are unmistakable: his method relied on the one hand on an anachronistic 18<sup>th</sup> century conception of human nature, and on the other on a positivistic (in the broad sense of the word) illusion about the objective nature of “facts.” But this illusion did not lead Dobroliubov to bow down before facts – on the contrary, his faith in “human nature” as an immutable and absolute frame of reference for normative judgments gave him a self-confidence that made him very different from the self-questioning liberals of the 40s he criticized. Dobroliubov’s “facts” acquired a new revolutionary meaning, reinforced by his conviction that this meaning was an inseparable aspect of the facts themselves. In the light of his articles it appeared that Russian reality was against human nature itself, and that this was shown by objective facts registered in the works of almost all realist writers, even those who were far from radical. All this made a great impression, of course, and transformed literary criticism into a powerful tool helping to radicalize the social consciousness.

Dobroliubov’s favorite theme was the problem of the “two generations,” or more accurately of the two social forces involved in the reform movement. His articles were an expression of the insight gained by the younger generation of radical democrats, who were clearly aware of the gulf that divided them from the liberal gentry, who had until recently borne the main burden of opposition. Following Chernyshevsky,<sup>49</sup> Dobroliubov set out to draw a close parallel between the lack of determination of the liberal opposition of his day and the psychological type of the “man of the 40s.” Lacking roots in a concrete social force, he argued, the “superfluous men” were incapable of action and preferred to be passive observers mouthing approval of the reforms initiated by the government. The new age needed “new men,” and such men had already begun to appear. The liberal idealists, torn by inner conflict and paralyzed by “reflection,” were being replaced by “real men with strong nerves and a healthy imagination.”<sup>50</sup>

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48 Ibid., p. 307.

49 Chernyshevsky discussed the issue of the “superfluous men” in his article “Russkii chelovek na Rendez-vous” (1858).

50 Dobroliubov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 4, p. 73.

These quotations come from “Last Year’s Literary Trifles,” an article published in 1859. In it Dobroliubov skillfully combined impassioned criticism of liberal publicists and the so-called “literature of exposure” with reflections on the “men of the 40s” as the precursors of modern Russian liberalism. Although the “muckrakers” denounced various social evils, he wrote, their criticism was superficial and the remedies they proposed were mere palliatives. In fact, the liberals were afraid of consistent radical exposure because they themselves were a product of the very social realities they were attempting to denounce.

Dobroliubov developed these ideas in his trenchant article “What is Oblomovism?” published in the same year. In it Oblomov, the hero of Goncharov’s famous novel, is shown from an unexpected angle as the last of the “superfluous men” in Russian literature – brother, or at least close relative, of Pushkin’s Eugene Onegin, Lermontov’s Pechorin, Herzen’s Beltov, and Turgenev’s Rudin and Hamlet of Shchigrovsk. There were certain individual differences, Dobroliubov conceded, between the indolent and totally apathetic Oblomov and the tragic figure of Pechorin, whom Lermontov had made into a “hero of our time”; nevertheless, all “superfluous men” were organically incapable of real action, for they had all been brought up in the demoralizing hothouse conditions of privilege, indolence, and lack of responsibility. They had no right to a halo of glory, for every one of them suffered from the paralysis of “Oblomovism.” This was indeed a severe settling of accounts with the entire culture and traditions of the enlightened liberal gentry.

The severity of this attack evoked protests on more than one front. The liberals reiterated the view, upheld by Annenkov in his polemic with Chernyshevsky, that the “idealist of the 40s” criticized by the radical democrats was “the only moral type in the contemporary world.”<sup>51</sup> It is significant that Herzen, too, hastened to the defense of the superfluous men. In his article “Very Dangerous!” he even suggested that by criticizing the liberal press and the liberal traditions of the Russian intelligentsia the “buffoons” of the *Contemporary* were abetting the tsarist regime and deserved to be decorated for their services to absolutism. The editors of the *Contemporary* were taken aback to find themselves the target of an attack from such a source – even Dobroliubov had always regarded Herzen (as well as Belinsky) as a “superior nature” whom his criticism did not concern. Chernyshevsky thought it essential to go to London in order to clear up the misunderstanding in person. He returned with little to show for his pains, convinced that Herzen was a man of the past. The misunderstanding had been cleared up, but the difference of opinion remained.

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51 P. V. Annenkov, *Vospominaniia i kriticheskie ocherki* (St. Petersburg 1879), vol. 2, pp. 170-72.

This is shown by the fact that, even after his conversation with Chernyshevsky, Herzen published another article ("Superfluous Men and Angry Men"), milder in tone, but condemning Dobroliubov's dismissal of the generation of the 40s as prejudiced and unhistorical.

Dobroliubov's uncompromising criticism of Russian society, and his equally severe strictures of men who until recently had been regarded as Russia's "finest sons," were paralleled by his determination to find praiseworthy aspects of Russian life, new models worthy of imitation and new literary heroes.

In his article "When Will the True Day Come?" he sketched a vivid portrait of a "strong nature," a man of action capable of impelling his country forward along the path of progress. This "strong nature" was Insarov, the hero of Turgenev's novel *On the Eve*, a Bulgarian fighting against the Turks for his country's freedom. The source of Insarov's firmness and energy, Dobroliubov suggested, was his absolute lack of any connection with what he was trying to oppose. Although Russia was not a conquered nation, she had been subjugated by her "domestic Turks" and needed men like Insarov. Such men would soon arise, according to the optimistic conclusion of the article.

## Dmitry Pisarev and "Nihilism"

After the death of Dobroliubov and Chernyshevsky's imprisonment, the most influential literary critic in Russia was DMITRY PISAREV (1840-68).<sup>52</sup> Although he, like Dobroliubov, developed ideas put forward by Chernyshevsky, he gave them his own personal slant and arrived at conclusions very different from Dobroliubov's; indeed, Pisarev once wrote that if he had ever met Dobroliubov they probably would not have agreed on a single issue.<sup>53</sup>

The intellectual trend represented by Pisarev in his articles for the periodical *Russian Word* [*Russkoe Slovo*] was often referred to as "nihilism." This word, which had been given wide currency by Turgenev's novel *Fathers and Sons*, was not at first a term of abuse, although that is the meaning imposed on it by right-wing critics. Originally it simply meant a radical rejection of all established

52 Unlike either Chernyshevsky or Dobroliubov, Pisarev came from the gentry. In his first articles he defended "pure art" and a moderate liberalism. It was in 1861 that his views became more radical. The most comprehensive Western work on Pisarev is A. Coquart, *Dmitry Pisarev et ideologie du nihilisme russe* (Paris 1946). In the book by a Soviet scholar, A. I. Novikov, *Nihilism i nigilisty* (L, 1972), Russian "nihilism" of the 1860s is analyzed in the perspective of the further development of nihilist ideas in Russian and Western thought.

53 D. I. Pisarev, *Sochineniia* (M, 1955-56). vol. 3, p. 35.

authorities, the determination to recognize nothing [*nihil*] that could not be justified by rational argument. In *Fathers and Sons*, Bazarov (who represents the generation of the “sons”) himself adopted the label “nihilist”; Pisarev was a great admirer of Turgenev’s hero and held him up as a model to the younger generation. Like Bazarov, Pisarev thought that the emancipation of the individual from the irrational bonds imposed by society, family, and religion (the central idea of nihilism) would be largely accomplished through the popularization of the natural sciences. At the same time, he had an exaggerated faith in the utilitarian ethics of “rational egoism.” He used his articles to advocate the attitudes of “thinking realists” (whose literary prototype was Bazarov) and to attack “aesthetics” – by which he meant the aestheticizing postures of the gentry liberals.

In the course of time, mainly under the influence of the right-wing press, the label “nihilists” also became attached to the revolutionaries of the 70s (especially the terrorists, although they persistently rejected the label, reserving it exclusively for “Pisarevites”). The distinction is emphasized by the revolutionary Populist Sergei Kravchinsky, author of a successful attempt on the life of chief of police Mezentsev, who wrote in his book *Underground Russia*:

It would be difficult to imagine a sharper contrast. The nihilist’s objective is personal happiness at any price, his ideal is the ‘rational’ existence of the “thinking realist”. The revolutionary’s object, on the other hand, is the happiness of others; for this he is ready to sacrifice his own. His ideal is a life full of suffering and a martyr’s death.<sup>54</sup>

There is, of course, some oversimplification in this comment; elsewhere Kravchinsky emphasized that the nihilists were not calculating egoists and quoted a characteristic statement made by V. Zaitsev, one of Pisarev’s closest collaborators: “We were convinced that we were fighting for the happiness of mankind, and every one of us would gladly have given his head for Moleschott and Darwin.”<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, the fact remains that the nihilism of the 60s was not a revolutionary movement; no doubt by its attacks on established authorities it helped to radicalize public opinion, but it did not advocate revolutionary methods of struggle or lead automatically toward revolutionary goals.

This conclusion would appear to be contradicted by an apparently significant episode in Pisarev’s life that led to his imprisonment for four-and-a-half years in the Peter and Paul Fortress. In June 1862, Pisarev approached Petr Ballod, a student who was running an illegal printing press, and asked him to

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54 Serge Kravchinsky, *Underground Russia: Revolutionary Profiles and Sketches from Life*, with a preface by P. Lavrov (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; London 1883).

55 Ibid.

print a proclamation he had written. This was a defense of Herzen against attacks contained in two pamphlets written in French by Baron Fircks, a tsarist agent in Belgium who used the pseudonym Schedo-Ferroti. The final words of the proclamation sound like a call to revolution:

The Romanov dynasty and the Petersburg bureaucracy must disappear. They will not be saved by ministers like Valuiev or litterateurs like Schedo-Ferroti.

That which is dead and decaying will come crashing down into the grave on its own; our role is merely to give it the final impetus and bury the stinking corpses in the mud.<sup>56</sup>

Ballod was arrested before the proclamation could be printed, and Pisarev, too, was detained. During interrogation Pisarev tried to defend himself by citing his nervous condition resulting from a broken engagement and the government's reactionary measures (the closing of Sunday schools, and the temporary suspension of the *Contemporary* and *Russian Word*). Even taking his explanations at their face value, it is possible that under different circumstances Pisarev might have joined the revolutionary camp. As it turned out, this proclamation was to remain an isolated episode in his life. In articles published both before and after his arrest (in prison he was allowed to read books and write articles), Pisarev gave his unequivocal support to non-revolutionary methods of struggle. He was convinced that, for the time being at any rate, a sober, realistic view of the situation would make it clear that a successful revolution was quite unlikely; and though revolution might be unavoidable in certain circumstances, it was a form of struggle that "thinking realists" should only adopt as a last resort. In his programmatic article "The Realists," Pisarev contrasted "mechanical influences" (by which he meant revolution) with "chemical influences" (that is, the struggle for a new and "realistic" outlook, and the systematic and legal struggle for reforms). In contrast to Dobroliubov, therefore, Pisarev may be called not a revolutionary democrat but rather a radical advocate of patient organic work for progress.

This distinction becomes very clear when we examine Pisarev's attitude toward Dobroliubov's favorite literary characters. Turgenev's Insarov (*On the Eve*), for instance, he accused of being unrealistic, stiff, and bombastic. He also disagreed with Dobroliubov's view of Catherine in Ostrovsky's *The Storm*, maintaining that her rebellion was purely emotional and irrational, and therefore without positive value. By his enthusiastic praise for Catherine, Pisarev contended, Dobroliubov had abandoned the "realistic" point of view and had unwittingly given his support to "aesthetics."

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56 Pisarev, *Soch.*, vol. 2, p. 126.

The difference of outlook between the two men had its underlying source in their philosophical convictions. Both were materialists in their general view of the world, but idealists in their interpretation of history. Pisarev's materialism had characteristic elements of positivism (e.g. his view of agnosticism as a radical defense against metaphysics) and was as extremist as his historical idealism. It is interesting to note, for instance, that it was not Feuerbachian materialism but the vulgarized naturalistic version of it put forth by Buchner, Vogt, and Moleschott that most appealed to him. At the same time, his rather naive rationalistic idealism led him to identify progress with the advance of scientific knowledge, thus turning science into a veritable demiurge of history. Dobroliubov also believed in science, but his idealization of simple folk as the representatives of an unchanging human nature led him to put some stress on the role of the masses. Pisarev, on the other hand, continued the line of thinkers in Russia who believed that the only progressive force was the educated minority and who regarded all purely "natural" and spontaneous acts with considerable skepticism.

An interesting exposition of Pisarev's view on the issue of the "new men" and the positive hero may also be found in an article on Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?* published in 1865 under the title "A New Type" (reissued later as "The Thinking Proletariat.") What at first sight seems surprising in this article is Pisarev's praise for the mysterious revolutionary Rakhmetov, whom he calls a successful portrait of an "unusual man" infinitely superior (apart from his asceticism) to Turgenev's Insarov. This view should not be regarded as inconsistent with Pisarev's program of organic reforms, rather it should be taken as showing that in his case "non-revolutionary" was not synonymous with "antirevolutionary." Rakhmetov, Pisarev wrote, was an unusual man whose activities could only find full scope in unusual circumstances that could not be planned or foreseen; only the distant future would reveal what were to be the fruits of this man's work. For the time being, however, ordinary people needed models to look up to in their everyday lives. The other leading characters of Chernyshevsky's novel – Lopuchov, Kirsanov, and Vera Pavlovna – provided models of this kind.

Pisarev's favorite literary hero – the best example of a "thinking realist" – was Turgenev's Bazarov, to whom he devoted two essays, "Bazarov" (written in 1862) and the longer "The Realists" (written in prison in 1864). The difference in viewpoint between the two pieces is striking. In the first, Pisarev revealed his obvious fascination with the ideal of the emancipated autonomous individual and represented Bazarov as a man who had rejected all "principles" or norms, thought only of himself, and was incapable of any form of self-sacrifice: "He is guided only by his own whim or calculation. He recognizes no regulator –

whether above him, outside him, or within him – no moral law, no principle. He has no noble aims and for all that represents a powerful force.”<sup>57</sup> For Pisarev this absolute self-affirmation of the individual ego was synonymous with the emancipation of the individual, and was therefore praiseworthy as a necessary prerequisite of critical understanding.

In “The Realists” this viewpoint was strikingly modified. Immoral individualism was replaced by a utilitarianism that, though rooted in an individualistic world view, was closely bound up with the idea of work for the common good. A close analysis of his own position, Pisarev now argued, would show that the thinking individual owes everything to society and that a sense of honor should make him pay his debt: every honest man ought therefore to contribute as far as he is able to the solution of the “unavoidable problem of the hungry and the naked”; “apart from this problem there is nothing worthy of our efforts, thoughts, or exertions.”<sup>58</sup> In his new character sketch of Bazarov, Pisarev now placed emphasis not on the importance of the pleasure motive but on social goals, not on the joyful emancipation from restrictive bonds but on the willing subordination to the rigor of critical reflection and the taste for steadfast, “socially useful” work. Of course, Pisarev did not consider this to be inconsistent with egoism: Bazarov was motivated by egoism, but by the egoism of a “thinking realist” and not that of an “aesthete.”

Although he placed such stress on efforts to improve the lot of “the hungry and the naked,” Pisarev was not a socialist; “thinking realists” in his eyes were to be found not only among the democratic intelligentsia, but also among enlightened capitalists, whom he called “thinking leaders of work among the masses.” This attitude stemmed not only from the fact that he placed little hope in the masses, but also from the fact that he knew more about the role of industrialization and technological advance than Dobroliubov. In the Russia of his time, he felt, men like Bazarov would only appear among the intelligentsia; the masses were still the passive raw material of history and were likely to remain so for a long time to come. Only the educated and financially independent strata of society were capable of organizing the labor of the masses along rational lines and increasing productivity by the application of the latest scientific and technological advances.

“Nihilism” in the sense of a revolt against established authorities thus took second place to a constructive and politically moderate positivist program concentrating on the foundations of future prosperity. Only in its view of art or “aesthetics” – which Pisarev said had become “a veritable nightmare” to him –

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57 Ibid., p. 11.

58 Ibid., vol. 3, p. 105.



was the later article more “nihilistic.” In the earlier one Pisarev had not identified himself with his favorite hero’s comments that Pushkin was not “worth reading” or that “Raphael was not worth a brass farthing.” He called these comments a possibly justifiable reaction against the aestheticism of the generation of the “fathers,” but also an example of “ridiculous overreaction” and even of “narrow-minded intellectual despotism.” In the later “Realists,” Pisarev withdrew even these reservations. In his puritan radicalism he even declared that to waste human energy on the creation and consumption of artistic pleasures contradicted the principle of “the economy of material and intellectual forces.” Novels, he allowed, might have a certain didactic value, but he was doubtful about the role of poetry and quite vehement about the total uselessness of music and the visual arts, about which he wrote: “I can see no reason for believing that these art forms can make any contribution whatsoever to raising the intellectual or moral standards of humanity.”<sup>59</sup>

These ideas, which were characteristic of the general line of the periodical *Russian Word*, were developed by Pisarev in his critical essay “Pushkin and Belinsky” (1865), and in an article with the self-explanatory title “The Destruction of Aesthetics” (1865). The first of these was a vehement and even brutal attack on both the cult of Pushkin led by Apollon Grigoriev and the liberal critics’ defense of art for art’s sake. Pisarev also took exception to the high praise of Pushkin in Belinsky’s writings and called even him a “semi-aesthete.” The second essay – “The Destruction of Aesthetics” – was a one-sided “nihilistic” interpretation of Chernyshevsky’s aesthetic theories.

An important part of Pisarev’s work was his popular articles on the natural sciences, which he regarded as the most efficient instrument for spreading “realism.” He was one of the first men in Russia to write of Darwin and the theory of evolution, and his contribution in this field was praised by the botanist K. Timiryazev, Russia’s most eminent champion of Darwinism. Pisarev’s articles, written with considerable verve and a vivacious and colorful style, were read by high school students all over Russia. In some of his articles on animal life he succeeded in combining popularization of sciences and materialist philosophy with witty and satirical comment (by analogy) on human society.

There are grounds for supposing that if Pisarev had not died at an early age he would have arrived at a more balanced viewpoint, closer to that of Chernyshevsky and the contributors to the *Contemporary*. The tone of his last articles seems to lend credence to this view. Further evidence for a change of outlook is the fact that after leaving prison (in November 1866) he made

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59 Ibid., p. 114.

approaches to Nekrasov and Saltykov-Shchedrin, who had taken over the periodical *Notes of the Fatherland* after the *Contemporary* was closed down. Unfortunately, Pisarev did not have long to live: he drowned in June 1868 while bathing in the Baltic near Riga.

## Critics of the “Enlighteners”: Apollon Grigoriev and Nikolai Strakhov

Enlightenment-style rationalism in various forms was prominent in progressive circles in the 1860s. In the domain of philosophy, materialism was able to make headway because there were no professional philosophers at Russian universities. It is significant that the most serious critic of Chemyshvsky's *Anthropological Principle* was a theologian, Pamphil Yurkevich (1827-74), a professor at the Kiev Theological Academy. His articles “A Contribution to the Science of the Human Spirit” and “Against Materialism” attracted the notice of influential conservatives, who had him promoted to the chair of philosophy at Moscow University. Yurkevich's Platonic idealism was, however, too reminiscent of traditional Christian apologetics to have any wider influence in secular circles.

Of greater interest and far greater intellectual and cultural potential was the critical reaction to the “enlighteners” of the *pochvenniki* group – advocates of a “return to the soil” (from *pochva*, the Russian word for “soil”). This group's call clearly harked back to Slavophilism; and indeed, the ideologists of the group treated the conflict with the “enlighteners” as part of the wider polemic on the relationship between Russia and Europe, thus continuing the philosophical discussions of the 40s in a new context. Quantitatively speaking, the influence of the group was negligible, but their contribution to Russian culture was nevertheless of great importance, largely because of the seminal role of their ideas in the work of Dostoevsky.

The main ideologist of the *pochvenniki* was the romantic poet and literary critic APOLLON GRIGORIEV (1822-64). His own romantic nationalism, however, differed from that of the Slavophiles, whom he accused of an idealization of Russia's ancient boyars. He believed that vital national principles had been best preserved among social groups unaffected by serfdom, and should therefore be sought not among the patriarchal peasantry but among the conservative merchant class, which he called “the eternal quintessence of ancient Russia.” The Slavophiles, for their part, were rightly suspicious both of Grigoriev's extravagant “aestheticizing” romanticism, which even colored his attitude to religion, and of his romantic delight in the diversity of national cultures with

their “scents” and “colors,” which smacked of relativism and was difficult to reconcile with a “truly Christian” system of values.

Perhaps the most outstanding feature of Grigoriev’s personality was his deep-rooted dislike of all “artificiality,” of schematic fetters and lifelessness – of anything that was “made” rather than “created,” to use his own distinction. He violently opposed all rationalist theories in the name of “immediate” intuitive knowledge, and set “life,” “organicity,” and “history” against “theory” and “logic.” His own philosophy he summed up in the following sentence: “Not reason itself with its logical exigencies and the theories they give rise to, but reason and its logical exigencies plus life and its organic manifestations.”<sup>60</sup>

One of the most dangerous theories, according to Grigoriev, was Hegelian philosophy. In his critique of Hegelianism he attempted to explain how the “enlighteners” had acquired their dominant position in Russian intellectual life and how Belinsky’s Hegelian ideas had paved the way for the enlightenment-style rationalism of Chernyshevsky and Dobroliubov.<sup>61</sup> Against the “historical criticism” represented by the mature Belinsky he proposed to set something he called “organic criticism.” This antithesis was based on a differentiation between a “sense of history” (i.e. the conservative historicism that arose in reaction against 18<sup>th</sup> century rationalism) and the Left Hegelian “historical view” (i.e. the historicist theory – put forward by Belinsky among others – of infinite and universal progress). Grigoriev dismissed the latter as another variant of the 18<sup>th</sup> century standpoint. The danger of this theory, he argued, was that it represented a peculiar combination of fatalism and relativism, according to which neither individuals nor nations were responsible for their own lives but were merely “transient moments,” instruments of the universal spirit. Hegel himself, the founder of the “historical view,” possessed a “sense of history”; but in his disciples that sense had disappeared altogether, so that they were left with nothing but a dogmatic teleological “theory of history,” an abstract model of evolution implementing a pre-established plan. This theory, like all variants of rationalism, implied that there was an “abstract Spirit of mankind,” a notion that Grigoriev dismissed as illusory, since in his view only concrete individualities –

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60 A. A. Grigoriev, *Sochineniia* (St. Petersburg 1876), vol. 1, p. 624.

61 Grigoriev’s attitude toward Belinsky was complicated. He distinguished two trends in Belinsky’s work, one leading down to himself, the other leading straight to the “enlighteners” of the sixties. He criticized Belinsky as the theorist of the “natural school,” but he accepted his interpretation of Pushkin and at the same time praised the writings of the “reconciliation with reality” and Schellingian periods of the 1830s, while attacking him as a Left Hegelian.

either individual human beings or collective individualities – could claim to be real.<sup>62</sup>

Grigoriev’s main objection to the “historical view” (and “historical criticism”) can be summed up under three headings. First, he accused its representatives of putting an absolute value on every “last word” of progress, of reducing the rich variety of life to a simplified pattern of “gradual approximations” to the currently accepted norm. Second, he felt that the belief of the representatives of the “historical view” in the universal and inevitable nature of progress led them to undervalue national “distinctiveness,” to overlook the importance of the specific individual and unrepeatable phenomenon, and to ignore anything that could not be explained by universal laws. Third, by identifying their own consciousness with immanent Historical Reason, they were guilty of attempting to seek conscious control over life, of claiming the right to force it into a Procrustean bed of logic and slice into its living tissues with a scalpel in the conceited belief that such an operation would prove salutary. This was an absurd and harmful claim, Grigoriev declared. It failed to take account of the fact that life was directed by divine creativity – that “vital focus of the supreme laws of life itself”<sup>63</sup> – and that therefore man must listen to the irrational pulse of life instead of trying to control it.

Grigoriev attributed the merit of transcending the “historical view” to the later Schelling, whose insistence on the personality of God in his “philosophy of revelation” had once more reinstated human individuality as an absolute value, and who had laid the basis for the view that nations, too, were endowed with unique irrational and exclusive personalities unaffected by the so-called universal laws of human evolution.

“Nations,” Grigoriev wrote, are organisms each of which “is self-contained, is governed by its own necessity, is permitted to live in its own way according to laws specific to itself, and need not serve as a transitional form for any other organism.”<sup>64</sup>

The basic premise of Grigoriev’s “organic criticism” was “faith in the fact that life is an organic whole.”<sup>65</sup> This naturally led to a preference for “organic phenomena” in culture, i.e. for works rooted in the native soil. Nevertheless, for Grigoriev (unlike the Slavophiles) a “return to the soil” did not mean a rejection of Western values or the denial of the personality principle. In his view not only

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62 See Grigoriev’s article “Vzgliad na osnovy, znachenie i priemy sovremennoi kritiki iskusstva” (1858), in *Soch.*, vol. 1.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 205.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 210.

65 *Ibid.*, p. 223.

the “meek” type idealized by the Slavophiles but also his opposite, the “predatory” type who represented individualism, had his roots in the Russian soil. An organic synthesis of respect for tradition and the personality principle, of spontaneous plantlike growth and sophisticated rational consciousness – in fact, of Slavophilism and Westernism – was not inherently impossible. Such a synthesis, Grigoriev thought, had already taken place in the work of Pushkin and would come about in society as well, for a great poet was always the most perfect spiritual organ of his people and an infallible harbinger of its future.

Holding views of this kind, it is not surprising that Grigoriev took an original stand on the question of the “superfluous men” in Russian life and literature. The “superfluous men” had indeed been uprooted from the soil and condemned to inner duality, he admitted, but this process had been necessary in order to enrich the soil and help it to assimilate European elements and the personality principle. The “superfluous men” had torn themselves away from the soil, but their destiny had been to return home not only as repentant prodigals but also as men who had brought back new and valuable experiences gathered during their “wanderings.” Grigoriev’s favorite confirmation of this thesis was the development of Lavretsky, the hero of Turgenev’s *House of Gentlefolk*. In fact, he interpreted the ideological evolution of the most outstanding Russian writers, beginning with Pushkin and ending with Dostoevsky, as a similar process of “striking roots,” or of a return to the native soil.

In the controversies of the 60s, therefore, Grigoriev warmly supported the “superfluous men” against their detractor Dobroliubov. When the latter set out to prove in his article “What Is Oblomovism” that the “superfluous men” were themselves rooted in the serf system they appeared to attack, Grigoriev reversed the argument to claim that this very “rootedness” was a point in their favor against the “rootless theoreticians.” The apathetic village of Oblomovka became a symbol of the “true mother” whom Dobroliubov had “bespattered with saliva like a mad dog.”<sup>66</sup> The rule “love work and avoid indolence,” Grigoriev wrote, is entirely correct and praiseworthy in the abstract; however, as soon as we make use of it in order to “dissect, as with a scalpel, what is called Oblomovka and Oblomovism, then if we are living beings, organic products of soil and nationality, Oblomovism, that poor wronged creature, makes its voice heard in ourselves.”<sup>67</sup>

Central to Grigoriev’s thought was a specific conception of national features of literature, which he set against both the subordination of literature to social and political ends and the ideal of art for art’s sake. This enabled him to

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66 A. A. Grigoriev, *Vospominaniia (i vospominaniia o nem)* (M – L, 1930), p. 212.

67 Grigoriev, *Soch.*, vol. 1, p. 415.

reconcile romantic aestheticism with support for realistic tendencies, a cult of the great romantic poets (in addition to Pushkin, he admired Mickiewicz and Byron) with understanding and sympathy for the poetry of Nekrasov. Since there was room for the folk element in his conception of nationality, he was on the whole inclined to welcome the democratization of literature – both the tendency for writers to be drawn from a wider background and the tendency for literature to penetrate more profound levels of national life. It must be remembered, however, that the concept of nationality in Grigoriev's world view was linked to a romantic irrationalism and a conservative view of history in which "organicity" was set against rational thought and conscious attempts to shape reality. This, of course, prevented him from understanding that the "theorists" he criticized – Chernyshevsky, Dobroliubov, and Pisarev – were in fact also organic products of the Russian soil.

The other leading ideologist of the "return to the soil" movement was NIKOLAI STRAKHOV (1828-96), a scientist by training and a close friend of Dostoevsky and later of Tolstoy.<sup>68</sup> The notion central to his thought was that nature and society form an organic whole. Strakhov believed that Hegelian philosophy provided the theoretical foundations of this holistic vision of the world. His interpretation of this philosophy was, of course, different from Grigoriev's: he regarded Hegelianism not as a form of rationalism but as the "purest mysticism," related to the mysticism of Baader, Meister Eckhart, and Angelus Silesius.<sup>69</sup> It is hardly surprising that he found it possible to reconcile Hegelianism thus conceived with Orthodox theism and Slavophile irrationalism.

Strakhov devoted his whole life to fighting various manifestations of atomistic and mechanistic theories, which he felt were symptoms of the sickness of Western civilization and provided the ideological foundations of the nihilism, revolutionism, and fashionable "enlightenment" of the 60s. He regarded Feuerbachian philosophy as the counterpart of atomistic conceptions in the natural sciences. The quintessence of Feuerbachian ideas, he wrote, is the lack of unity:

There is no unity, no wholeness in the world; there is only multiplicity and parts. There is no center, no connecting link in the world; the center of everything is in the thing itself, everything exists because it is separate and not connected with any others. Every point in space, every atom exists separately, by itself, and that is true existence.<sup>70</sup>

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68 See L. Gerstein, *Nikolai Strakhov* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971).

69 See D.I. Tschiiievskij, *Gegiel w Rossii* (Paris, 1939), p. 273.

70 N.N. Strakhov, *Bor'ba s Zapadom v nashei literature*, St. Petersburg, 1883, vol. 2, p. 92.

The article from which this quotation is taken was written in 1864. Though writing about Feuerbach, there is no doubt that Strakhov also had in mind his Russian disciple Nikolai Chernyshevsky.

One of Strakhov's best known publications is the article *The Fatal Question*, written in connection with the Polish uprising and published in April 1863 in the magazine *Vremya*. The publication triggered a scandal that led to the closedown of the periodical on the charge of insulting the Homeland. The reason for such a strong charge was Strakhov's argument whereby the major reason behind the January Insurrection was the sense of superiority shared among the Poles, their moral impossibility to come to terms with a situation where "a cultured European nation is subjected to the rule of a barbaric nation." Strakhov considered this conviction of superiority reasonable, because, unlike Russia, Poland "has constantly fraternized and contended with other members of the European family, never being its underdeveloped member, or an alien to it."<sup>71</sup> He even added that the level of civilization achieved by Poland gave it a moral right to be the leader for the Slavonic nations and to expand eastwards.

It was Strakhov's intent, though, that the conclusions from this diagnosis confirmed the argument that Russia was expecting a great historical future. The Russians, after all, successfully resisted the Polish expansion, which was possible only because the germs of a civilization that is qualitatively different from European, and potentially higher, was inherent in the Russian people. This coincided with Dostoevsky's stance: the novelist perceived Russia's struggle with the Polish insurgents as "the beginning of a future war between the Orthodoxy and Catholicism; speaking otherwise, a war of the Russian genius with the European civilization."

Strakhov's main work was a book called *The World as a Whole* (1872). In it he set out his own philosophy of nature and a detailed critique of ideas popularized by Pisarev in his articles – that is, materialism, atomistic and mechanistic natural history, Darwin's evolutionary theory. The world is a whole, Strakhov argued. Moreover, it is a whole imbued by spirit, and its various parts are in fact embodiments of the spirit at different stages. No single part is separate or autonomous; everything is connected with everything else, nothing exists "by itself," everything is fluid, as Heraclitus would say. The unity of the world has a harmonious and organic character; the parts that compose it are not

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71 N.N. Strakhov, *Bor'ba s Zapadom v nashei literature*, Kiev 1897, vol. 2, p. 92 (reedited in: Slavic Printings and Reprintings, ed. by C.H. van Schooneveld, The Hague and Paris 1969).

I discuss the content of the Strakhov article and the scandal it generated in my book *Rosja, katolicyzm i sprawa polska*, pp. 100–4.

only linked together but also subordinated to each other to form a hierarchical structure. Last of all, this world has a center and that center is man, nature's finest achievement and the "nodal point of being," the "chief phenomenon and chief organ of the world." Man, however, constantly aspires to become separated from the whole, to cut the umbilical cord that links him to the organic unity of creation.<sup>72</sup>

Strakhov of course condemned these centrifugal tendencies. The world around him filled him with misgivings, for it seemed to be the battleground of powerful forces of disintegration. In order to counteract these forces he called for a reaffirmation of the "organic" principle in human existence, expressed through religious feeling, ties with the "native soil," and a sense of nationality.

### **Reactions to the "Enlighteners" in Spiritual Academies: Pamphil Yurkevich and Fyodor Bukharev**

The reception of the "enlighteners'" ideas in Orthodox spiritual academies constitutes a separate subject. It shows that some of the academy professors were willing to break the barrier between the Orthodox clergy and the laicized intelligentsia by undertaking active attempts at joining general Russian intellectual life. Their attempts, however, ended in failure, for reasons independent from their own intellectual and moral qualifications. It turned out that opening a fruitful dialogue between the ecclesiastical circles and the Europeanized intelligentsia was still too difficult and historically premature a task.

Especially symptomatic in this respect are the fates of two outstanding clergymen: Pamphil Yurkevich (1827-1874) – an alumnus and later philosophy professor of Kiev Spiritual Academy, and Archimandrite Fyodor Bukharev (1824-1871) – professor of Biblical Studies at the Moscow Academy. Both schools (as well as the other two Russian spiritual academies, in Petersburg and Kazan) were strongholds of the Christian Platonic tradition that dominated the Russian Orthodox Church – at the same time, both were vividly interested in contemporary German philosophy, especially that of Schelling, and were able to manifest that interest in professionally academic form. At the Kiev Academy, history of philosophy were for many years taught by Silvester Gogotsky (1813-1889) who tried to interpret Schelling's and Hegel's philosophies in the spirit of Christian theism. The Moscow Academy employed Fyodor Golubinsky (1797-

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72 N.N. Strakhov, *Mir kak tseloe* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; St. Petersburg, 1892), pp. vii-ix.



1854), a specialist in speculative theology which he pursued by borrowing from the German idealists.

In his first and already strikingly mature philosophical dissertation, entitled *Idea* (1859),<sup>73</sup> Yurkevich presented himself as an advocate of a modernized version of Platonism. He proposed a theist interpretation of Platonism as a philosophy of ideas conceived as the realm of ideal forms and prototypes given in spiritual contemplation thanks to which thinking becomes identical with being, reason becomes real, and reality – rational. Towering above that realm is God – the self-knowing and independent ruler. Further development of philosophy was presented by the author as a series of transformations of that enrapturing vision. In Aristotle’s philosophy, the concept of God was immanentized: God became pure thought in its immanent self-development. In the modern times, that rationalist idealism was transformed into dualism (Descartes), which, in turn, split into Spinoza’s monism (eliminating, in fact, the Platonic conception of ideas) and Leibniz’s spiritualist pluralism. It was Kant who introduced a crucial and truly revolutionary change in philosophy, countering the Cartesian conviction about thought meeting being “face to face,” with his own thesis that thought superimposed its own forms on a given experience, encapsulating cognition in the world of phenomena.

This marked the beginning of classical idealism which deprived thought of its ontological foundation. In Fichte’s philosophy, it took on the form of consistent subjectivism. Schelling tried to reconcile that active subjectivism with pre-Kantian realism, thereby taking a step back to the eclectic standpoints.<sup>74</sup> The culminating point in the development of classical idealism was Hegel’s panlogism, or the system of absolute idealism in which thought was stripped of any other subject except for its own activity.

In his own presentation of Hegelianism, Yurkevich followed the thinkers who criticized panlogism from the standpoint of philosophical theism. He argued – just like Khomiakov, the German philosophical theists (the young Fichte, Weisse), or the Polish philosophers of the Romantic age<sup>75</sup> – that the Hegelian “absolute idea” – unlike *Idea* as conceived by Plato – was a mere logical abstraction, that Hegelian “thought” was something different and infinitely smaller than “spirit,” and that the dialectical process in Hegel’s version

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73 See P. D. Yurkevich, *Filosofskie proizvedeniia*, Moscow 1990, pp. 9-68.

74 See A. I. Abramov, “Vliianiie Shellinga na russkuyu dukhovno-akademicheskuyu filosofiiu,” in: *Filosofia Shellinga v Rossii*, W.F. Pustarnakov, ed., Sankt Petersburg 1998, p. 385.

75 Cf. A. Walicki, “Filozofia narodowa”, romantyzm i kryzys “absolutnego idealizmu”, in: A. Walicki, *Między filozofią, religią a polityką*, Warsaw 1983, pp. 100-156.

had neither a substratum, nor a subject. He echoed left-wing critics of Hegelianism who accused the “Berlin Master” of an instrumental treatment of individuals and other “finite beings” whom he reduced to the role of dependent, subordinate “moments” in the dialectic development of the Spirit. Yurkevich stressed the irreducibility of being to thinking and did not hesitate to conclude thereof that the teosophers (on the one side) and the materialists (on the other) understood the needs of living, active people much better than the “absolute idealists.”

It was during the crisis of absolute idealism that Yurkevich traced the genesis of the philosophical condition of his own times. He assumed that the crisis might be overcome by an integral philosophy of the spirit which would appeal not only to reason, but also to the moral, aesthetic and religious needs of man. He ended his dissertation with the statement: “Philosophy as a *complete worldview* is not the product of an individual, but of the whole of mankind which never lives by an abstract, logical consciousness, but always manifests its spiritual life in the entire fullness and integrity of its moments.”<sup>76</sup>

Yurkevich referred to the train of thought followed in *Idea* in his excellent lecture on Plato and Kant given at Moscow University on January 12, 1866, in which he presented Plato and Kant as the two best exponents of the two contrasting views of the nature of cognition. The first one, represented by Plato’s teaching about reason, conceived of ideas as the roots of being and followed with the conclusion about the possibility of knowing objective truth; the other one, developed in Kant’s teaching about experience, conceived of ideas as formal conditions of experience, thus encapsulating cognition in the world of phenomena and substituting the ideal of true knowledge with the concept of a generally useful knowledge. Yurkevich summarized the opposition as follows:

*Plato.* Only the invisible, extrasensory essence of things is cognizable.

*Kant.* Only the visible, sensory phenomenon is cognizable.

*Plato.* The area of experience is the sphere of shadows and dreams. (*De rep.* 514a, 476c); only reason’s striving to penetrate the extrasensory world is the way to the light of knowledge.

*Kant.* Trying to grasp the extrasensory world with reason means sinking into the sphere of shadows and dreams, whereas activity in the sphere of experience is the way to the light of knowledge.

*Plato.* Real cognition is the movement of thought from ideas through ideas to ideas.

*Kant.* Real cognition is the movement of thought from opinions through opinions to opinions.

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76 P.D. Yurkevich, *Filosofskiie proizvedeniia*, p. 68.

*Plato.* Getting to know the nature of the human spirit, its immortality and higher destiny, deserves the name of science more than anything else. It is the queen of sciences.

*Kant.* It is not a science but a mere formal *discipline*, discouraging from jejune attempts at saying anything about the nature of the human soul.

*Plato.* Pure reason can know the truth.

*Kant.* Neither pure reason, nor a reason enriched with experience can know truth. Indeed, the latter is capable of cognition – that, however, is but generally useful knowledge, rather than the knowledge of truth.<sup>77</sup>

Far from degrading the importance of the Kantian breakthrough in philosophy, Yurkevich considered it to be the foundation of contemporary science and culture, as well as a theoretical justification for democracy. At the same time, however, he perceived Kant's phenomenalism as an essential source of cultural crisis, manifested in the triumphs of subjectivisms and the relativization of truth. He therefore postulated a philosophical therapy of a return to Platonic ontologism which accentuated the objectivity of truth and the existential roots of ideas.

Both the diagnosis and the program were all the more important as they introduced a theme that would be picked up and exposed at the onset of the following century by thinkers representing the so-called religious-philosophical renaissance in Russia. Ontologism, as opposed to phenomenalism, became then, the identification mark of all the theories attempting to define, in philosophical terms, Russian spiritual identity and the specificity of the Orthodox tradition in Christendom. In the works of the most representative theologian of the time, Father Pavel Florensky, the theme took on a form identical with that proposed by Yurkevich: Plato was sharply contrasted with Kant and the entire of European philosophy was divided into the Platonic and Kantian eras.<sup>78</sup> Analogous thoughts were developed by Vladimir Ern who opposed Kantianism in the name of the Eastern-Christian philosophy of Logos, inspired, as he admitted, by Platonic concepts.<sup>79</sup> It should be noted, however, that Yurkevich

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77 Ibid., p. 496.

78 See P.A. Florensky, "Kosmologicheskie antinomii Kanta" (a lecture of 1908), *Bogoslovsky vestnik*, 1908. A comprehensive presentation of the reception of Kantianism in Florensky's works is proposed by A.W. Akhutin in his study, "Sofia i Tschert. (Kant pieried litsom russkoi religioznoi metafiziki)," in the collective work *Rosiia i Germania. Opyt filozofskovo dialoga*, Moscow 1993, pp. 207-247.

79 See V.F. Ern, "Bor'ba za Logos," in: Ern, V.F., *Sochinenia*, Moscow 1991, pp. 71-127. In his essay, "From Kant to Krupp" (1914), Ern went as far as to suggest that Kant's

drew the “Plato-Kant” antithesis in conciliatory terms, consciously avoiding the extremes. Unlike Florensky, he did not present Kantianism as a fundamentally anti-Christian philosophy. Unlike Ern, he did not indulge in philosophical anti-Westernism, nor did he portray Kant as an exponent of the aggressive spirit of Western civilization.

A separate place in Yurkevich’s work belongs to the dissertation entitled *The Heart and Its Meaning in Man’s Spiritual Life as Taught by the Holy Scripture* (1860). He argued in it that the center of a human soul lay in the heart, rather than in the head, reason not being autonomous from life whose laws are, above all else, those of the heart. Some suggestions appearing in literature on the subject trace those theories back to the old Byzantine tradition of “cardiognosis” which had been represented in the 18<sup>th</sup> century circles of Kiev Academy by the pioneer of Ukrainian philosophy, Grigory Skorovoda.<sup>80</sup> More aptly, however, it may be pointed out that Yurkevich’s dissertation was largely a translation of a study on Biblical anthropology by German Hebraist Franz Delitzsch and that its proper subject was Bible studies, rather than philosophy.<sup>81</sup> So it was seen by Yurkevich himself, perfectly aware of the fact that the heart, being an organ of the human body, was not a philosophical category.

Yurkevich’s dissertation of high importance from a strictly philosophical point of view is the one entitled *Materialism and the Tasks of Philosophy* (1860). It offers a highly balanced judgment on the reasons that had caused the popularity of German materialism after 1848 and brought the offensive of the materialist “enlightener” movement in Russia. Yurkevich gave materialism considerable credit. Materialism was, after all, a justified reaction to Hegel’s absolute idealism. In the person of Feuerbach, it defended a living, carnal human individual from the panlogical tyranny of “the general”; as a political party, it used the atomistic concept of reality to justify men’s equality and political democracy; as a protest against the idealistic deontologization of the world, it represented the standpoint of philosophical realism – while in confrontation with Positivist scientism, it opposed agnostic tendencies. Performing all those functions, it defended the “crucial and essential interests of mankind.”<sup>82</sup> It thus

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philosophy had become an ideological inspiration for German militarism (Ibid., pp. 308-318).

80 See A.I. Abramov, “Problemy realizma, metafizyki i platonizma v filosofskom tvorchestvie P.D. Yurkevicha,” in: *Spadshchina Panfila Yurkevicha: sviatovy ta vitchiznianii kontekst*, Kiev 1995, p. 29.

81 See A.G. Tikholaz, *Platon and Platonism v russkoi religioznoi filosofii vtoroi poloviny XIX-nachala XX vekov*, Kiev 2003, pp. 122-123.

82 Yurkevich, *Filozofskie proizvedeniia*, p. 241.

represented philosophical progress, constituting a valid link in the development of thought. And that regardless of the fact that it had currently become – in view of the success of philosophical realism in the theories of Herbart, Beneke, Schopenhauer and Lotze – an outdated and vulnerable attitude.

In Russian conditions, materialism continued as a dominating philosophy, aspiring to hold monopolist power over the minds of the progressive intelligentsia. Yurkevich felt it was his duty to oppose the monopoly, not from the clerical standpoint, but rather from that of a professional philosopher. In his extensive study entitled *From the Science of the Human Spirit* (1860), he applied comprehensive criticism to the program text of the materialist philosophy of man, namely, Chernyshevsky's essay, *The Anthropological Principle in Philosophy*. While acknowledging Chernyshevsky's attempt at overcoming the dualist concept of man, he followed with a chain of grave accusations. Those concerning the all-philosophical questions were: naïve realism, the lack of distinction between phenomena and things in themselves, ascribing metaphysical sense to the achievements of natural science, explaining qualitative transformations by quantitative ones, describing the human spirit as an object that can be studied from without, and an attempted negation of the moral nature of man. Yurkevich paid special attention to the theory of "reasonable egoism," arguing that pure egoists would never be able to constitute a society, since the social bond required "movements of the heart" and "a spark of benevolence" toward others, as well as a readiness to work for the common good. He firmly rejected the utilitarian principle of the superiority of the common interest over the private one and priority of more numerous communities to those less numerous, opining that all the conflicts of will and interests should be resolved by moral arguments, rather than by a numerical majority.<sup>83</sup> He also expressed his emphatic doubt as to the fact that Chernyshevsky himself might be capable of ignoring inner moral inspiration and acting solely upon selfish calculations.

His dissertation ends with a reflection on the attitudes shaped by an uncritical faith in the rightness of one's own beliefs identified with the principles of general human progress. In Chernyshevsky's case, they took on a dictatorial note, marked by contempt for any hesitation and a propensity for drastic oversimplifications – in other words, by that very dogmatic conceit that the classical of philosophical skepticism, David Hume, had been warning against.<sup>84</sup> In fact, Chernyshevsky confirmed that diagnosis. Answering Yurkevich, he wrote: "I feel so much superior to the thinkers of Mr. Yurkevich's school that it

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83 Ibid., pp. 175-176.

84 Ibid., p. 192.

is of no interest to me whatsoever what they might think of me.”<sup>85</sup> What was the sense, after all, of entering into discussions with representatives of theological seminars?<sup>86</sup>

The results of that highly biased exchange were most symptomatic. Yurkevich’s essay caught the attention of Mikhail Katkov who reprinted it – adding a favorable comment – in his periodical, *Russkii Vestnik*. This paved Yurkevich’s way to the philosophy chair at Moscow University (which he took in Autumn, 1861), but the price was a fierce campaign against him in the progressive press which made Yurkevich the principal object of its satire – as a clerical obscurantist, a philosophical ignorant and an alleged defender of “all that is wild and monstrous” in Russian reality (to quote Tkachev in the periodical *Delo*, 1869). One of the satirical texts went as far as compare Yurkevich to “the excrements of Diogenes.”<sup>87</sup>

No wonder Yurkevich gave up publishing philosophical texts and focused on the theoretical problems of pedagogy. All in all, however, his didactic activity at Moscow University had a positive influence on Russian philosophical culture. Suffice it to mention the name of Vladimir Soloviev who had been one of his students and remembered him gratefully, devoting a separate essay to Yurkevich’s work.<sup>88</sup>

Unlike Yurkevich, another graduate of Moscow Spiritual academy, Bukharev, was, first of all, a theologian, deeply involved in the question of the inner transformation of the synodal Orthodox Church. He fought for it from the ecclesiastical position, being a monk as well as a priest, which put him at risk of especially sharp conflict with the representatives of the official ecclesiastical hierarchy.<sup>89</sup>

In his youth, Bukharev was an avid reader of the essays by Belinsky. It was Belinsky who introduced him to the problems of Hegel’s philosophy, inspiring him even, with the suggestion that it could be reconciled with the Biblical philosophy of history. At the same time, Bukharev knew Gogol personally and approved of Gogol’s religious investigations. Gogol’s book, *Selected Fragments*

85 See N. Chernyshevsky, “Kwiatki polemiczne,” in: Chernyshevsky, M., *Pisma filozoficzne*, vol. II, p. 117.

86 Ibid., pp. 39-40.

87 See D.I. Chizhevskii, *Giegel v Rossii*, Paris 1939, p. 253.

88 See V.S. Soloviev, “O filosofskikh trudakh P.D. Yurkevicha” (1874). Reprinted in: Yurkevich, *Filosofskii proizvedeniia*, pp. 552-557. Ibid., reprint of G.G. Shpet’s precious lecture, “Filosofskii nasledstvo P.D. Yurkevicha” (1914), pp. 578-638.

89 The latest and most comprehensive study of Bukharev’s views is the book by American theologian Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology. Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov*, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2000, pp. 17-106.

of *Letters to Friends* was, in Bukharev's opinion, an appeal to the Orthodox Church to come out of isolation and commit itself to the Christianization of social life.<sup>90</sup> That is why Belinsky's famous letter to Gogol, in which the author of *Selected Fragments* was described as "lover of the knout, an apostle of muddle-headedness," came as a painful shock to Bukharev. He expressed it in his *Three Letters to Gogol* (1848), also defending the latter from attacks by clerical conservatives who accused him of profaning the spiritual domain by mixing it with secular issues.<sup>91</sup> However, Moscow Metropolitan Philaret (Vassily Drozdov) forbade the publishing of the text and therefore the *Three Letters* appeared in print as late as 1860).

The revolutionary events of 1848-49, as well as the following Crimean War, were interpreted by Bukharev in a prophetic-apocalyptic spirit. He sought confirmation of his own intuitions with the *yurodivii*, or "mad in Christ," whom he believed to be prophetically inspired.<sup>92</sup> In his eyes, the war with the Ottoman Empire became an Apocalyptic battle with the "whore of Babylon" – which provoked him to produce an extensive commentary to the Book of Revelation.

Yet, nothing influenced the ideological evolution of Bukharev as much as the post-Sevastopolian "thaw." The cumulated attack of both the liberal and the radical press on the "old regime" strengthened his conviction that the program of thorough modernization had to embrace not just the lay, but also the ecclesiastical sphere of life, and that the situation in which the Orthodox Church sealed itself, in a liturgical-bureaucratic ritualism, turning its back on the secular life and leaving it prey to paganism, could not possibly continue.

In 1854, Bukharev was transferred from the Moscow Academy to the Kazan one, and in 1858 he was appointed Church censor in Petersburg. Somewhat paradoxically, it was as a censor that he prepared for print an important collection of his own essays, *On Orthodoxy in Its Relationship to Modernity* (1860).<sup>93</sup> Considering the then conditions, he proposed a bold modernizing program for the Orthodox Church, while simultaneously advocating the popularization of Christian values in social life. In fact, Bukharev accused his entire contemporary Christendom of "Anti-trinitarianism," i.e., denial of Christ's divinity, which amounted to denying the faithful the possibility of participating in the theandric process. He condemned both the "spiritual Jews" – by which he understood religious ritualism concerned only with the dead letter of the

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90 See Elizabeth Behr-Sigel, *Alexandre Boukharev. Un theologien de l'église orthodoxe russe en dialogue avec le monde modern*, Beauchesne, Paris 1977, pp. 51-52.

91 See Valliere, op.cit., pp. 21-22.

92 Ibid., pp. 24-25.

93 *O pravoslavii v otnoshenii k sovremennosti*, Sankt Petersburg, 1860.

Scripture – and the “spiritual Gentiles” – i.e., those who were only formally Christians, too self-indulgent and renouncing the mission of Christian transfiguration of the world that was clearly named in the Lord’s Prayer: “Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth.” The supreme Christian truth was, according to him, the idea of “Godmanhood” which combined the humanity of God with the divinity of man. He opposed a wholesale condemnation of the secularizing process, referring to lay thinkers as “brothers and sisters” who had been saved from sin by Christ and often contributed more to the moral progress of humanity than men of the Church. He treated the theology of incarnation as a natural basis for the theology of dialogue between the Church and laicized contemporary culture.

In reference to the Russian situation, this meant a program of reconciling Russia with the West and levelling the gulf that separated the Orthodox – especially monastic – Russia from the Europeanized Russian intelligentsia. The anticipated result of the program would be an overcoming of both forms of “contemporary Russian apostasy,” namely, the pseudo-spiritualism of the secluded world of the Orthodox Church and the blasphemous materialism of the radical “enlightening” movement.<sup>94</sup>

It turned out, however, that the reforming Russia lacked the social forces that would be ready to support such a scenario. The radical “enlighteners” ignored the archimandrite’s voice altogether, while it was heard – and reacted to frantically – by Victor Askochensky, a clerical reactionary and editor of the periodical *Domashnaya biesieda*. Askochensky attacked Bukharev in an uncannily aggressive way, writing:

A man who, in the guise of a defender of the Orthodox Church, extends his hand to contemporary culture, is a coward, a renegade and a traitor.<sup>95</sup>

Bukharev tried to defend himself, but ran into a stone wall. Askochensky responded from a position of uncompromising fundamentalism:

In the face of the world, the Orthodox spirit soars like a pillar of fire. [...] We discover the spirit on Mount Athos and in Kiev. But it cannot be reconciled with the contemporary world which is totally immersed in evil.<sup>96</sup>

The controversy was eventually submitted to the judgment of the Synod and the Metropolitan. The judgment was severe. Even though Bukhariyev was cleared of the charge of heresy, he was dismissed as censor and transferred from

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94 Cf. E. Behr Sigel, op.cit., p. 64.

95 Ibid., p. 59.

96 Ibid.



Petersburg to a monastery in Pereyaslav Zaleski. To make things worse, he was forbidden to publish his commentary on the Apocalypse, the manuscript of which – ready for print – was confiscated and locked as a deposit in an archive.<sup>97</sup> To this, Bukharev responded by applying for exemption from monastic vows. His application was accepted, but along with the holy orders he was withdrawn from his academic titles.

He then married, provoking a new stinging comment from Askochensky. The marriage proved successful, but Bukharev remained socially isolated and extremely poor. He tried writing for the periodical *Syn Otechestva* (using the chance that its publisher, A.V. Starchevsky, was a Catholic) where he commented on such high-ranking books as Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* and Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?*<sup>98</sup> Yet, he did not manage to win the acceptance of either the Slavophiles or the Westernizers, nor the men of the Church or the representatives of the intelligentsia. Thus, he started falling into oblivion, totally ignored by his contemporary Russian culture which he had tried to improve from an inner ecclesiastical position.

And yet, the period of religious-philosophical renaissance in Russia brought memory and recognition of the ideas proposed by the obliterated modernizer of the Orthodox Church. It was noticed that his concepts were significantly concordant with those of Soloviev and the whole pleiad of religious thinkers who postulated modernizing the Orthodox tradition, incorporating Christianity in social life and reconciling the historical Church with the Europeanized intelligentsia. Albeit long overdue – coming only in the years of the First World War<sup>99</sup> – Bukharev's rehabilitation granted him the honorary position of precursor in the history of Russian religious and philosophical thought.<sup>100</sup>

The place, however, was hardly unquestionable. Bukharev's program of Orthodox renewal collided with the aspirations of the neo-Patristic trend in Orthodox theology for whom the only road to a renewal led back to the classical tradition of ancient Eastern Church fathers – to Palamism and Hesychasm. The neo-Patristic spirit found its expression in an excellent history of Russian

97 The text was eventually published only in 1916, entitled "Issledovaniia Apokalipsova," ed., *Bogoslovsky vestnik*, Sergiyev Posad 1916.

98 Bukharev's essays on Turgenev and Chernyshevsky have been reprinted in his collected works, *O dukhovnikh potrebnostiakh zhizni*, ed. K. Kosheneva, Moscow 1991, pp. 148-183.

99 The promoter of Bukharev's rehabilitation was Father Pavel Florensky who, in the years 1915-1917, published three collections of Bukharev's letters in his own periodical, *Bogoslovsky vestnik* (cf. Valliere, p. 100).

100 Cf. the opinion on Bukharev in V.V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, vol. 1, London 1953, pp. 315-319.

theological thought by Father Georgy Florovsky, one of the most outstanding Russian theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>101</sup>

The figures of Yurkevich and Bukharev allow for a revision of easy oversimplifications about Orthodox spiritual academies being strongholds of ignorance and hardcore conservatism. Simultaneously, however, they confirm the sad fact of the academies' deep isolation from all-Russian intellectual life – an isolation that stemmed as much from the attitudes of the Orthodox hierarchy, as from the anticlerical prejudices of the laicized elites. Even in the circles of the enlightened Russian bureaucracy, the intellectual potential of clergymen was largely ignored, while spiritual academies were thought to be of use only to the clergy. The isolation of the monastic clergy was their own conscious choice: St. Seraphinus Sarovsky and Alexander Pushkin lived in the same times, and yet were unaware of each other. The spiritual academies educating the so-called white clergy were trying to break the isolation by showing interest in contemporary German philosophy and contributing to its popularization.<sup>102</sup> Still, the scope of their activities did not surpass the narrow-set limits. During the period of the great reforms, the tendency to raise barriers between Church institutions and the culture of the elites became even stronger. Suffice it to say that Vladimir Soloviev never sought inspiration in the works of Bukharev and was probably unaware of their existence.<sup>103</sup> Yurkevich, on the other hand, became Soloviev's master only because his own polemics with Chernyshevsky resulted in his transfer from the Kiev Spiritual academy to Moscow University.

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101 Cf. G. Florovsky, *Puti russkovo bogosloviia*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Paris 1983 (first printed: Paris 1937), pp. 344-349. Florovsky accused Bukharev of naïve utopianism, excessive optimism and daydreaming sentimentality in the spirit of the mystics of Alexander I's times.

102 See V.V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, vol 1, Ch. X; D.I. Chizhevsky, *Giegel v Rossii*, pp. 284-287 (on Silvestrus Gogotsky, a professor of Kiev Academy); *Filosofia Schellinga v Rossii*, ed. W.F. Pustarnakov, Sankt Petersburg 1998, pp. 48-55 (Pustarnakov) and pp. 371-389 (Abramov).

103 Cf. P. Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, p. 9.

## Chapter 12

# Conservative Ideologies after the Land Reform

One of the most significant global social reforms of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was undoubtedly the abolition of serfdom and the enfranchisement of peasants proclaimed in the Manifesto of the 19<sup>th</sup> of February 1861. This reform, setting aside the liberation of slaves in the United States, which took place almost simultaneously, referred to a much larger group of people and was implemented bloodlessly.<sup>1</sup> Still, it had not managed to relieve either the social or political tensions in the empire. The peasants found it disappointing, since they had received only a portion of the estates. Moreover, they were required to purchase the land they considered their own. Carrying out the reform therefore involved rebellions, which were violently suppressed. This resulted in the radicalization of the opposition intelligentsia, including the foundation of the revolutionary organization “Land and Freedom” [*Zemlya i Volya*] in 1862 along with a series of declarations calling for revolutionary action. Mysterious fires in Moscow in mid-1862 fanned the anxiety. The government reacted with repression: the arrest and trial of Chernyshevsky, for example, which was regarded by oppositional circles as groundless and provocative.

Anxiety was also aroused by an intensified independence movement in Congress Poland, with the increasingly evident failures of attempts to settle the Polish issue by restoring its autonomy. A policy of concessions toward Poland, put into effect in Congress Poland by Margrave Wielopolski, and in an environment supported by a group of liberals concentrated around the Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich, was popular in Russian public opinion. For this reason, disappointment with the lack of results of this policy was more profound. The January 1863 uprising (which has already been mentioned) was perceived as a sign of Polish ingratitude and its course triggered nationalistic reactions in Russia. The claims of insurgents to establish borders once again, just as they

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1 The Russian reform liberated about 52 million of peasants, including approx. 20 million serfs, who gained personal freedom. The American Civil War liberated 4 million of black slaves, at the cost of the death of millions. See N.V. Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, ed. 5, New York-Oxford 1993, pp.372-373.

were in 1772, entailing claims to the territories which were not ethnically Polish, led to defensive nationalistic reactions among all social strata in Russia.

With the uprising stifled, the position of Russian conservatives was substantially strengthened. However, the policy of reforms was not abandoned. Even Mikhail Katkov, the main ideologist of anti-Polish nationalism, was at the time in favor of a conservative-liberal modernization of the state. Two reforms were adopted in 1864: judicial reform, which introduced trial by jury and bar associations in Russia, and a reform instituting a form of local government [*zemstvo*]. The future of Congress Poland was also not definitely determined: the supporters of Grand Duke Konstantin were engaged in a fight to preserve the autonomy of some institutions of Congress Poland and had chances of succeeding.

In this case, as in the others, the wrestle of liberal and conservative tendencies in Russian politics was settled by an outside factor: Dmitrii Karakozov's fanatic revolutionary attempt on the life of the Tsar on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 1866. Reactions to this act of terror took the form of plebeian demonstrations, exhorting to fight "nihilism." Right and left-wing extremists achieved their goal and Tsar Alexander II had to desist from reform efforts. Instead, what was to be faced was the confrontation between conservative tendencies and the revolutionary movement.

An important phase of this confrontation started with the foundation of the populist revolutionary movement and a mass "go out to the people" movement of 1873-1874. Taking into account the goals set by the reformers of the 60s, the moral innocence and heroism of the proponents of the "go out to the people" movement was particularly and paradoxically destructive. They managed to win the admiration of people from various social strata, which undermined the moral legitimacy of autocracy as well as the liberal path of Russia's development. The trial of Vera Zasulich in January of 1878, a revolutionary who tried to kill General Trepov, governor of St. Petersburg, proved how the authorities had been delegitimized. Having considered the moral arguments of the terrorist, the jury found her innocent, a verdict that received the frenetic applause of spectators.

This perhaps indicates not a positive attitude toward the young woman, but a general negative opinion of the brutal general – if even Dostoevsky yielded to such feelings. Still, it is obvious that the advantage of moral over legal arguments was not to the credit of the legal culture of the society. The political consequences of the verdict were unfortunate, as it disgraced trial by jury in the eyes of right-wing, which became even more critical of the heritage of Great Reforms and even more convinced that they should not be continued.

The fight between the revolutionary movement and the sinking urge of reforms within the existing system reached its climax when the Tsar was

assassinated on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 1881 by members of a populist terrorist group. Not only does the tragedy of this lie with the fact that a bomb thrown by a terrorist killed the monarch who granted freedom to tens of millions of Russian peasants, but also in the fact it was on the very day he was killed that Tsar Alexander II approved in writing a proposal to include elected representatives of society in the discussions of the drafts of some State orders, as formulated by the Minister of the Interior, *de facto* Prime Minister, Mikhail Loris-Melikov. This project paved the way to constitutional reforms, which were to crown the liberal reforms of 60s. Had it been implemented, many historians claim that Russia would have become a constitutional monarchy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and would have avoided the horrors of revolution.

The assassination of the Tsar thwarted these hopes. Having hesitated only for a while, Alexander III made a choice to abandon liberal policies and turn to reactionary policies, which were not simply conservative but attempted to restore the status quo of the pre-reform period. For this reason, the legislative changes introduced by Alexander III are called “counter-reforms.”

## Mikhail Katkov

Mikhail Katkov (1818-1887), who was mentioned previously, was a follower of Schelling’s philosophy in his youth, a member of the Stankevich circle and a liberal Westernizer. In contrast with members who joined this circle earlier, he resisted the influence of Hegel, instead appealing to philosophical romanticism. In spite of this fact, with respect to his views on the history of Russia, his stance was very much like that of Belinsky – he rejected the Slavophile idealization of Muscovite Tsardom, arguing that only the Europeanizing reforms of Peter the Great initiated the transformation of Russians into a modern nation. Similar to Belinsky, Katkov opposed the idealization of folkloristic works, and refused to call Old Russian literature “literature.”<sup>2</sup>

Toward the end of 1840, Katkov, just as Bakunin, travelled to Berlin to study philosophy. Shelling’s lectures on the “Philosophy of Mythology and Revelation” strengthened his criticism of Hegelian rationalism. However, his faith in Western civilization was not shaken and Katkov remained a Westernizer. Following Belinsky and Herzen, he deemed the “idea of personality,”<sup>3</sup> which was developed in the West, “the last word of philosophy.”

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2 See M. Katz, *Mikhail N. Katkov. Political Biography 1818-1887*, The Hague-Paris 1966, pp. 23-26.

3 Ibid, p.32.

Back in Russia, Katkov continued his studies in Moscow, where he defended his dissertation on the Old-Russian language and started his academic career at Moscow University. He was teaching philosophy, trying to reconcile Schellingianism with the psychological realism of Edward Beneke. He lost this position in 1850, as philosophy had been eliminated from the curricula of the university. Soon afterward, he became an editor of the daily *Moskovskiye Vedomosti* [*Moscow News*], and after a break from 1856 until 1862, he resumed this position in 1863 – this time also as its owner. He was given permission to publish *Russky Vestnik* [*Russian Courier*] and *Sovremennaiia letopis* [*Contemporary Chronicle*] at the end of 1855. The first cooperated with many outstanding intellectuals (Nicholas Ogariov, Konstantin Kavelin, and Boris Chicherin) and in the years of the “thaw” served as the main organs of liberal Westernism. Moreover, it popularized Russian literature, printing works of Turgenev (*Fathers and Sons*), Tolstoy (*The Cossacks* and *Anna Karenina*) and Dostoevsky (*Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot* and *The Brothers Karamazov*).

As far as political sympathies were concerned, the employees of *Russian Courier* were either Anglophilic liberals, in favor of decentralization, or etatist liberals, supporting liberalism of the French variety, with a centralized state. The first group was represented, among others, by Katkov, the other – by Chicherin. The dispute between them escalated through the discussion of Tocqueville’s book *L’Ancien regime et la revolution* (1856), which contained arguments against centralism. In 1857, Katkov refused to print Chicherin’s critique of Tocqueville, claiming that Chicherin was betraying liberalism in favor of enlightened absolutism. Consequently, there was a split within the editorial staff. Etatist liberals were forced to establish a new journal, *Atenej*, edited by E.F. Korsh.<sup>4</sup>

At this point, it is worth mentioning that Katkov was at the time both an anglophile and a polonophile. He adored Mickiewicz, inspired the translation of his poetry by Nikolai Berg, and received with enthusiasm the recitation of *Pan Tadeusz* [*Sir Thaddeus, or the Last Lithuanian Foray: A Nobleman’s Tale from the Years of 1811 and 1812 in Twelve Books of Verse*] in Russian. Katkov supported the autonomy of Congress Poland; according to Longin Panteleev, he even proposed toasts to the “disintegration of Russia.”<sup>5</sup>

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4 Ibid, pp. 46-56. Cf. V.A. Kitaev, *Ot frondy k okhranitelstvu: iz istorii russkoi liberalnoi mysli 50-60ch godov XIX veka*, Moscow 1972, chapter 2.

5 See H. Głębocki, *Fatalna sprawa. Kwestia polska w rosyjskiej myśli politycznej (1856-1866)* [*The Fatal Question*], “Arkana”, Cracow 2000, pp. 98-99. Cf. J. Kucharzewski, *Od białego caratu do czerwonego, vol. IV: Wyzwolenie ludów*, Warsaw 1931, pp. 25-27.

Katkov justified his positive attitude toward Poland by invoking the Westernizing concept of Russia's development. The Kingdom of Poland, representing a combination of the old freedom of movement traditions, while resembling the English liberal tradition and modern legal culture, and nevertheless mirrored in the Napoleonic Code, seemed to be an excelling part of the Tsardom in Katkov's eyes.<sup>6</sup> As such, the Kingdom of Poland had many factors that could complement Russia and accelerate its Westernization.

With things in the Kingdom evolving as they did, however, these hopes turned out to be in vain. The failures of Wielopolski's mission, and especially the attempt on the life of the Grand Duke Konstantin, changed Katkov's attitude toward Poles and caused him oppose decentralizing tendencies.<sup>7</sup> A recent enthusiast of decentralization, he now began to lean toward a unitary model of the state, capable of standing up to separatism.

The outbreak of the January uprising eventually finalized the evolution of the views of Katkov. By analogy to the November uprising, with Russia's objection to integrating the Lithuanian-Russian territories (officially referred to as "Western *guberniyas*") into the Kingdom, the January uprising broke out. For Katkov, this was a proof that reaching a compromise between the Kingdom and Russia was unfeasible. Had it just been for ethnic issues, a compromise could easily have been worked out. Instead, the problem rested with how the Polish nobility, supported by the clergy, perceived Poland – namely, viewing it in historical and imperial categories, as a great Catholic power meant to fulfill a historical mission in the East. The editor of *Russian Courier* understood the dimensions of the problem: deprived of Lithuanian-Russian territories, the ethnically Polish population would not succeed at establishing a mighty state. This was likewise true of Russia: had it not been for the "Western *guberniyas*," Russia would not be a European power. Two strong "historical nations" could not exist side by side in Slavic Europe. Therefore, Poles and Russians were not just rivals, but "enemies to the end," who could not live next to each other. What separates the two is the "fatal question of life and death":

The question between Russia and Poland is a state question: whether or not a Polish or a Russian state is to exist. And since the Polish state ceased to exist, and Russian

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6 The comparison of historical development of Poland and Russia, viewed as two complementary traditions within Slav countries, was outlined in *Russian Courier* (vol.31, 1861) by Paweł Szczebalski in his article on the work of K. Szajnocha Jadiga i Jagiełło (see H. Głębocki, *The Fatal Question*, p. 159).

7 Ibid, pp. 172-173.

exists, the question is if the existing Russian state shall be destroyed so that the formerly existent Polish state can be restored.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast with Samarin, Strakhov and Dostoevsky, Katkov interpreted the Polish-Russian conflict as a matter of geopolitics and not of a clash of civilizations. He rejected the thesis depicting Poland as a bastion or vanguard of European civilization; for him, it was Russia that formed an integral part of Europe, far more important than Poland. He mentioned his “sincere respect” for Polish nationality,<sup>9</sup> while still regarding Polish political aspirations as a blatant anachronism, based on a misunderstanding of Poland’s position in contemporary Europe. To the Western world, Poland was a borderland, the Cinderella of civilization. Russia was the only state that saw the Kingdom of Poland as a lever of positive industrial change. But Polish insurgents preferred to convert Poland into a dam, separating Russia from the West – to the detriment, in the first place, of Poland.<sup>10</sup>

Despite a lack of agreement concerning “civilizational difference,” Samarin and Katkov shared a social diagnosis of the Polish issue; they were both convinced that it was solely the nobility which might serve as the bearer of Polish patriotism. This is where Katkov and Samarin rested their hopes, anticipating that the enfranchisement of peasants by the Tsar would constitute the ultimate, “social” partition of Poland. Nationalistic extremism, placing national bonds above the state solidarity of the nobility, sharply differentiated Katkov from aristocratic court circles.

The stances taken by and expressed in Katkov’s journals on the Polish issue were, at the heights of power, set against a group of liberalizing bureaucrats, represented by Duke Konstantin, constant in his sympathies, and by the Minister of the Interior, Petr Valuev. The group was believed to be making a push for the transformation of the Empire into a federation of provinces, connected only through dynastic bonds, as in the case of Russia and Finland. For this reason, the stance of this group was referred to as “dynastic cosmopolitanism.”<sup>11</sup> Engaged in the program of nationalizing the Russian Empire through political homogenization and cultural Russification, Katkov considered this stance utterly unacceptable. He expressed his opinion on the matter, attacking the stance and not sparing the Duke – a fact that was of great concern to Censorship Committee. Following subsequent warnings, the publication of *Moscow News*

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8 M. Katkov, *1863 god. Sobranije statiej*, Moscow 1887, p. 219.

9 M. Katkov, “Bor’ba protiv polskoi propagandy v Jugo-Zapadnoj Rossii,” *Sovremennaja letopis*, no. 2, January 1863, pp. 2-3.

10 J. Kucharzewski, op.cit., pp.39-40.

11 Cf. M. Katz, *Mikhail N. Katkov*, pp.129-137



was suspended in 1866. An assassination attempt on Tsar by Karakazov constituted an unexpected turn of events, and a change for the better for Katkov. Widespread indignation against “nihilists,” fought by Katkov, convinced the Tsar to meet with Katkov in person and to allow the journal to be published. This entailed a significant decrease in the influence exerted by the group surrounding the Grand Duke. At this point, it is worth mentioning that with the Polish uprising stifled, the influences of the group increased.<sup>12</sup>

Ukrainophilia, a form Ukrainian national awakening, was, in Katkov’s opinion, the most pressing national problem of Russia, after the Polish issue. In contrast with the Poles, however, Ukrainians (called “Little Russians”) had never been, to his mind, a separate nation; contrary to what Nikolai Kostomarov claimed they could not be regarded as one out of two (next to Great Russians) Russian nations.<sup>13</sup> The Ukrainian language was just a dialect (*patois*), differing from Russian language less than Low German (*plattdeutsch*) from High German (*hochdeutsch*). In terms of political aspects, Little Russians were a part of Russia, the basis being the same as in the case of Provençals (or even the people of Breton) who were a part of France. Viewed from this perspective, a separate Ukrainian nationality seemed to be an invention of the Poles, willing to divide and weaken as much as possible its eastern neighbor.

In their fundamental framework, these views were no novelty. On the contrary, they expressed beliefs common in the Ukraine. An indigenous Little Russian, Nikoai Gogol, was also convinced that Ukraine belongs to Russia; Vissarion Belinsky energetically opposed “south-Russian” separatism, deeming all ethnic peculiarities as at variance with human development. Nevertheless, Katkov’s contribution is indisputable: he was the first one to set these views against a nation-making background in Europe and articulate these in a language of modern nationalism.

Katkov based his theory on a model of a centralized nation-state, the same he stood up to in the period of “thaw” in his polemic with etatist liberals. A modern nation was, according to him, a product of the homogenizing efforts of

12 See W.A. Tvardovskaya, *Idieologiia porieformnogo samodzhierzhaviia (M.N. Katkov i yego izdaniia)*, Moscow 1978, pp. 67-69.

The group of the Grand Duke Konstantin (including, among others, the Minister of Education, A.V. Golovnin) campaigned against Katkov’s stance on the Polish issue, among others by publishing a brochure by Baron Fircks (Schedo-Ferroti) *Que fera-t-on de la Pologne* (Brussels 1864).

13 An article of Kostomarov “Dvie russkiiie narodnosti” [“The Two Peoples of Rus”] was published in the Ukrainian *Osnova*, vol. 3, 1861. A. Miller provided an in-depth analysis of Katkov’s stance on the Ukrainian issue in his book “*Ukrainskii vopros*” v *polititkie vlastiei i russkom obshchestviennom mnenii*, St. Petersburg 2000.

political centralization, imposing common culture and patriotism on all residents of the state. It was in such a way that the population of France, speaking various languages and dialects – Provençal, Basque, and Flemish – transformed into one French nation.<sup>14</sup> An analogous process would take place in the Russian Empire, with state authorities involved. Systematic russification of the education and administration systems, and employment of force whenever necessary was supposed to act as a tool of national integration. To Katkov, such a policy seemed to be Russia's imperative, and there was no need of universal justifications. National states had the right to be guided by their own interests, own national egoism.

Katkov's reflections on the French nation-building process started to take the shape of a modern theory of integral nationalism.<sup>15</sup> It came perfectly natural, then that with Germany unified, Katkov began invoking the nationalist politics of the "Iron Chancellor," Bismarck.

However, Katkov's nationalism differed considerably from that of Slavophile provenance. Unlike Danilevsky, also preaching the theory of national egoism, Katkov remained a Westernizer – admittedly conservative, but still vigorously rejecting the idea of civilizational difference between Russia and Europe. In his fight against revolutionary "nihilism" as a "cancerous growth" on Russian spiritual culture, Katkov invoked neither Christianity nor the eastern traditions of Orthodoxy. Katkov propagated classical education as an antidote to nihilism. It was supposed to educate future social elites in the spirit of moral and intellectual discipline, teach logics and rhetoric, thus justifying their right to social leadership. Katkov stressed that the command of foreign classical languages is a key to common European heritage.<sup>16</sup> As far as the education program was concerned, it transpires that Katkov was more a Westernizer than a nationalist.

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14 Cf. E. Weber *Peasants into Frenchmen. The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914*, Stanford, Calif. 1976.

15 Martin Katz calls Katkov an "integral nationalist" (*Mikhail N. Katkov*, p. 7). Edward Thaden (*Conservative Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Russia*, Seattle 1964, p. 55) uses the term "dynamic nationalism," as opposed to "static conservatism." Geoffrey Hosking (*Russia. People and Empire*, Cambridge, Mass. 1997, pp. 367-376) employs the term "imperial nationalism."

16 Cf. M. Katz, *Mikhail N. Katkov*, chapter VI: Nihilism and Classicism.

It is also of note that in Pre-Revolution France classical education was deemed as the best tool of training conservative elites. For this reason it was criticized by D'Alembert (in the Introduction to Diderot's *Encyclopedia*), who set it against utilitarian education, based on empirical sciences.

Put into practice by the Minister of Education, Dmitry Tolstoy, Katkov's education program did not dismiss natural sciences, on the contrary, it acknowledged their utilitarian necessity for the modernization of state. Since scientific ideology undermined conservative values, Katkov wished to prevent its spread. Gymnasiums assumed two directions: classical, i.e., a track toward universities and "real," i.e., a track toward "practical" careers.

Katkov exhibited signs of Westernism also through his support for Russia's economic modernization, including first of all the development of the railway. Some researchers stress his criticism of local commune, seeing it as pioneering in relation to Stolypin's reform.<sup>17</sup> This seems somewhat simplified, because Katkov's attitude toward *obshchina* was strictly pragmatic and differed depending on the period.<sup>18</sup> Beyond any doubt, however, in his social philosophy he represented, just like Stolypin, a "bank on the strong," and not Slavophile or populist-socialist values.

The era of reaction, initiated with the murder of Tsar Alexander II, bridged the gap between Katkov's westernizing conservatism and Pobedonostsev's traditional-orthodox conservatism. Katkov, Dmitry Tolstoy and Pobedonostsev were regarded as a "triumvirate" wielding a profound influence on the politics of a new tsar. A more careful analysis indicates that their cooperation lacked no conflicts, these however pertained to issues of minor importance. Fundamental was that all three supported the policy of repression and counter-reforms. The reforms Katkov had advocated back in the 60s (the establishment of an independent judiciary, the autonomy of universities and jury courts) were now precisely what he fought against.<sup>19</sup>

## Ivan Aksakov and Nikolai Danilevsky

In terms of the most influential organs of conservative nationalism in Russia after the land reform, second to Katkov's publishing houses were the journals of Ivan Aksakov, which were already mentioned in the chapter on Slavophilism. In

17 See M. Katz, *Mikhail N. Katkov*, p.14. V. A. Tvardovskaya disputes this view, arguing that Katz and Thaden overstate the meaning of modernization aspects in Katkov's ideology (*Ideologiya porieformennogo samodzhierzhawia*, pp. 125-126).

18 Before the land reform, Katkov's journals were in favor of maintaining local communes as economic-administrative units, demanding they be expanded (minimum of 5000 members) so that they could support their own schools and hospitals, and in the future even prisons (see V. S. Maslov "Russian Messenger and Moscow News" [in:] *Ocherki po istorii russkoi zhurnalistiki i kritiki*, Leningrad 1965, p. 220).

19 Cf. E. C. Thaden, *Conservative Nationalism*, p. 53.

this context, the general characteristics of evolution that Katkov's Slavophile thought underwent, as expressed in his publications, suffice. This evolution could be grasped in four points.

Firstly, the evolution consisted in a transition from idealistic and romantic nationalism, which was based on universal ethics and orthodox spirituality, to post-romantic nationalism, which accentuated the meaning of common interest. This evolution was neither finished nor free of discrepancies, although it was very vivid. It was the beginning of the 60s when Aksakov expressed his negative views on the policy of "national egoism," which he regarded as typical of Prussia, and completely unfamiliar to Russians, who search for moral legitimization in politics. Under the influence of the Polish uprising, and later also difficulties in opposing the Polish element in "western *guberniyas*," Katkov came to the conclusion that it is in Russia's interest to implement extraordinary measures, measures that would liquidate the norms of ethics and respect for the rule of law in the name of a higher law, the "law of Russian nationality."<sup>20</sup> In foreign policy the rejection of the idea of Christian legitimism, according to which Russia stood guard over morality in international relations, corresponded with this conclusion. A Slavophile ideologist started fearing that reviving the "Holy Alliance," whatever its form might be, would curb the liberty of Russian policy toward Turkey, the Dnepr region and among the Slavs.<sup>21</sup>

Secondly, the religious idea of a Russian national identity started taking the form of an ethno-nationalist concept, according to which a nation is a combination of political integration and common language. Such a change was a result of viewing the Polish issue as a major threat to Russia. Loyal to the Slavophile vision of an ideal Orthodoxy, Aksakov deemed the real Orthodoxy as a weapon not powerful enough to defeat the traits of Polishness. He accepted that the education system in Congress Poland needs to be subject to russification and that the secret teaching in Polish on the Lithuanian-Belarus territories has to be bitterly thought. This required acknowledging the priority of language criteria and engaging the state apparatus in enforcing the ideas so that the aims specified by Russian nationalism, as viewed from an ethnic perspective, would be fulfilled.

Thirdly, placing the political power in charge of russification tasks meant that the scope of activities of the state had to be considerably expanded. This could not be adjusted to the old Slavophile idea of distinguishing "external

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20 I. S. Aksakov, *Polnoje sobraniie sochinenii*, vol. 3, Moscow 1886: "Polskii vopros i zapadnorusskoie delo. Yevrieiskii vopros," p. 482.

21 See F. Fadner, *Seventy Years of Pan-Slavism in Russia. Karazin to Danilevskii 1800-1870*. Georgetown U.P., Washington D.C. 1961, p. 227.

truth,” that is the sphere related to politics and state from “inner truth,” that is the sphere related to religion and tradition, which is free from state interference. A nationalist, russifying state could not accept such a restriction, or a self-restriction to put it more precisely, of its activity. Aksakov was confused by these discrepancies. Claiming that the freedom of conscience is an indigenous value of the “inner truth,” at the same time he was convinced that Russia cannot allow equal rights for Poles and Jews.<sup>22</sup>

Aksakov’s faith in the efficiency of realizing by the state national goals was not unshakeable, however. Bureaucratic methods of fighting Polish culture in the “western *guberniyas*” were, according to Aksakov, ineffective and left no room for optimism. Thus, fourthly, Aksakov propagated the idea of social engagement initiated from below, the idea of national mobilization of the masses.<sup>23</sup> The passive apolitical character of Russians, idealized by his brother Konstantin, ceased to be a Christian virtue to him. Russian peasants – he urged – should become fully and consciously Russians, actively engaged in the national fight.

The traits of classic Slavophilism in the nationalism of Aksakov were so visible and apparent that it was not possible to transform it into a modern integral nationalism, which would be free from religious and ethical scruples. A book by Nikolai Danilevski, *Russia and Europe*, published in 1869 and reprinted several times later on, posed the first theoretical justification of the consequent “national egoism” and the first and only of this kind systematic exposition of Russian political Pan-Slavism philosophy.

Nikolai Danilevsky (1822–85), a natural scientist by education and profession, former member of the Petrashevsky Circle, had never been associated with classical Slavophilism. As the theorist of Pan-Slavism he made use of Slavophile ideas, but by means of conscious selection and revision he was able to fit them into an entirely different ideological structure.

In the first place Danilevsky had to jettison the Slavophile standpoint on statehood, since a doctrine that regarded the state as a “necessary evil” or “external truth” obviously conflicted with a program calling for the creation of a powerful economic and military federation led by Russia. In his assessment of Peter the Great, too, Danilevsky placed rather more stress on the political and military successes that helped to create a powerful empire than on the

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22 Cf. I.S. Aksakov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, pp. 426-427.

Aksakov asserted that in the cases of Catholicism and Judaism, a certain political credo is involved, which precludes loyalty toward a state where another religion prevails, a fact that in Aksakov’s eyes was an argument for refusing the Poles and the Jews equal citizen rights.

23 *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98 and 448.

undignified and damaging “aping” of Europe accompanying the reforms. The greatest changes were to be found in the interpretation of the Russian nation’s historical mission: for the Slavophiles the goal had been the defense of certain universal ideals, such as “true Christianity,” a specified type of social bonds, as well as personality and culture; for Danilevsky, the mission and goal that justified all the cruelties of Russian history was the creation of a powerful state organism whose expansion would be subject only to the natural laws of evolution. Europe, he wrote indignantly, refused to recognize Russia’s mission and assigned her merely a modest role in “civilizing” Central Asia. No great nation would be content with such a role. Fortunately her destiny was manifestly quite different: the Russian people, like the other Slavs, bore the germ of a new type of civilization that had nothing in common with the Germano-Romanic civilization of Europe. This new civilization would only flower after the conquest of Constantinople and the establishment of that city as the capital of a Slavic empire liberated and united by Russia. The “concept of Slavdom” ought therefore to be, after God, the supreme ideal of every Slav, an ideal standing “higher than freedom, higher than science, higher than education, higher than all worldly goods, for none of these is attainable unless this ideal is realized.”<sup>24</sup>

The mistake the Slavophiles had made, according to Danilevsky, was to attribute an absolute and therefore universal value to “Russian” or “Slavic” principles. In effect they had fallen into the same error as the Westernizers, who had identified European civilization with a universal culture. There could be no such thing as “universal values” shared by the whole of mankind, Danilevsky declared; humanity expressed itself solely in specific “historico-cultural” types that were simply different and that could not be compared. To attempt to evaluate these types from the point of view of their allegedly universal significance was just as absurd as to ask which concrete plant form – palm or cypress, oak or rose – better expressed “the concept of plant.” Since there could be no such thing as a universal mission, the Slavs could not have been selected to fulfill such a mission; nor could they, as a collective body, represent “true Christian principles” in their actions, since such principles were only valid in relation to individuals. The demand for the application of Christian principles to politics, the “mysticism and sentimentalism” of the period of the Holy Alliance, did not take into account the fact that only individuals were immortal and that self-sacrifice, the supreme “yardstick of Christian morality,” could be demanded of them alone. The laws governing the relations of states and nations could only be based on self-interest – “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth”. In accordance

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24 N.Y. Danilevsky, *Rossiiia i Evropa, Vzgliad na kul’turnye i politicheskie otnosheniia slavianskogo mira k germano-romanskomu*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.; St. Petersburg, 1889, p. 113.

with this “Benthamite principle of utilitarianism,”<sup>25</sup> Danilevsky demanded the rejection of the surviving hold of legitimism on Russian foreign policy and preached an openly cynical attitude toward international alliances.

Such a programmatic political immoralism was bound to be most convenient for Russian great-power chauvinism. The term “immoral” is perhaps not entirely appropriate in this context: Danilevsky did not ignore moral criteria but only selected a different concept – that of realizing the “Slavic historico-cultural type” – as the supreme moral frame of reference for Russia and all other Slav nations. From this “Slavic” point of view it was easy for him to pronounce judgment on the “Jesuitical gentry state of Poland,” that “Judas of Slavdom,” which he compared to a hideous tarantula greedily devouring its eastern neighbor, unaware that its own body was being eaten by its western neighbors.<sup>26</sup> It was from this standpoint, too, that he condemned tsarist policy for its “softness” toward Europe and accused the government of overlooking the interests of Russia and her Slavic sister nations by currying favor with the West. Even toward the Poles, Danilevsky thought, the tsarist government had shown an excess of a “truly Maltese chivalry” by agreeing to incorporate Congress Poland into Russia instead of leaving her to non-Slavic Austria and Prussia.

In home policy Danilevsky believed in a “social monarchy” that would stand above classes and safeguard social development by subordinating particular interests to the general good. At the outset it seemed to him that this ideal would be well served by the reforms of Alexander II, but later he came to change his mind, especially where the juridical reforms were concerned. In the early editions of his *Russia and Europe* he had defended these reforms against the charge that they were “aping” Europe, citing Khomiakov’s assertion that the jury system, ruling “according to the conscience,” was an indigenous Slavic institution. In the third posthumous edition, however, Nikolai Strakhov included marginal notes made by Danilevsky himself (probably in 1881–2). Motivated by his dissatisfaction with the proceedings and verdicts of the great political trials of the 1870s, Danilevsky confessed that he had been wrong:

Everything I wrote here is nonsense. The reforms had only just been introduced and we wanted to believe – and therefore did believe – that they would assume a sensible character; in actual fact they turned into a caricature of foreign ideas. If we had been more sober in our appraisal we would and should have foreseen this.<sup>27</sup>

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25 Ibid., pp. 31–2.

26 Ibid., p. 33.

27 Ibid., p. 300.

Danilevsky owes his place in Russian intellectual history not only to his reactionary political doctrine but also to his “theory of historico-cultural types,” which cannot be regarded simply as a theoretical underpinning for Pan-Slavism.

Danilevsky’s precursor here was Apollon Grigoriev, who had argued that particular nations or groups of related nations are unique self-contained organisms, governed by laws specific to themselves and independent of the allegedly universal laws of human evolution.<sup>28</sup> Grigoriev developed this notion from the later views of Schelling and set it against the universalistic scheme of Hegel’s philosophy of history. His polemic with Hegel’s “historical view” had its counterpart in Danilevsky’s polemic with Darwinism, in which the classification of species made by the French zoologist Baron Cuvier assumed the significance Schelling’s ideas had had for Grigoriev. Although Danilevsky replaced Grigoriev’s romantic and idealistic philosophy of history with a naturalistic one, in both instances evolutionary categories were supplanted by a morphological point of view. Aestheticism, or rather somewhat special aesthetic criteria deriving beauty from the multiformity and distinctiveness of “types of organization,”<sup>29</sup> also figured largely in Danilevsky’s doctrine. Cuvier’s contribution, in his view, was that he differentiated between the “evolutionary stage” (or level) of organisms and their “types”:

These types are not evolutionary stages on the ladder of gradual perfectibility (stages that are, as it were, placed in a hierarchical order of subordination), but entirely different plans – plans without any common denominator – in which each entity evolves in a specific and distinct fashion toward the multiformity and perfection within its reach.<sup>30</sup>

When translated into historical terms, this meant the elimination of the concept of unidirectional and universal progress. In place of an abstract “universal humanity” (*obshchechelovechestvo*, conceived as a common yardstick of everything human), Danilevsky proposed the notion of “all-humanity” (*vsechelovechestvo*), by which he meant a rich variety of cultural and national differences that could not be reduced to a common denominator or arranged in an evolutionary sequence. Anticipating the later theories of Spengler<sup>31</sup> and Arnold Toynbee, Danilevsky divided mankind into “historico-cultural types” comparable to different styles in architecture and paintings; progress was

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28 See above, p. 313

29 Danilevsky, *Rossia i Evropa*, pp. XXX-XXXI.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 87.

31 On the question of the possible influence of Danilevsky’s ideas on Spengler, see P. Sorokin, *Modern Historical and Social Philosophies* (New York, 1963), pp. 50, 69, 73-82. See also N.S. Timasheff, *Sociological Theory. Its Nature and Growth*, New York 1967, pp. 55-6 (Danilevsky’s theory is described there as an “early option of evolutionism”).



something that could not only take place within the type, and categories of organic growth such as youth, maturity, and old age were applicable only to these various types and not to humanity as a whole. In view of the heterogeneity and variety of historical phenomena, there was no point in attempting to formulate theories that claimed to embrace the whole of history; these were invariably based on the characteristic “false perspective” of Europocentrism – the unconscious identification of the history of Europe with the history of mankind.

This differentiation between “evolutionary types” and “evolutionary levels” (or “stages”) within the various types met with the enthusiastic approval of Mikhailovsky.<sup>32</sup> The Populist thinker’s interpretation of historical types differed somewhat from Danilevsky’s, since he was primarily interested in types of economic development rather than specifically national characteristics. However, the concern they both showed for distinguishing between evolutionary types and evolutionary stages or levels was not fortuitous: both Danilevsky and Mikhailovsky wished to justify their insistence on Russia’s development by “native” principles and therefore had to reject all universalistic evolutionary schemes or conceptions of unidirectional development.

Danilevsky distinguished ten cultural types in the past: (1) Egyptian, (2) Chinese, (3) Assyrian-Babylonian-Phoenician or Ancient Semitic, (4) Hindu, (5) Iranian, (6) Hebrew, (7) Ancient Greek, (8) Roman, (9) Neo-Semitic or Arabian, and (10) Romano-Germanic or European. These civilizations were “incommensurable” as far as their “principles” were concerned, but they could be compared from a formal point of view. There were “mono-elemental” types, for instance, that could lay claim to achievements in one cultural sphere alone, and “multi-elemental” types that could boast of achievements in many spheres; some types were completely “self-contained,” whereas others were capable of assimilating “cultural material” (but not principles) created by types contemporary with them or preceding them. Cultural activity, in the broadest sense of the word, evolved in four principal spheres: (1) the religious sphere, (2) the cultural sphere (in the narrower meaning of science, the arts, and technology), (3) the political (or, political-law) sphere, and (4) the socioeconomic sphere. Hebrew civilization was a mono-elemental religious type, ancient Greece a cultural (primarily artistic) type, and Rome a political type; in contrast to the Chinese and Hindu civilizations, each of these types was capable of assimilating the achievements of other cultures. European civilization

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32 N. K. Mikhailovsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.; St. Petersburg, 1906–14, vol. 3, pp. 867-68 (“Notes of a Layman”).

was a “dual” one composed of both the political and the cultural elements, and was capable of far-reaching and creative assimilation.

Unlike the Slavophiles, Danilevsky was not hostile to the Romano-Germanic principle. Of his “historico-cultural types,” the European type was one of the most outstanding, perhaps the finest produced so far; at the same time, however, he reaffirmed the Slavophile diagnosis of European decay. In his scheme European history had three periods of peak achievement. The first was the thirteenth century, which saw the flowering of an aristocratic and theocratic culture. The second was the seventeenth century, after the intellectual liberation of the Renaissance and the liberation of conscience of the Reformation; this period represented the creative apogee of European history (it was also the age to which all European conservatives looked back with the greatest nostalgia – with the exception of the Ultramontane Catholics, who wanted to go back even further). Liberation from feudalism at the end of the eighteenth century ushered in the third and last period of achievement – the technical and industrial age. During this period (in 1848) new forces had emerged that desired the total liberation and total destruction of the old European civilization. The Paris Commune, Danilevsky wrote in a note to a later edition of his book, was another and more terrifying embodiment of these forces: “It was the beginning of the end.”<sup>33</sup>

The eclipse of Europe did not, however, concern Russia or the Slavic nations. Whatever arguments the Russian Westernizers might put forward to the contrary, Russia emphatically did not belong to Europe; the best proof of this was that Europe itself did not consider Russia “one of us,” and turned its back on her in abhorrence. Positive evidence of Russia’s originality was the solution to the peasant question, which entailed the distribution of the land to the peasants but also the preservation of the village commune as a bulwark against the proletariat that was ruining Europe. By turning her back on Europe and shutting herself off from her, by conquering Constantinople and liberating and uniting her fellow Slavs, Russia would create a new, eleventh cultural type. Danilevsky suggested that this would be the first “tetra-elemental” type, as he claimed for the Slavs the ability to be active in all four spheres of culture, especially in the religious sphere (Orthodoxy) and the socioeconomic sphere (the agrarian solution). Thanks to the Slavs’ extraordinary capacity for understanding other cultures and assimilating their achievements, the Slavic type was likely to be closest to the ideal of “all-humanity.” Until this new type was fully formed, however, it would be better to concentrate on individuality and distinctiveness

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33 Danilevsky, *Rossia i Evropa*, pp. 253–4.

than on the ideal of all-humanity, which was fully attainable by God alone. Particularly in relations with Europe Danilevsky recommended “exclusivity and patriotic fanaticism” as essential counterweights to Western influences. In order to straighten the bent tree, the utmost force must be used to pull it to the other side.<sup>34</sup>

In the everyday political context of those years, Danilevsky’s theories amounted to an appeal to launch an out-and-out campaign not only against the revolutionary movement but also against the moderate liberal opposition. Like all convinced reactionaries in Russia at that time, Danilevsky regarded liberalism and all radical movements as symptoms of a disease with which tainted Europe had infected the healthy organism of Mother Russia.

## Konstantin Pobedonostsev

Unlike Danilevsky, Konstantin Pobedonostsev (1837–1907) was neither an original nor an interesting thinker. If he has a place in Russian intellectual history, it is mainly as a typical and influential representative of reactionary thought during the crisis of Russian absolutism. His name will always be associated with the oppressive, all-encompassing triumph of reaction in Russia during the reign of Alexander III. The poet Alexandr Blok describes this depressing age in his poem *Revenge*:

In those mute and distant years  
 A dull gloom filled all hearts.  
 Pobedonostsev had unfurled  
 His owlsh wings over Russia.  
 There was neither day nor night,  
 Only the shadow of giant wings.

Pobedonostsev was a jurist, author of a three-volume textbook on civil law and many works on the history of Russian jurisprudence. He abandoned a successful university career in order to enter politics, and in quick succession became senator (1868), member of the Council of State (1872), and Director-General (*Ober-Prokurator*) of the Holy Synod (1880–1905). In this post he encouraged anti-Semitism, persecuted Old Believers and Sectarians, and pursued a policy of Russification that systematically restricted the religious rights of national minorities. He owed his impact on the internal policies of the tsarist government

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34 Ibid., pp. 109, 468.

not only to his official position, but also to his close influence on the imperial family, which had engaged him as tutor in the 1860's. He was responsible for the upbringing of the last two tsars, Alexander III and Nicholas II, and their obstinate and shortsighted adherence to the inviolability of autocracy were no doubt partly a result of his efforts.

Pobedonostsev's direct influence on the state's policy culminated in the first three months of the reign of Alexander III. The *Ober-Prokurator* of the Holy Synod played then a crucial role in persuading the young emperor, frightened at the time by the killing of his father, that not only the proposed Loris-Melikov reform but the entire Great Reforms tradition should be rejected. In his emotional address delivered on 8<sup>th</sup> March 1881 to the monarch and the government, he went as far as naming those reforms a "criminal error." He was the main author of the Emperor's Manifesto of 29<sup>th</sup> April, whose aftermath was the resignation of the reform-oriented members of the government (including Loris-Melikov and Grand Duke Constantine).<sup>35</sup> He moreover heavily influenced the law of 14<sup>th</sup> August 1881 which lent the Russian monarchy the traits of a police state.

Pobedonostsev expounded his social philosophy in a collection of articles entitled *Moscow Miscellany* (*Moskovskii Sbornik*, 1896). In them he criticized Western European civilization for its rationalism and belief in man's innate goodness. He himself put his faith in inertia, which he thought of as a mysterious force cementing society. This force was epitomized in the lives of the illiterate peasantry, who were faithful to old traditions and deeply attached to church ritual, although they could not understand the prayers they were reciting. Following the French sociologist Frédéric Le Playe (whose *La Constitution essentielle de l'humanité* he had translated into Russian), Pobedonostsev also emphasized the conservative and stabilizing function of the family. He saw national evolution as an organic process determined by such factors outside the conscious control of individuals as land, the collective unconscious of the masses, and their history. Every nation, he wrote, is the prisoner of its own history, and each one evolves according to laws specific to itself, so that imitating other nations is always unnatural and injurious. In Russia absolutism was a truly national institution, and therefore all attempts to liberalize the system

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35 See P.A. Zaionchkovskiy, *Krizis samoderzhaviya na rubezhe 1870-1880kh godov*, Moscow 1964, chapter IV (Peter A. Zaionchkovskiy, *The Russian Autocracy in Crisis, 1878-1882*, edited, translated and introduced by Gary M. Hamburg, Academic International Press, Gulf Breeze FL 1979, p. 208).

– including the juridical reforms introduced during the reign of Alexander II<sup>36</sup> – were likely to have fatal consequences. In his attacks on the juridical reforms, Pobedonostsev shifted the responsibility on the Emperor, while dissembling his own contribution. He was particularly severe in his attacks on the parliamentary system, although he conceded that it had a place in the Anglo-Saxon countries, where it was a product of organic historical development. In all other countries, he insisted, parliamentary government led to universal corruption, the tyranny of the masses, and uncontrolled “party-mindedness”, i.e. the abandonment of the general good to the mercy of the brutal struggle of particular interests.

These views show many points of similarity with the romantic conservatism of the first half of the century. This is not by chance; Pobedonostsev’s ideas on jurisprudence were formed by a theorist of the German “historical school,” F.C. Savigny, and among Pobedonostsev’s favorite writers we find the “feudal socialist” and romantic conservative Thomas Carlyle. The Russian’s personality, however, was far from romantic: he was a dry, pedantic bureaucrat and regarded all romantic enthusiasms or excessive displays of feeling with suspicion. Despite his largely friendly relations with Ivan Aksakov<sup>37</sup> and the high esteem in which he held Slavophilism, he was little influenced by it; the bureaucratic conservatism of the reign of Nicholas was much closer to his heart. In contrast to the Slavophiles, Pobedonostsev did not believe in the fellowship of *sobornost’*, since he could not have reconciled such a belief with his deep conviction that man’s weak and indeed wicked nature required strong discipline imposed and controlled from without. Believing as he did that Russia’s “native principle” was the inviolability of absolutism, he firmly dismissed any demands for convening a Land Assembly and praised the Petrine reforms largely because they had consolidated autocracy. His view of the peasant commune was influenced by purely practical considerations: he regarded it initially as a conservative institution that helped to stabilize the state, but in the late 1880s he came to the conclusion that it was in the interests of absolutism to abolish the common ownership of land and create a class of wealthy farmers (here he anticipated the

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36 Pobedonostsev had a very poor opinion of Alexander II: he accused him of weakening the state and maintained that this was connected with the immoral life he led (by which he meant the emperor’s affair with Catherine Dolgoruki). See R. F. Byrnes, *Pobedonostsev, His Life and Thought*, Bloomington, Ind., 1968, pp. 143–4. He also attacked the juridical reforms and declared they had been the responsibility of the emperor and the liberals, although he had in fact taken an active part in their preparation (Byrnes, *Pobedonostsev*, pp. 54-59).

37 The relationship was not entirely free of conflict, for Aksakov – faithful to the traditions of Slavophilism – defended freedom of speech and conscience.

central idea of Stolypin's agrarian reforms).<sup>38</sup> It is also significant that Pobedonostsev was not an opponent of industrialization – he thought it would be possible to modernize the economy without introducing basic changes in the social structure or the political system.

His pessimistic view of human nature and deep distrust of strong emotions and spontaneous social movements inclined Pobedonostsev to treat the aggressive nationalism of the Pan-Slavists with considerable reserve. On the eve of the war with Turkey in 1877 he did, it is true, succumb to the general Pan-Slavic mood, but he soon regained his sober restraint and returned to his conception of a passive and defensive foreign policy. His American biographer R.F. Byrnes, in fact, has called him a typical isolationist.<sup>39</sup> The Director General of the Holy Synod had no faith in Russia's "all-Slavic" mission. It would be more apt to say, perhaps, that he was entirely lacking in any faith in the future. Orthodox, autocratic Russia was, for him, a "separate world"; but it was a world threatened from without and within, defending itself desperately against disaster, which sooner or later was bound to overtake it.

## Konstantin Leontiev

A far more colorful and complex personality was Konstantin Leontiev (1831–91). His outlook was formed in the course of the ten years (1863–74) he spent in the Russian consular service in various parts of the Ottoman empire, during which period he frequently stayed with the community of Greek Orthodox monks on Mount Athos. After resigning from the diplomatic service (over disagreements with Russian policy toward Turkey), he worked in Russia as a censor; but he again handed in his resignation after a few years and settled in the Optina Cloister, famous for its holy elders. Towards the end of his life he took monastic vows.

A contemptuous dislike of the "bourgeois plebeianism" of the "man in the street" and his philistine ideals of "universal prosperity" and "rational middle-class happiness" – this was the emotional mainspring of Leontiev's entire work. After his death he was often referred to as the "Russian Nietzsche."<sup>40</sup> An exceptionally important aspect of his aversion to bourgeois values was his

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38 Byrnes, *Pobedonostsev*, p. 301.

39 *Ibid.*, pp. 119-20.

40 See N.A. Berdiaev, *Konstantin Leontiev. Ocherki iz istorii russkoi religioznoi mysli*, Paris 1926, pp. 37-39. There is an English translation of this book (by S. Reavey), *K.N. Leontiev*, London 1949.

aestheticism: even as a very young man Leontiev had disliked the railway – that archsymbol of bourgeois civilization – and had condemned European dress as “unbearably commonplace” and devoid of the picturesque. Man, he wrote, ought to model himself on nature, which “adores variety and luxurious forms.” Beauty revealed itself in clear-cut distinction, peculiarity, individuality, specific coloring; it depended on differentiation and therefore on inequality. By attacking extreme social differences, liberal humanism and individualism were in effect an anti-aesthetic force “destroying the individuality of persons, provinces, and nations.”<sup>41</sup> In the same way “sentimentalism” or “eudaemonism” prevented the emergence of powerful and splendid personalities who were only formed by misfortunes and injustices. The victory of such liberal and egalitarian ideals as universal prosperity and the universal acceptance of middle-class values would make history meaningless. “One would have to blush for mankind if this shabby ideal of universal utility, of shallow commonplace work and inglorious prosiness were to triumph for centuries.”<sup>42</sup>

The same thoughts are developed in more detail in Leontiev’s major work, *Byzantinism and Slavdom* (1875). This puts forward an original interpretation of the evolution of societies anticipating Spengler’s theory of the transition from “culture” to “civilization.”<sup>43</sup> It also shares certain features with the concepts of Ortega y Gasset and other anti-egalitarian critics of mass culture.

All development, Leontiev argues, passes through three fundamental stages that are common not only to biological evolution but also to the evolution of artistic styles or whole social organisms. The starting point is a period of simplicity in which a primitive homogeneity prevails both in the whole and in its component parts. The transition to the second stage is a process of growing complexity in which both the whole and its parts become individualized, but at the same time are welded together more strongly by the “despotic unity of form”; this second stage culminates in “flourishing complexity,” i.e., maximum differentiation within the framework of a specific individualized morphological unity. From this moment evolution passes into disintegration and, through secondary simplification, leads to a leveling fusion of the component elements and therefore to a new monochromatic simplicity. This third stage – that of a “leveling fusion and simplicity” – heralds the approaching death of the organism.

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41 K. N. Leontiev, *Sobranie sochinenii*, St. Petersburg, 1912, vol. 5, p. 147.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 426.

43 See P. Sorokin, *Contemporary Sociological Theories*, New York and London [n.d.], pp. 25–26, note 49.

In applying this scheme to the philosophy of history, Leontiev made use of Danilevsky's "types," which he substituted for "abstract humanity" as the protagonist in the process of evolution and disintegration. The history of Western Europe naturally supplied him with a classic example of cultural decay that was both a lesson and a warning for Russia. The culmination of European progress, according to Leontiev, was the period between the Renaissance and the eighteenth century; this was followed by a period of "decay" that heralded the third stage, the disintegration of the differentiated morphological unity. During this stage everything became laxer and shallower. While industry expanded and prosperity increased, culture disintegrated, because cultural individuality (its unrepeatable uniqueness) is possible only under an integrating "despotism of form"; by this standard, China or Turkey was more highly cultured than Belgium or Switzerland.

The main symptom of Europe's decay was the "liberal-egalitarian process," which, Leontiev declared,

is the antithesis of the process of development. In the process of development the inner ideal firmly holds the social fabric in its organizing and despotic grip, and restrains its divergent and centrifugal tendencies. Progress, on the other hand, in its struggle against despotism – the despotism of estates, guilds, monasteries, and even fortunes – is nothing other than a process of disintegration, [...] a process that levels the morphological contours and destroys specific features organically (i.e., despotically) related to the given social organism.<sup>44</sup>

From this theory special conclusions could be drawn about the role of statesmen. Prior to the period of "flourishing complexity," Leontiev suggested, right is on the side of the progressives who lead the nation from the stage of primitive simplicity toward differentiation and proliferation of forms. During the stage of disintegration, however, right is on the side of the conservatives, who try to hold back the process of atomization. This was the situation not only in Europe but also in Russia, where the "liberal-egalitarian process" had made headway after the death of Nicholas I. "We must freeze Russia to save her from rotting" was the sinister aphorism Leontiev coined in justification of Pobedonostsev's ultrareactionary program.

Leontiev agreed with Danilevsky that Russia, though exposed to the "pestilent breath" of Europe, did not belong to the European "type," but he had different ideas about the specific nature of "Russianness." In his view Russia was not a purely Slavic country; the originality of her culture was determined by its Asiatic elements as well. Slavdom was "amorphous, spontaneous, unorganized," whereas Russia was above all heir to the Byzantine civilization

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44 Leontiev, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 5, pp. 198–9.



that Danilevsky had overlooked in his theory of “historico-cultural” types. The conquest of Constantinople, therefore, would enable Russia to create a new cultural type that would be not Slavic but neo-Byzantine. Byzantinism, as embodied in Orthodoxy and autocracy, was the “organizing principle” in Russian history; “Slavism” as such did not exist, for without Byzantinism the Slavs were merely so much ethnographic material, vulnerable to the disintegrating influence emanating from Europe. If the southern Slavs had retained their originality, Leontiev concluded, it was only thanks to Turkey, which had “frozen” their culture and fenced them off from liberal Europe.

To understand Leontiev better, we must remember that during his years in the Balkans he had fallen in love with the Turks and had, at the same time, come to hold the Slavs in thorough aversion. In particular he disliked the Bulgarians, in whom he claimed to see symptoms of a premature old age – the uninterrupted transition from the first to the third evolutionary stage, or the transformation of swineherds into middle-class liberals.

Leontiev’s harsh judgment of the Slavs was in part determined by his wider attitude to nineteenth-century nationalism; the separate essay he devoted to this subject has the revealing title *National Policy as an Instrument of World Revolution*. In it he put forward the view that nations were a creative force only when they represented a specific culture: “naked” or purely “tribal” nationalism was a corrosive force destroying both culture and the state, a leveling process that was, in the last resort, cosmopolitan; in fact, nationalism was only a mask for liberal and egalitarian tendencies, a specific metamorphosis of the universal process of disintegration.

Leontiev illustrated this thesis by pointing to the examples of Greece and Italy, which, he maintained, had rapidly begun to lose their “native” character after gaining independence. Nationalist movements among the Slavs were tending in the same direction: nationalist passions had caused the Bulgarians to quarrel with Orthodoxy as represented by the Greek Metropolitan and to adopt a European constitution. On the Slavic question Leontiev tended to agree with Nicholas I rather than Pogodin and the Pan-Slavists. In *Byzantinism and Slavdom* he argued that it was not the Slavs as such that were deserving of affection and support, but merely their “originality”; in practice this meant that support should be given not to the Slav nationalists, but to the standard-bearers of Byzantinism – the Greek Phanariotes. This conclusion conflicted with the “Slavic” policies of the government of Alexander II and put a stop to Leontiev’s diplomatic career.

From having been Danilevsky’s enthusiastic admirer and in a sense his disciple, Leontiev thus came to repudiate Pan-Slavism, Danilevsky’s brainchild. “From now on,” he wrote, “we should regard Pan-Slavism as something very

dangerous if not downright disastrous.”<sup>45</sup> The “younger brothers” – the Slavs – had been infected by the spirit of egalitarian liberalism, and were in fact the worst enemies of the distinctive Orthodox-Byzantine culture. It was not by chance, Leontiev thought, that Pan-Slavism had gained ground in Russia together with liberal ideas – that is, during the period of the “great reforms” that had blurred the distinction between Russia and Europe in her decline. This comment should not be taken to imply that Leontiev was no longer interested in the conquest of Constantinople; his real opposition was to the emphasis on the “liberation” of the other Slavic nations. Austria and Turkey, he felt, should long continue to rule over their Slavic subjects, for it was only the absence of political independence that induced the latter to cultivate their cultural distinctiveness. In fact, the Turkish and Austrian yokes should only be thrown off when Russia was mature enough for her mission and, after conquering Constantinople, able to direct the future of Slavdom.

That Constantinople would ultimately be conquered was not in doubt for Leontiev, but he was far from sure whether this in itself was enough to allow Russia to create a new and original civilization. Russia could hardly be called a young country, he wrote with regret; the policy of Alexander III was one of “salutary reaction,” but it was impossible to tell whether this would “heal” Russian society, which since the 1860s had been profoundly affected by corrosive processes. Although the conquest of countries with an original Orthodox-Byzantine culture would strengthen Russian Byzantinism, Leontiev deplored the fact that in the process of gaining independence these countries would fall prey to the plague of egalitarian liberalism. Toward the end of his life, in the early 1890s, he finally lost his faith in Russia’s ability to create a distinctive new cultural type. The future, he prophesied, belonged to socialism; possibly a Russian tsar would stand at the head of the socialist movement and would organize and discipline it just as the Emperor Constantine had “organized” Christianity; or perhaps, he wrote in another apocalyptic prediction, a democratic and secular Russia would become the home of the Antichrist.<sup>46</sup>

In his catastrophic vision of the future Leontiev found only one consolation: the hated liberals, he was convinced, would never triumph; the new rulers who would emerge from the crisis of European and Russian civilization would be neither “liberal” nor “mild.” If further imitation of the ailing West were to bring about a revolution in Russia, he wrote in 1880, this revolution would ultimately set up “a regime whose strictness will surpass anything we have seen so far.”<sup>47</sup>

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45 Leontiev, *Natsional’naia politika kak orudie vsemirnoi revoliutsii*, Moscow 1889, p. 54.

46 See Berdiaev, *Konstantin Leontiev*, pp. 212, 217.

47 Leontiev, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 7, p. 205.

European and Russian socialists, he wrote elsewhere, would not put up monuments to the liberals:

They are right to despise them. [...] However hostile these people [the revolutionary socialists] are to the actual conservatives and the forms and methods of their activity, nevertheless all the essential aspects of conservative doctrine will prove useful to them. They will require terror, they will require discipline: traditions of humility, the habit of obedience, will be of use to them; nations who (let us suppose) have managed successfully to reconstruct their economic life, but have nevertheless failed to find satisfaction in life on earth, will blaze up with renewed enthusiasm for mystical doctrines.<sup>48</sup>

In his ideas Leontiev recapitulated, to a considerable extent, reactionary doctrines formulated at the beginning of the nineteenth century, in particular the ideas of the German conservative romantics and the theocratic conceptions of de Maistre. Conservative romanticism in fact was the common provenance linking Leontiev and the Slavophiles.<sup>49</sup> Leontiev himself conceded this relationship, but at the same time condemned Slavophilism as an inconsistent doctrine with elements that he considered definitely unacceptable.<sup>50</sup> As he put it:

Slavophilism seemed to me to be too close to egalitarian liberalism to serve as a protective fence against the contemporary West. This is one thing; another aspect of this doctrine that aroused my mistrust was a certain one-sided moralism. At the same time this doctrine seemed to me unsatisfactory in relation to the State and unaesthetic. On the issue of statehood Katkov was far more satisfactory. [...] As far as aesthetics are concerned, both in history and in the outward manifestations of reality, I felt much closer to Herzen than to the Slavophiles.<sup>51</sup>

This was a reference to Herzen's critique of the Western European bourgeoisie, in which aesthetic revulsion had played an important role. Undoubtedly, however, Leontiev's aestheticism was closer to that of Grigoriev and Danilevsky, and their rejection of universalist criteria. In Leontiev we see the intimate connection between this type of aestheticism and the rejection of morality as a guiding principle; immoral acts and traits can in fact be "beautiful," because variety, color, vigor can be enhanced by the element of evil.

It is obvious that the Slavophile vision of ancient Russia – with its harmony, homogeneous traditions, and alleged absence of clearly demarcated social

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48 Ibid., p. 217.

49 That is why Miliukov considered Leontiev a product of the decline of Slavophilism, whereas Trubetskoi called him a "disillusioned Slavophile". See P. N. Miliukov, *Iz istorii russkoi intelligentsii*, St. Petersburg, 1902, and S. N. Trubetskoi, "Razochorovannyi slavianofil," *Vestnik Evropy*, 1892, no. 10.

50 Ivan Aksakov denied the resemblance and dismissed Leontiev's ideas as a "lascivious cult of the truncheon."

51 Leontiev, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 6, p. 335–6.

divisions – could not be reconciled with Leontiev’s aesthetic ideal. Far closer to his vision of “flourishing complexity” was the West as criticized by the Slavophiles, with its government “based on force,” its harsh social divisions, its splendid knighthood, and its Church ambitious for hegemony over the secular government. As might be expected, Leontiev admired “ancient” Europe and ascribed Slavophile criticism of feudalism and the Western aristocracy to the influence of the new “liberal-egalitarian” Europe.”<sup>52</sup> This naturally affected his interpretation of the central problems of Russian history and led him to regard the cleavage between the nobility and the common people, which had so disturbed the Slavophiles, as a positive symptom.

Before Peter our society and mores showed greater homogeneity, a greater similarity of the component parts; Peter’s reign initiated a more specific, more clear-cut social stratification and gave rise to that diversity without which life cannot attain its full prime and there can be no creativity. It is a well-known fact that Peter further consolidated serfdom. [...] In the above sense Peter’s despotism was progressive and aristocratic. Catherine’s liberalism was definitely of a similar stamp. She led Russia to an age of prosperity and creativity. She increased inequality – that was her main contribution. She guarded serfdom (the integrity of the *mir*, the communal ownership of the land) and introduced it even in Little Russia, and on the other hand relieved the nobility by diminishing their sense of being “servitors” and thereby strengthening such aristocratic traits as family pride and individuality; from the time of Catherine the nobility became somewhat more independent of the state, but dominated and ruled over other classes just as before. As an estate it became still more distinct, clear-cut, and individualized, and entered the age when it gave birth to Derzhavin, Karamzin, Zhukovsky, Batiushkov, Pushkin, Gogol, and others.<sup>53</sup>

On the political plane, too, Leontiev’s attitude toward the aristocracy, class divisions, and the class privileges of the nobility differed from that of the Slavophiles. A supporter of the reactionary measures by which the government of Alexander III attempted to restore “differentiation” (i.e., the obliterated class-related differences), Leontiev could not forgive the Slavophiles their collaboration in the liberal reforms of the 1860s. The anti-aristocratic pronouncements of the epigones of Slavophilism (Y. Samarin and Ivan Aksakov), their constant reiteration that the Russian nobility was descended from “servitors” of the state and ought therefore to show moderation in its claims, were indignantly dismissed by him as an open concession to egalitarianism. How consistent he was is shown by the fact that he rejected even

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52 Ibid., pp. 431–2.

53 Ibid., vol. 5, pp. 133–4.

the Slavophile-inspired “democratic” policy of Russification. The aristocratic traditions of the German barons and Polish gentry ought to be carefully protected by the tsarist government, he wrote – especially at a time when nihilism and other symptoms of decay were spreading among the Russian masses. To persecute the Polish gentry and Catholicism, and to support the Latvians and Estonians at the expense of the Livonian and Courland barons, was to aid the disintegrating force of egalitarianism and hasten the fatal process of homogenization. Oddest of all, Leontiev even sympathized with the Polish uprising of 1863 as a “reactionary” movement and expressed regret that after its defeat the victors were largely responsible for speeding up the process of democratization.<sup>54</sup>

It is interesting to note Leontiev’s attitude toward the land reforms in Russia. In his comments he emphasized the twofold implications of the program – what he called its liberal-individualistic (European) aspect, and its communal-conservative (Russian) aspect.<sup>55</sup> By confusing these two aspects and failing to differentiate between the “beneficial effects of being chained to the soil” (i.e., the preservation and legal codification of the commune) and the “risky liberation of the peasants from the rule of the nobility,” the Slavophiles and even Danilevsky and Katkov had, according to Leontiev, fallen into the “liberal trap.”

Last but not least, Leontiev’s conception of religion and therefore his interpretation of Orthodoxy<sup>56</sup> differed radically from that of the Slavophiles. The “Russian Nietzsche” had a deep-seated aversion to any kind of moralizing and evangelical Christianity and all attempts to “humanize religion”; he was equally repelled by religious sentimentalism and by doctrines of love that overlooked fear of God (*timor Domini*), obedience, and authority. In his view, Khomiakov’s “ecclesiastical democratism” and the Slavophile ideal of “free unity” were typical examples of a “rose-colored” Christianity that was utterly alien to the authentic “black” Christianity of the Orthodox monks on Mount Athos and in the Optina Cloister. For Leontiev, “ascetic and dogmatic Orthodoxy” was mainly distinguished by its “Byzantine pessimism,” its lack of faith in the possibility of harmony and universal brotherhood. In this respect, he suggested,

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54 Ibid., vol. 6, pp. 170-71. It is interesting to note that a very similar opinion about the Polish uprising of 1863 was held by Proudhon – of course with the opposite value judgment. The argument that the uprising was allegedly a reactionary movement of the Catholic nobility was also used and abused in the government – supporting the anti-Polish campaign in the Russian press.

55 Ibid., vol. 7, p. 322.

56 Leontiev, “*Moia literaturnaia sud’ba*,” in *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 22–24, Moscow 1935, p. 441.

Schopenhauer and Hartmann were perhaps closer to Christianity than the liberal-socialist prophets of universal justice and welfare.<sup>57</sup> All great religions were “doctrines of pessimism sanctioning suffering, wrongs, and the injustices of life on earth.”<sup>58</sup> It was with an almost sadistic satisfaction that he recalled the New Testament’s failure to promise universal brotherhood and also its prediction that a time would come when love would weaken and the kingdom of the Antichrist be established. For Leontiev, Christianity offered individual salvation in the afterworld, rather than collective salvation in this world.<sup>59</sup>

The reception of Leontiev’s legacy has nevertheless shown that his ideas have inspired theoreticians and ideologues in Russia’s post-Revolution history. This is particularly true for the part of his output he had taken over from Danilevsky, having freed it from its peculiarly Pan-Slavic entanglements: the theory of “historico-cultural” types. The latter became, in turn, an integral item in the doctrine of Eurasianism, developed in 1921 by the famous linguist and ethnologist Nikolai Trubetskoi.<sup>60</sup> This doctrine proved of use as a modern and dynamic form of nationalistic integration of the entire pre-Revolution and, later on, Soviet imperial area. In the post-communist Russia, the “historico-cultural” types theory, now usually referred to as the theory of types of civilization, has been accepted by all the ideologists who oppose globalization processes from the standpoint of Russia’s geopolitical and cultural individuality. Among them have been personages such as Gennady Zyuganov, the leader of neo-Communists, along with Alexander Dugin, the fighter of extreme rightist and aggressively anti-Western Eurasianism.

Western historians of Russian thought have never ceased taking interest in the works of the author of *Byzantinism and Slavdom*. In his monumental encyclopedia of philosophy recently published in England, George Kline, the pioneer of American historiography of Russian philosophy, described Leontiev as “one of the most original and provocative thinkers in nineteenth-century Russia.”<sup>61</sup>

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57 Leontiev, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 7, pp. 232–243.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 230.

59 The thinker referred to this extremely antimillennaristic interpretation of Christianity as “transcendental egoism.”

60 N. Trubetskoi’s first manifesto of Eurasianism was a collection of articles *Iskhod k Vostoku*, published in 1921 in Sofia.

61 See G.L. Kline, “Leont’ev, Konstantin Nikolaevich,” in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by E. Craig, London and New York 1998, vol. 5, pp. 567–570.

Also Polish scholars have expressed their interest in Leontiev, as attested by two recently published monographs: M. Bohun, *Kontrrewolucja i pesymizm. Filozofia spoleczna*

The worldwide career of Samuel Huntington's work *The Clash of Civilizations*<sup>62</sup> testifies to a justifiable interest in the issue of "civilization type.

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*Konstantina Leontjewa*, Krakow 2000; and, M. Broda, *Historia a eschatologia. Studia nad myślą Konstantego Leontjewa i "zagadką Rosji"*, Łódź 2001.

62 S.P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York 1996.





# Chapter 13

## Populist Ideologies

### Introduction

The announcement and implementation of the land reform and enfranchisement of peasantry proved to be an important caesura in the history of Russia. Ever since the emancipation of Russian peasants from serfdom and bondage with all the imperfections that could be identified in the applied solutions became the accomplished fact, it could no more be the central affair around which the most varied trends in political thought united. The radical ideologists did not alter their priorities as, clearly enough, they continued to focus on the agrarian question. They had to accept, though, that oppression of the peasants had assumed a new form, with non-economic feudal coercion giving way to economic constraint rooted in the extreme inequality of social forces, with the nobility remaining dominant as the landowner class, of capitalist type now.

Given the circumstances, the radical movement began to become Populist, or *narodnik* oriented. Since the notion *narodnichestvo* – “Populism,” in approximate rendering – has been attached various meanings by different authors, it first requires explanation and precise definition. As its broadest concept, *narodnitsvo* stands for:

an agrarian socialism of the second half of the nineteenth century, which upheld the proposition that Russia could by-pass the capitalist stage of development and proceed through the *artel* and peasant commune directly to socialism.<sup>1</sup>

Richard Pipes, who has just been quoted, remarks that such a broad definition of *narodnichestvo* was put into circulation by the Marxists of the nineties – in particular, by Petr Struve. While this observation is basically apt, it becomes more precise when one bears in mind the anti-Populist polemicism of the young Lenin, which is at least as important for determining the content of the

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1 See R. Pipes, “Narodnichestvo: A Semantic Inquiry,” *Slavic Review*, vol. XXIII, no. 3, September 1964, pp. 441–2.

phenomenon under critique as Struve's studies.<sup>2</sup> In any case, the Marxist concept of *narodnichestvo*, deriving its origins from the defense of petty producers (mainly, peasants) who suffered impoverishment because of capitalist development, was accepted by the Populists (*narodniks*) themselves and popularized in the scholarly literature owing to its proved heuristic fertility.<sup>3</sup>

In its narrowest, strictly historical meaning – that used by the Russian revolutionaries of the 1870s – the term *narodnichestvo*, or Populism, is applied to a single current within the Russian revolutionary movement: a trend that made its appearance in the mid-seventies resulting from the experiences of the first “go to the people” movement, and that differed from other revolutionary trends in that it put an emphasis on work among the people, in the name of the ideals as realized by the people. In this sense of the word, Populism was opposed to the “abstract intellectualism” of those revolutionaries who tried to teach peasants instead of learning from them, and who wanted to impose on the peasants the ideals of Western socialism instead of listening to what they had to say and acting along the lines of their endeavors and in their interests. From the point of view of the methods of struggle advocated, the *narodniks* (in the meaning as above) were opposed to the *narodovoltsy* (members of the *Narodnaia Volya* [People's Will] organization), because, unlike the latter, they advocated action solely among the people and through the people, condemning revolutionary plots, individual terror, and attempts to seize power by professional revolutionary organizations.

The use of the term *narodnichestvo* as “Populism” in this chapter tends to follow the first of the definitions outlined above, albeit in a slightly narrower and more restricted meaning, taking into account the caesura separating Russia from before the reforms and the country under the reform. Rather than a specific trend in revolutionary thought, we will refer to “Populism” as a dynamic ideological structure that appears in a variety of forms and proves reconcilable with various political positions. In brief, the significant feature of this ideology

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2 See A. Walicki, *The Controversy over Capitalism. Studies in the Social Philosophy of the Russian Populists*, Oxford 1969 (2nd ed.: Notre Dame, In. 1989), chapter I: “The Concept of Populism” (pp. 1–28).

3 In the Soviet historiography, the concept in question has been best justified by B.P. Kozmin, *Narodnichestvo na burzhuzno-demokraticheskom etape osvoboditel'nogo dvizheniya v Rosii*, [in:] idem, *Iz istorii revoliutsionnoi mysli v Rosii*, Moscow 1961, pp. 638–727. An advantage of the concept proposed by this author is that he uses the term *narodnichestvo* in a meaning that is free of negative valuation, as otherwise characteristic of the historians from M.W. Nechkina's circle who tended to approach the populism as a “retrograde step” compared to Chernychevsky's “revolutionary and democratic” views.

is that it combined, in its specific fashion, democratic radicalism (or, “bourgeois democratism,” using the Marxist term) with opposition to capitalism which was expressed in various forms of socialism, and was moreover coupled with a retrospective utopianism that idealizes pre-capitalist economy and the pre-capitalist type of social bond. In terms of this description, *narodnichestvo* flourished in Russia only in the seventies, when there was widespread disillusionment with bourgeois development. Chernyshevsky might be called a Populist *in statu nascendi*: he formulated the basic theses of the Populist conception of non-capitalist development, but primarily he belonged to the “enlighteners,” being an ideologue of “bourgeois-democratic” transformation. In its strict sense, however, Populism expressed the radicals’ deep disillusionment with the progressive role of European capitalist development. It was, therefore, an ideology of the fraction of the Left intelligentsia who, having realized the consequences of capitalism they saw as tragic for the masses, became alarmed by the Western-style modernization.<sup>4</sup>

The years 1868–70 can be selected as the period marking the emergence of a fully-fledged classical Populism. The young progressive elite of Russian intelligentsia turned away from Pisarev’s “realism” at this time and rejected the belief in the liberating mission of science. In 1868 Bakunin called on these young Russians (in the émigré journal *Narodnoe delo* [*People’s Cause*] to leave the universities and “go to the people.” Three classic documents of Populism were published a year later. These were Lavrov’s *Historical Letters*, Nikolai Miklailovsky’s treatise *What Is Progress?* and Vasil Bervi-Flerovsky’s book *The Situation of the Working Class in Russia*. The first two called into question the optimistic belief in progress so characteristic of the “enlighteners,” pointed out the painful contradictions of the historical process, and threw doubt on, and finally rejected, the conception of unidirectional evolution, thus removing the theoretical premise for the view that Russians must follow the general pattern of European capitalist development. Flerovsky, in his turn, painted a shocking picture of the growing destitution of the peasantry following the introduction of new capitalist forms of exploitation; the conclusion he drew was that everything possible should be done to prevent capitalism from making further headway and to utilize, instead, the potentialities inherent, to his mind, in the peasant commune. In parallel to the publication of these important documents, the Populist revolutionary movement also began to emerge. What was specifically

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4 The internal diversity of Populism thus understood, which (unlike in F. Venturi’s concept) encompassed not only revolutionary but also reformist ideologies, is shown in the two-volume anthology *Filozofia społeczna narodnictwa rosyjskiego*, selected, introduced and footnoted by A. Walicki, Warsaw 1965.

Populist about these particular revolutionary cells was their determination to put the main emphasis on the struggle against the further development of capitalism inside the country – a struggle for a non-capitalist progress for Russia.

## **From “Go to the People” to the “People’s Will”**

The anticapitalist character of Populist ideology can be seen most clearly in its distrust of parliamentary institutions and ostentatious indifference to “political” forms. The Populists identified “socialist” revolution with social revolution, or the radical transformation of the economic base of society. The “political” struggle, on the other hand – i.e. the struggle for political freedom aiming at the overthrow of autocracy – was dismissed as a merely “bourgeois” revolution to be ignored by true socialists. Socialism was thus conceived as the antithesis of “political struggle”; it was even suggested that a liberal constitution would strengthen the possessing classes and ruin the chances of the socialists for many years to come. Although today this seems to us a curious paradox, Populists regarded themselves as being “apolitical” and saw this as a guarantee that their socialism had not been contaminated by bourgeois values. Sometimes they took this position because they were ready to collaborate with the government provided it decided to push through the necessary social reforms; more often, though, they took this line because they believed that the overthrow of tsarist autocracy without a change in the social system would only lead to government of the bourgeoisie and the worsening of the economic lot of the masses.

The problem of the relationship between political and social goals was not a new one. In the sixties it had exercised Herzen and Bakunin, although the distinction they had made between the two types of goals was neither as radical nor as principled as that made in the following decade. The first “Land and Freedom” organization (set up in 1862-63 under the inspiration of Chernyshevsky, Herzen, and Ogarev) had political goals, such as the convocation of a Land Assembly, and did not regard that fact as a defection from its social goals. The consistent rejection of the political struggle did not become widespread in the Populist movement until the early 70s.

This rejection occurred for a number of reasons. Of these the most immediately obvious was the influence of Bakunin, who by then had become the leader and chief theorist of international anarchism. He opposed Marx and the German Social Democratic party on the grounds that fighting for universal suffrage or seats in a bourgeois parliament was unworthy of a socialist, was a form of capitulation to petty-bourgeois radicalism.

Another factor was the state of mind of the “conscience-stricken gentry” (a term coined by Mikhailovsky), which was brilliantly portrayed in Lavrov’s *Historical Letters*. Members of the Chaikovsky Circle<sup>5</sup> the largest Populist organization at the beginning of the 70s – were particularly prone to intense ethical self-questioning. For these young men the rejection of the political struggle was a way of paying their debt to the people for whom political freedom was felt to be meaningless. Mikhailovsky, who in his legally published articles showed a gift for formulating the current problems and dilemmas of the revolutionary movement in pithy terms, defined this mood as the victory of “conscience” (a sense of moral obligation) over “honor” (a sense of one’s own rights). In a fine article on Dostoevsky’s *Demons* published at the beginning of 1873, just before the first “go to the people” movement, he wrote:

For the man who has tasted the fruit of the universal human tree of knowledge nothing is more attractive than political freedom, freedom of conscience, freedom of speech and of the press, the free exchange of ideas, the right of free assembly, and so on. And naturally we want all this. But if all the rights arising out of this freedom are merely to allow us to go on playing the role of a colorful and scented blossom, then we reject these rights and this freedom! A curse upon them, if all they do is increase our debt to the people instead of helping us to discharge it! [...] By accepting the priority of social over political reform we relinquish the demand for further rights and greater freedom, acknowledging these to be instruments for the exploitation of the people and a further aggravation of our guilt.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, and most importantly, there was a growing realization that political freedom modeled on the English system was bound up with the development of capitalism, which was felt to be a retrogressive step – at least in Russia. Two books played an important part in creating the Populist image of capitalism and bourgeois political freedom – *The Situation of the Working Class in Russia* (1869), and *The Alphabet of the Social Sciences* (1871). Both were written by the economist V. Bervi-Flerovsky, who was connected with what were then the two main centers of the Populist movement – the Chaikovsky and Dolgushin circles.<sup>7</sup> Young Populists were also greatly impressed by Mikhailovsky’s article “What is Progress?,” and by Eliseev’s attacks on the “plutocracy” and his

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5 The circle took its name from N. V. Chaikovsky, but its real founder was N. A. Natanson.

6 N. K. Mikhailovsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed.; St. Petersburg 1911, vol. 1, pp. 870–2.

7 The founder of the Dolgushin Circle organized in St. Petersburg in the autumn of 1869 was A. V. Dolgushin.

dismissal of parliamentary government as a convenient tool of the bourgeoisie.<sup>8</sup> Last but not least, there was the influence of Marx, the first volume of whose *Capital* was widely known in Populist circles even before the publication of its Russian edition in 1872 (the censor thought it harmless because it only concerned Western Europe).<sup>9</sup> Marx himself (unlike Bakunin) never neglected the political struggle; but the Populist revolutionaries had little difficulty in making their own interpretation of his work, his thesis that the political superstructure always serves the interests of the ruling class and his acute analysis of the “formal” nature of bourgeois democracy being taken as powerful arguments in favor of the Populist view that social and economic changes should be given priority.

The Populists’ rejection of political struggle was therefore part of their endeavor to prove that they were completely free from bourgeois illusions, and that their chief enemy was capitalism. It is thus understandable that as capitalist processes accelerated in the Russian countryside, the Populists reacted by bringing into the foreground the anti-capitalist and anti-bourgeois aspects of their ideology, and by increasingly idealizing the allegedly socialist nature of commune self-government.

The real explosion of this romantic faith in the socialist instincts of the Russian peasantry was the great Populist crusade of 1873-74. Following the example of members of the Chaikovsky and Dolgushin circles, hundreds and thousands of young men and women decided to “go to the people.” Clad in peasant clothes, without having made any previous arrangements, very often without even having consulted each other, they went to the villages in order to taste the authentic, healthy, and simple life.

The enthusiasm that accompanied this “collective act of Rousseauism,” as Venturi has called it, was by all accounts something unprecedented and unique. “Nothing similar had been seen before or since,” wrote Sergei Kravchinsky.

It was a revelation, rather than a propaganda. At first the book, or the individual, could be traced out, that had impelled such or such person to join the movement; but after some time this became impossible. It was a powerful cry which arose no one

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8 See the article by G. Z. Eliseev “Plutocracy and Its Social Base,” published in *Notes of the Fatherland*, no. 2 (1872), and reprinted in N. K. Karataev, ed., *Narodniceskaia ekonomicheskaiia literatura* (M, 1958), pp. 125-59. Eliseev based his analysis of government by “plutocracy” on Marx’s *Capital*.

9 See Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, p. 503.

knew where, and summoned the ardent to the great work of the redemption of the country and of humanity.<sup>10</sup>

Among the participants in the movement a distinction is usually made between the followers of Bakunin and the followers of Lavrov. The differences between the two groups began to be apparent in the late 1860s – even before the “go to the people” movement – during an interesting controversy over the value of education and science from the point of view of the revolutionary cause. In an 1868 article in the émigré journal *The People’s Cause*, Bakunin had called on Russian students to give up their studies, since they were merely a form of exploitation. In a revolutionary epoch, he argued, there is no time for learning; revolutionaries have no need of the official learning that serves the interests of the ruling classes and aggravates social inequalities. Lavrov, who was much closer to the rationalist heritage of the “enlighteners,” thought it necessary to dissociate himself from Bakunin’s view. This he did most succinctly in an article “Knowledge and Revolution” published in the first number of his émigré journal *Forward* (1873). In their practical work the Lavrovites, who were known as “propagandists,” emphasized revolutionary propaganda: by enlightening the peasants they hoped to prepare them for socialism. The Bakuninites, ‘on the other hand, were known as “rebels,” as they went to the villages not to teach their inhabitants but to stir them into spontaneous and immediate revolt.

The results of the Populist crusade were very disappointing, and the police made massive arrests. Very often the young enthusiasts were handed over to the gendarmes by the very people they had wished to prepare for revolution. The Russian peasantry turned out to be less receptive to socialist ideas and more reluctant to revolt than the town-bred intellectuals had believed. The Populist movement had gained its first important experience: appropriate conclusions now had to be drawn from it.

The program of the revolutionary “Land and Freedom” organization, founded at the end of 1876, was based on the experiences of both the “rebels” and the “propagandists.” Their common platform was the conviction that revolutionaries should act only among and through the people. The main reasons for their previous lack of success were felt to be the Bakuninites’ exaggeration of the peasants’ readiness to revolt and the excessively abstract nature of socialist propaganda. This latter reproach was directed mainly against the Lavrovites, but it was not without relevance to the Bakuninite “rebels,” whom experience had convinced that it was wrong to begin revolutionary agitation

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10 S. Kravchinsky, *Underground Russia, Revolutionary Profiles and Sketches from Life*, with a preface by P. Lavrov, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; London 1883, pp. 25-26.

among the peasants by a general attack on the foundations of the existing social order. To avoid these errors in the future, the program of "Land and Freedom" put forth only goals that could be "realized in the immediate future," i.e. goals that harmonized with the peasants' immediate interests. It is not enough, declared Kravchinsky, to give up German dress and go to the villages in peasant clothes; not the socialists only but socialism itself should be the homespun variety of the Russian peasant.<sup>11</sup> It was this attempt to jettison their abstract intellectualism and utopianism and make their socialist program more attractive and comprehensible to the masses that gave prominence to the name *narodnichestvo*, which previously had been rarely used.

Armed with a new program, the "Land and Freedom" revolutionaries started a new popular crusade, much better organized than the first one. According to Vera Figner, the new organization tended from the very first to replace "federalist" principles by centralism and effective leadership.<sup>12</sup> The conditions of underground activity reinforced this tendency until, finally, "Land and Freedom" became transformed into the "militant centralized organization" that Lenin (in *What Is to Be Done?*) held up as an example for Russian revolutionary Marxists to follow.

The postulate of a strong centralized organization had been put forward long before by Petr Tkachev. His ideas, however, known under the name of "Jacobinism" or "Blanquism," because of their emphasis on the role of a revolutionary elite, were incompatible with the generally accepted principle of action through the people, let alone the *narodnichestvo* of "Land and Freedom." What he recommended was a conspiracy of professional revolutionaries who would aim, first of all, at the seizure of political power. He regarded the Populist crusades as a tremendous waste of energy and recommended instead a return to the methods of Nechaev, with whom he had collaborated in the late 1860s. He also thought that much could be learned from the Western European revolutionary conspiracies of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and he particularly extolled the experience and conspiratorial skill of the Poles. His closest collaborators while he was an émigré were, in fact, two Poles: Karol Janicki and Kasper Turski.<sup>13</sup>

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11 See B. P. Kozmin, *Iz istorii revoliutsionnoi mysli v Rossii*, Moscow 1961, p. 642.

12 V. Figner, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Moscow 1932, vol. 1, p. 105.

13 Kasper Turski was a co-founder of the Polish Social-Democratic Society, established in Zurich in 1872, and affiliated with the International. In 1877-78 he was in close contact with Walery Wróblewski, the Polish general of the Paris Commune, helping to arrange his illegal trip to Russia. Wróblewski was a member of the International and a personal friend of Marx and Engels. Knowing Engels's critical attitude toward Tkachev,



The masses, Tkachev contended, were incapable of liberating themselves by their own efforts. Their support was necessary for the victory of the revolution, but their role was the purely negative one of a destructive force. The decisive role would be played by the strong leadership and well-organized intervention of a revolutionary vanguard who would know how to exploit the chaos caused by popular uprisings. Preparatory work among the people made no sense; it was simply a way of shirking genuine revolutionary involvement, a convenient dodge thought up by “reactionary revolutionaries.” Revolution in Russia could not be postponed, for its chance of success was lessening daily. So far the Russian state was “absolutely absurd and absurdly absolute,” lacking any genuine support and “suspended in thin air.”<sup>14</sup> Soon it would become “constitutional and moderate” and gain the support of sections of society that would not dream of defending it at present. As long as the Russian bourgeoisie was weak and capitalism in its early stage, it was possible to map out another future for Russia; soon it might be too late.

This diagnosis suited the mood of the impatient Bakuninites, always eager to engage in direct revolutionary action; on the other hand, Tkachev’s views of the masses and of the society of the future molded by the totalitarian revolutionary state were a far cry from the Bakuninites’ belief in spontaneity and their ideal of a free federation of self-governing communes. Tkachev, for his part, was convinced that the peasant communes could not give rise to socialism: according to him, the autarchic and self-contained rural communities were among the most conservative and static forms of social organization and contained no germ of any progressive development. Collectivism – the “innate communism” of the Russian peasantry – could no doubt greatly facilitate the revolutionary transformation of society, but it did not constitute an adequate basis for socialism. The people alone would not be able to found a dynamic, progressive society; they would not even be able to remain true to their old ideals and defend them against hostile social forces. The task of the revolutionary vanguard thus could not be restricted to the overthrow of absolutism. The revolutionary party, Tkachev concluded, should take over and strengthen the absolute power of the Russian state in order to turn it into a powerful instrument of revolutionary dictatorship and utilize it for a thorough transformation of all aspects of society. The authority of the revolutionary party

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Wróblewski preferred to conceal from him (and from Marx) his contacts with Tkachev’s group. See J. W. Borejsza, *W kręgu wielkich wygnańców 1845-1895* (Warsaw 1963), pp. 68-69, 123-24. On Turski see K. Pietkiewicz, “Kasper Michał Turski,” *Niepodległość*, 1 (1930), pp. 103-13.

14 An expression used by Tkachev in his “Open Letter to Engels” (see p. 251).

running the revolutionary state should replace for the Russian people the authority of its “mythical tsar.”

Members of “Land and Freedom” were, as a rule, violently opposed to Tkachev. They accused him of compromising the Russian revolutionary movement and betraying the cause of the people for the sake of his own political ambitions. Despite this, however, his influence accelerated the emergence of a new trend within “Land and Freedom” in which well-organized political struggle to overthrow autocracy was given priority over “work among the people.”

This reluctant withdrawal from a purely “Populist” position (in the narrow, historical sense of the word) was the result both of the partial successes and of the overall failure of the second “go to the people” movement. The revolutionaries who had settled in remote villages as country doctors, teachers, or artisans in order to help the peasants in their daily life and organize their resistance to the landlords, *kulaks*, and local officials could rightly claim to have achieved far more than the “propagandists” of 1874; at the same time, however, they were forced to realize that they could not continue their work effectively under existing political conditions. It was this realization that led some to take the step from narrowly Populist methods of struggle to political terrorism. In January of 1878, a young girl, Vera Zasulich, fired at General Trepov, governor of St. Petersburg, in order to avenge a revolutionary who had been flogged in prison. In May of the same year Colonel Heyking of the Gendarmerie was assassinated in Kiev. In August Sergei Kravchinsky stabbed to death General Mezentsev, chief of the secret police. On April 2, 1879, Alexander Soloviev made an unsuccessful attempt on the life of the tsar with the knowledge of the “Land and Freedom” organization, though without its help; a few weeks later the autonomous “Death of Liberty” terrorist organization was set up within “Land and Freedom.”

The new trend was deplored by the orthodox Populists, who, led by Plekhanov, accused the terrorists of abandoning work among the people and betraying the traditional principle of putting “social” goals first. Many leading members of “Land and Freedom” tried to remain true to the original tenets of Populism while not rejecting terrorism. A characteristic example of this was an important article by Kravchinsky published in the first number of the party’s clandestine journal (in the fall of 1878). In it he tried to convince his comrades that the party’s main forces should continue to work in the villages; terrorists, he wrote, were only a “defensive detachment whose role was to protect the

revolutionaries working among the people against the treacherous blows of the enemy.”<sup>15</sup>

However, neither Kravchinsky’s article nor the new version of the party program worked out in 1878 could prevent a split in “Land and Freedom.” At a secret general meeting of members in Voronezh (in June of 1879) a temporary compromise was reached (facilitated by the fact that Plekhanov walked out of the meeting); but this was not enough to enable the “traditionalists” and “innovators” to resolve their differences. In October of 1879 the split was formally recognized and “Land and Freedom” ceased to exist. The orthodox Populists, led by Plekhanov and joined – to the disappointment of the “innovators” – by Vera Zasulich, created a separate organization under the name of “Black Repartition” [*Chernyi Peredel*], a name that referred to the popular dream of a just distribution of the land among the “black” people, i.e. the peasants. The “innovators” adopted the name *Narodnaia Volia*, which is generally glossed in English as “The People’s Will,” although it can mean both the will of the people and the freedom of the people. The new organization’s program was the overthrow of absolutism and the establishment of a government in accordance with the people’s will.

Thanks to the almost universal feeling that traditional methods of work among the people had failed to secure any lasting results, the “People’s Will” easily took over the leadership of the revolutionary movement; by comparison, the “handful of members of the ‘Black Repartition’ did not represent any real revolutionary force.”<sup>16</sup> What was new in the revolutionary theory of the “innovators” was their rejection of the traditional Populist emphasis on the priority of “social” over “political” goals, and their attempt to justify this change of front by reference to certain specific characteristics of the Russian state. The party’s chief theorist, Lev Tikhomirov, put forward two main arguments in defense of the new line: one was rooted in the government’s active encouragement of capitalist development in Russia, the other in the theory of the etatist school of historians (discussed in Chapter 15) that in Russian history the state had always been not a mere instrument of the existing social classes, but the creator of them, the supreme organizer of the whole of social life. Tikhomirov used this latter theory in support of his own thesis that in Russia the struggle against the possessing classes must necessarily turn into a political struggle *against* the state that had called these classes (including the bourgeoisie) into being and was their main source of strength.

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15 The program of the journal *Land and Freedom*. Reprinted in Karataev, pp. 322-26.

16 See L. Bazylov, *Działalność narodziństwa rosyjskiego w latach 1818-1881* [*Russian Populism, 1818-1881*] (Wrocław 1960), p. 107.

The acceptance of the postulate of “political struggle” did not, of course, mean that there were no important differences in its interpretation. According to Plekhanov, there were two opposing tendencies within “The People’s Will”: one was the “constitutional tendency” represented by Zhelabov, the other the “Blanquist”<sup>17</sup> (or “Jacobin”) tendency to which Tikhomirov himself inclined. Tikhomirov was not, it should be added, an altogether consistent “Blanquist”; he was outdistanced in this respect by another member of the party’s executive committee, Maria Oshanina, an ardent follower of Tkachev and a disciple of the veteran of Russian “Jacobinism,” P. G. Zaichnevsky.

According to Zhelabov’s “constitutional” interpretation, switching over to political struggle meant seeking an alliance with all sections of society interested in the overthrow of Russian absolutism – primarily, in practice, with the liberals. The aim of this alliance was to secure a representative government and democratic rights that would allow the socialists to carry on a legal struggle for the economic betterment of the peasants’ and workers’ lot. This view was supported by Mikhailovsky in his series “The Political Letters of a Socialist,” published under a pseudonym in the journal *People’s Will* in 1879. Mikhailovsky provided a theoretical basis for Zhelabov’s ideas by arguing (in contradiction of views he himself had held not long before) that political freedom could be used as a weapon against the Russian bourgeoisie, which unlike the French bourgeoisie of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was luckily still too weak to impose its own rule after the overthrow of absolutism.

Tikhomirov’s conception of “political struggle” was less precise because he was torn between traditional “Populism” and “Blanquism.” Unlike Zhelabov, he stressed the seizure of power through the determined action of a revolutionary vanguard rather than a broad alliance with the liberals. On the other hand, he rejected Tkachev’s idea of a long-term revolutionary dictatorship. Revolutionaries should seize power, he argued, but keep it only until a popular social revolution was under way.

Irrespective of these differences, all members of the party agreed that the quickest way to overthrow absolutism was to assassinate the tsar. All possible efforts were made to achieve this end. The first two attempts – a plot to blow up the emperor’s train, and an explosion in the Winter Palace carefully prepared by Stepan Khalturin – failed, but the third was successful. On March 1, 1881, Alexander II was killed by a bomb thrown by a member of “The People’s Will,” the russified Pole Ignacy Hryniewiecki.

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17 Named thus after Auguste Blanqui (1805-81), a French revolutionary and radical thinker.

As we read in the memoirs of Vera Figner, the event sparked euphoria amongst the members of “The People’s Will” who shed tears of emotion, expecting that now there would finally be a reaction and the renewal of Russia. She witnessed an atmosphere of general approval, even “great enthusiasm.”<sup>18</sup> Considering the high intellectual and moral level of the organizers of the assassination, this is difficult to understand; all the more so, since in her general evaluation of the tsar’s killing Figner unwaveringly declared that the late emperor had “opened a new period for Russia,” and had “powerfully pushed her forward through reforms, such as the peasant, land and court reforms.”<sup>19</sup>

The Polish literature includes an attempt to treat the psychology of “The People’s Will” with a maximum of understanding and empathy: Stanisław Brzozowski’s *Flames (Płomienie)*. But from a more distanced point of view the act of March 1<sup>st</sup> and the hopes attached to it were rather a telling testimony to the lack of strong social structures in tsarist Russia, the deligitimization of the regime, the enormous moral authority of socialist ideas and the resulting moral and intellectual disorientation amongst the radical intelligentsia.

The result was a bitter disappointment to the revolutionaries: the assassination of the tsar was followed not by chaos and revolutionary disturbances but by the consolidation of autocracy. Instead of political freedom, there arose an even more reactionary government; and instead of the expected tremendous increase in the strength and popularity of the party, the arrest of its most important leaders put an effective end to its activities. The executive committee (or rather those of its members who had managed to escape arrest) addressed a letter to the new emperor (presumably drafted by Tikhomirov and modified in some details by Mikhailovsky) exhorting him to convene a National Assembly and thereby avoid a bloody revolution in the future. The letter ended with a solemn declaration that the revolutionary party would accept as binding all decisions of the freely elected Assembly, and would unconditionally renounce the use of force against the government. However, Alexander III preferred policies that precluded all hope for the peaceful evolution of the Russian monarchy.

Those who had taken part in the assassination attempt – Rysakov, Zhelabov, Mikhailov, Kibalchich, and Sofia Peroksaia – were hanged on April 3, 1881 (Hryniewiecki was killed by his own bomb). During the hearing only Rysakov – a youth of nineteen – broke down. The courageous behavior of the rest,

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18 Figner, Vera. *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, Northern Illinois University Press, 1991.

19 See A. Walicki, *Stanisław Brzozowski and the Polish Beginnings of Western Marxism*, Oxford 1989, chapter 5.

especially the fortitude of Zhelabov and Perovskaia, amazed the judges and gained the admiration of the entire world.

## Petr Lavrov

### *Biographical Note*

PETR LAVROV (1823-1900), a leading Populist thinker and one of the most attractive figures in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian revolutionary movement, came from a family of wealthy landowners.<sup>20</sup> He was educated in Mikhailov's Artillery Academy in St. Petersburg, and after graduation he taught mathematics at various military academies. His promotion was rapid, and by 1858 he had attained the rank of colonel. He was also interested in philosophy and sociology, and in 1860 published his first book, *Sketches in the Domain of Practical Philosophy* [*Ocherki voprosov prakticheskoi filosofii*], in which he showed himself to be an adherent of "anthropologism." This book came to the attention of Chemyshevsky, who discussed it in his *Anthropological Principle in Philosophy*; he accused Lavrov of eclecticism but nevertheless expressed agreement with the general line of his argument.

At this time Lavrov was in close touch with the revolutionary leaders of the first "Land and Freedom" organization. In 1866 he was arrested during the wave of repression that followed Karakozov's attempt on the Tsar's life and sentenced to exile under police surveillance in Vologda Province. His essay cycle *Historical Letters*, published in the periodical *The Week* [*Nedelia*] in 1868-69, gained him immense popularity among young radicals. In February of 1870 he was helped by the revolutionary Herman Lopatin to flee abroad, where he immediately made contact with the International Workingmen's Association, which he joined in the fall of the same year. He took part in the Paris Commune and was sent by the Commune Government to organize help in Belgium and England; this led to a lasting friendship with Marx and Engels. From 1873 to 1876 he published a revolutionary periodical, *Forward* [*Vpered*], first in Zurich and later (from 1874) in London. In it he condemned the Nechaev line that all means were permissible in the revolutionary struggle, warned against revolutionary adventurism, and emphasized the need for a lengthy and careful preparatory struggle. He shared the general Populist belief in the priority of social over political goals and agreed with Bakunin that the introduction of

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20 See P. Pomper, *Peter Lavrov and the Russian Revolutionary Movement* (Chicago 1972). Lavrov's *Historical Letters* were translated and published with an introduction and notes by J. P. Scanlan (Berkeley, Calif. 1967).

socialism could not be reconciled with the retention of the state apparatus; however (in contrast to the anarchists), this did not prevent him from being friendly with the German Social Democrats, who were anything but apolitical.

From the beginning, Lavrov was more radical than his followers in Russia. At a general meeting of his supporters held in Paris toward the end of 1876, discontent came to a head and resulted in a split, with Lavrov resigning the editorship of his journal. From the experiences of the “go to the people” movement, a section of his followers, especially the influential St. Petersburg group, drew conclusions that Lavrov himself could not accept. Having been disappointed in the peasants, this section now concentrated on propaganda among the workers; they were very careful in their approach and laid stress on long-term educational work rather than immediate revolutionary action (indeed, they were opposed to all premature disturbances, outbreaks of violence, or even strikes).<sup>21</sup> Lavrov, on the other hand, interpreted preparatory work for revolution in far wider terms than mere peaceful propaganda; though he approved of educational work among the workers, he still believed in the socialist potential of the peasant commune and thought that the future of Russia lay in agrarian socialism.

After the assassination of Alexander II, Lavrov joined “The People’s Will” and together with Tikhomirov edited the party’s journal from Geneva. With the decline of “The People’s Will” he returned to scholarly work and published several books in the fields of historical sociology and the sociological philosophy of history. These included the *Essay on the History of Modern Thought* [*Opyt istorii mysli novogo vriemieni*, Geneva 1888-94], *Problems in the Interpretation of History* [*Zadachi ponimania istorii*, 1898], and the posthumous *Important Stages in the History of Thought* [*Vazhneishie momenty istorii mysli*, 1903]. The last two were published in Russia under the pseudonyms S. Arnoldi and A. Dolenga respectively. Before these works, though, he published (in 1880) a valuable study of the Paris Commune that was translated into many languages. In the years 1892-96 he edited a series of *Contributions to the*

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21 Toward the end of the 1870s they began to justify their decision by reference to Marx. The commune, they argued, is a reactionary institution and condemned to disappear: therefore a socialist revolution in Russia will only become possible after the establishment of capitalism and the emergence of a proletariat. See S. M. Levin, *Obshchestvennoe dvizhenie v Rossii v 60-70-e gody XIX veka* (M, 1958), pp. 378-83. In combination with the traditional Populist attitude to political struggle, this led to a curious “philosophy of inaction.”

*History of the Russian Social Revolutionary Movement.*<sup>22</sup> He died in Paris, universally respected by socialists regardless of theoretical differences or political viewpoints.

### *The Historical Letters*

The *Historical Letters* largely owed their popularity among young Russian radicals of the 70s to the immense impact of one essay, entitled “The Cost of Progress.” “Mankind has paid dearly,” Lavrov wrote, “so that a few thinkers sitting in their studies could discuss its progress.” The personal development of “critically thinking individuals” from among the privileged cultivated minority has been purchased by the hard labor and terrible sufferings of generations of exploited men and women; each thought, each idea, “has been bought by the blood, sufferings, or toil of millions.” The cultivated minority must never forget this debt and should make every effort to discharge it. Each ethical and critically thinking individual should say to himself: “I shall shed the responsibility for the bloody cost of my own development if I utilize this same development to diminish evil in the present and in the future.”<sup>23</sup>

These words sum up perfectly the state of mind of those progressive members of the educated gentry who were tormented by feelings of guilt and eager to sacrifice their personal interests for the good of the masses. It was this younger “conscience-stricken” generation that, together with the more sober *raznochintsy*, was beginning to play a leading part in the radical movement. Lavrov’s book put this generation’s dilemma into words and at the same time set out to answer its questions. The most important of these was concerned with the nature of progress.

It was the conviction that their debt must be paid off which led young Populists to reject indignantly all theories claiming that progress was inevitable and inherent in the “natural” course of events. These theories seemed to them only too convenient as a way of justifying the uglier aspects of capitalism as part of the “objective laws of history” or the “iron laws of political economy.” Dislike of this kind of “objectivism” that identified progress with “spontaneous” development and condemned as utopian all “subjective” ideals conflicting with this development led Lavrov and Mikhailovsky to formulate the views that came

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22 His own contribution to the Materials was the valuable monograph *Narodniki – propagandisty 1872-1878 godov*.

23 P. L. Lavrov, *Filosofia i sotsiologija* (M, 1965), vol. 2, p. 81 (English translation in J. Edie et al., *Russian Philosophy* [Chicago 1965], vol. 2, p. 138).



to be known as “subjective sociology.” Populist “subjectivism” was much ridiculed by Plekhanov but deserves a fairer assessment.

The basic assumptions of “subjective sociology” (an unfortunate and not particularly accurate label) can be summed up under three headings. First, it was a defense of ethical standards, and implied that men had the right to judge everything from their own point of view and to protest even against the “objective laws of history” – that indeed they were obliged to protest against human suffering even where the situation seemed hopeless. Second, it was an epistemological and methodological standpoint that disputed the possibility of “objective” knowledge in the social sciences; “subjectivism” in this sense implied that historical and sociological knowledge could never be really objective because they were colored by the scholar’s social position, his unconscious emotions, or consciously chosen ideals. Third, it was a philosophy of history that claimed that the “subjective factor” – human will and consciousness (expressed in the activity of a revolutionary party or in deliberate state intervention) – could effectively oppose the spontaneous-development trend and influence the course of history. For the Populist revolutionaries this last point was, of course, the most important; on it Lavrov based his “practical philosophy,” which proclaimed that by forming a party and establishing a common program “critically thinking individuals” could become a significant force capable of changing reality and realizing their “subjective” aims.

To those of his readers who were looking for a definition of progress, Lavrov stated unequivocally: progress is not an objective or inevitable law of development. Such laws do not exist; historical events are always unique and unrepeatable. (Here Lavrov partly anticipated the theses of Windelband and Rickert.) In looking at history, therefore, the main problem is one of selection, of finding a criterion that will make it possible to pick out “what is important and meaningful” from the amorphous mass of historical data. Such a criterion must be subjective because it depends on the social ideal adopted by a particular scholar. All facts are classified and all historical events interpreted according to how they relate to this ideal. “In the historical perspective set by our moral ideal,” Lavrov wrote, “we stand at the end of the historical process; the entire past is related to our ideal as a series of preparatory steps leading inevitably to a definite end.”<sup>24</sup> According to this theory, therefore, progress is conceived as a category required to impose order onto the raw material of history and to impart a meaning to the chaotic mass of facts. In itself, history has no meaning; there are many meanings to be found in it, but all of them are imparted to it by men.

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24 Lavrov, *Filosofia*, vol. 2, p. 44 (*Russian Philosophy*, vol. 2, p. 131).

Imposing a meaning on history also presupposes an ideal: not only in the sphere of historical understanding, but also in the sphere of historical action. Human history began, according to Lavrov, with the emergence of critically thinking individuals trying to shape the destiny of men by means of “criticism” and “idealization.”<sup>25</sup> These two factors were necessary for those who wished to change the world: the first to destroy the old society, and the other to build a new one on the basis of specific ideals that were always to some extent utopian.

His own ideal Lavrov formulated as follows: “The physical, intellectual, and moral development of the individual; the incorporation of truth and justice in social institutions.”<sup>26</sup> Or, more precisely:

Progress consists in the development of consciousness and in the incorporation of truth and justice in social institutions; it is a process that is being accomplished by means of the critical thought of individuals who aim at the transformation of their culture.<sup>27</sup>

By culture Lavrov meant a static social structure based on religion, tradition, and folkways. With the emergence of critical thinking individuals there came about a gradual transformation of culture into civilization – that is, a dynamic social structure in which religion was replaced by science and custom by law. The development of civilization was no longer “organic,” spontaneous, or unconscious but increasingly determined by the conscious activity of individuals.

This theory was a typical example of the rationalist’s overestimation of intellectual factors in human history. In Russia it owed its great influence to the fact that – as Lavrov had intended – young Populist radicals identified themselves with the “critically thinking individuals” who were to influence history. On the other hand, the theory did not go well with the Populist idealization of the peasant commune and other ancient and patriarchal social bonds, which (in terms of Lavrov’s theory) had to be recognized as belonging to the inferior static “culture.” It is interesting in this context to note the similarity between Lavrov’s ideas and the philosophy of history of the Westernizers of the

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25 By “idealization” Lavrov meant something very close to “rationalization” in the Freudian sense, or to “ideology” in Karl Mannheim’s use of this word. Idealization in this sense simply means the effort, usually unconscious, to hide one’s real motivation and to interpret one’s aspirations in terms of disinterested aims. “False” idealization serves to conceal aims of which people are ashamed, whereas “truly human” idealization helps to prepare the way for the realization of legitimate human needs.

26 Lavrov, *Filosofia*, vol. 2, p. 54 (*Russian Philosophy*, vol. 2, p. 34).

27 P.L. Lavrov, *Formula progressa N. K. Mikhailovskogo, Protivniki istorii. Nauchnye osnovy istorii tsivilizatsii* (St. Petersburg 1906), p. 41.

40s. We find striking parallels with Belinsky's views on the growing role of the individual and of the rational consciousness in history, with Herzen's reflections on history as a process of individualization, and with Granovsky's theory of progress as the "individualization of the masses by means of thought." The close connection between Lavrov's thought and the philosophical themes of the 40s is also shown by his early works on Hegelian philosophy: *Sketches in the Domain of Practical Philosophy*, and *Three Conversations on the Contemporary Meaning of Philosophy* (1861). Lavrov's "subjectivism" – like Belinsky's revolt against the tyranny of the *Weltgeist* and Herzen's philosophy of action – was initially directed against the fetishization of historical necessity and Hegel's tyranny of the "universal," rather than against positivistic naturalism. His philosophy of history drew its inspiration from Kant (progress conceived as a "regulative idea," as a postulate of practical reason), from the Left Hegelians (especially B. Bauer's "critical thought" as the prime mover of progress), and from the "anthropologism" of Feuerbach (anthropocentricity as opposed to "objectivism" and the "Absolute Spirit").<sup>28</sup>

It is clear that Lavrov was the most extreme representative of the "Westernizing" wing of the Populist movement. We can also trace an obvious affinity between the views expressed in the *Historical Letters* and the rationalism of the "enlighteners" of the 60s, who, like Lavrov, overestimated the historical role of ideas and consequently of intellectual elites. Indeed, as a document of Populist ideology the *Letters* do not seem entirely consistent: they express admirably the ethical doubts of young radicals and also their sense of a historical mission; but they completely ignore one important aspect of classical Populism, namely its nostalgia for archaic social forms. Lavrov himself was too strongly bound up with the great progressive traditions of modern European humanism – represented in Russia by the Westernizers and "enlighteners" – to abandon them in favor of a backward-looking utopianism. Although he challenged the underlying concept of individualistic humanism – the free development of individuality – by insisting that this development had been bought by the "blood, sufferings, and toil of millions," in the last analysis his theory could be used to justify the ruthless course of history. If critical thought was the prime mover of social progress, then the price paid for it had not been wasted. If the flowering of individuality, together with the incorporation of truth

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28 The dependence of Lavrov's thought upon Feuerbach's "anthropologism" is emphasised in two articles published in the collection P. L. Lavrov: *Stat'i, vospominaniia, materialy*, (published by "Kolos", Petrograd 1932): P.V. Mokiievsky, "Lavrov, kak filosof" and G.G. Shpet, "Antropologizm Lavrova v svete istorii filosofii." See also the opening article by E. Radlov, "Lavrov v russkoi filosofii."

and justice in social institutions, was the main criterion of progress, one was forced to conclude that European history had after all been a history of progress, and that the long process of mass exploitation and oppression was not to be altogether condemned – with the qualification, of course, that it was now high time to discharge the debt owed to the masses.

### *Sociological Conceptions*

Under the influence of Marx, Lavrov paid more attention to the economic aspects of social processes in his later sociological writings. His basic ideas remained unchanged, but they were more fully worked out and systematized.<sup>29</sup>

Lavrov defined sociology as a science concerned with the solidarity of conscious individuals and describing concrete forms of cooperation. For Lavrov, “solidarity” was an indispensable condition of social life; but it had to be the solidarity of *conscious* individuals, since at the instinctual level (in a colony of polyps, for instance) it belonged to the realm of biology rather than sociology. Sociology has its theoretical as well as its practical aspect. It is a tool for investigating social evolution as an objective process but also has a normative role because it formulates social ideals and shows how they can be implemented. Because of this dual role, Lavrov repeatedly pointed out that his sociology could not be regarded in isolation from his socialism.

Lavrov divided the great variety of forms of social solidarity into three main types. The first was the unconscious solidarity of custom<sup>30</sup> to which the individual submits under the pressure of necessity. The second was a purely “emotional solidarity” based on impulses not controlled by critical reflection. The third was “conscious historical solidarity” resulting from a common effort to attain a consciously selected and rationally justified goal. This third type was the highest and most important form of social solidarity. It evolved later than the first two types and heralded the process of the transformation of static “culture” into dynamic “civilization.” The appearance of this highest form of solidarity marked the end of prehistory and the beginning of true history in a given society.

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29 See P.A. Sorokin, “Osnovnye problemy sotsiologii P. L. Lavrova,” [in:] P. L. Lavrov: *Stat'i, vospominaniia, materialy*, Petrograd 1932.

30 Lavrov uses the term “consciousness” in two different meanings: the first, wider meaning embraces “mental life” (in the definition of sociology as the science of the solidarity of conscious individuals); the narrower meaning only refers to reflective, critical consciousness, i.e. self-consciousness in the philosophical sense (in this sense the solidarity of custom is, of course, “unconscious”).

Conscious solidarity was expressed through the community of “critically thinking” individuals, or in other words the intelligentsia, who were responsible for transforming culture by means of thought. The history of ideas therefore contained the quintessence of the historical process, and investigating “the most important moments in the history of thought” was the shortest way to understanding social evolution.

In his conception of the motive force of history Lavrov represented a pluralistic point of view. Social evolution, he thought, was stimulated by the individual’s diverse needs, especially the need for food, the need to satisfy the instincts for mating and procreating, and the needs for safety and for nervous stimulation (he regarded the need for the company of others as a peculiar variant of the latter). The most important of these *basic* biological needs was the need for food, which stimulated society’s economic development. For Lavrov this thesis justified the priority of “economic” over “political” goals. However, he emphasized that apart from biological needs characteristic of man as a species, there were other needs; these he referred to as “historical categories,” because they constituted what might be called the historical dimension of human existence. The most important of these was the disinterested “need for development” characteristic of “critically thinking individuals.” Lavrov believed that this need was becoming more and more important and that its significance increased in direct proportion to the role played in a given society by conscious rational intervention.

This overall conception of history as a process in which culture became transformed into civilization was tied to the Saint-Simonian and Comtian notion of history as a succession of “organic” and “critical” phases. During the organic stages, which saw the emergence and maturation of specific forms of culture, the dominant social mood was one of solidarity; critical stages, on the other hand, were epochs of individualism and the destructive activity of “critical thought.” Historical progress moved along a spiral in an accelerating rhythm – its successive phases were growing shorter, and the difference between organic and critical periods was constantly diminishing. This was because historical evolution offered growing opportunities to achieve a harmonious fusion of solidarity and development, order and progress. Instead of swinging from one extreme to another, history was tending toward a state of “mobile equilibrium” in which development would not conflict with existing forms of solidarity and the strengthening of solidarity would not put a brake on development.

From the standpoint of the assumptions of the “subjective method,” Lavrov’s sociological writings appear to make considerable concessions to “objectivism.” It is true that he retained his emphasis on the role of critically thinking individuals and on the normative role of sociology, but he jettisoned the

very core of “subjectivism” – the denial that objective knowledge in the social sciences is possible. This was, however, a modification rather than a radical structural change. Even in the *Historical Letters* Lavrov made a distinction between history, which deals with what is unique and unrepeatable, and sociology, which aims at discovering certain overall laws of social development. A few years later, in his article “On Method in Sociology,” he clearly stated that in sociology (in contrast to history) both methods – the subjective and the objective – were justified and applicable. In time he even began to look for the objective justification of social revolution in “historical necessity” (by which he meant certain regular social processes established by sociology). Of course, this was not a concession to “objectivism” in the sense of the Hegelian idolization of history or to the liberals’ apologia for uncontrolled, “natural” development. It has been rightly noted (by J. Hecker) that Lavrov’s “subjective method” was very close in this respect to the “anthropoteological method” of L. F. Ward, who stressed the superiority of artificial teleological processes to “natural” ones without, however, denying the existence of certain general laws of social evolution.<sup>31</sup>

Regardless of the theoretical cohesion or academic value of Lavrov’s sociological theories, there is no doubt that they are of great historical interest. Basically, they reveal Lavrov as an ideologist of the intelligentsia. Certain scholars have suggested that they are an expression of a specific “intellectual aristocracy”<sup>32</sup> (the apotheosis of “critically thinking individuals”) or even of certain characteristic aspects of the gentry mentality (the view of the masses as an inert herd, combined with a sense of guilt).<sup>33</sup> Although this is partially true, such comments fail to draw attention to the fundamental difference between Lavrov’s ideas and the apotheosis of intellectuals and scientists in the sociological theories of Auguste Comte. There is no hint in Lavrov’s work of the Comtian vision of a new intellectual elite that would govern the hierarchically stratified society of the future. For the Russian thinker the intelligentsia was first and foremost the conscience of society – not an aristocracy of the intellect. Educated men who benefited from the gifts of civilization but were selfishly indifferent to the burning injustices of their time were for him “cultural savages” [*kulturnye dikari*] – individuals who had reverted to the pre-historical stage of

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31 See J.F. Hecker, *Russian Sociology: A Contribution to the History of Sociological Thought and Theory* (New York 1915), p. 118.

32 See Sorokin, “Osnovnye problemy”, p. 286.

33 See G. Ladokha, “Istoricheskie i sotsiologicheskie vozzreniia P. L. Lavrova,” in *Russkaia istoricheskaia literatura v klassovom osveshchenii*, ed. M. N. Pokrovsky (M, 1927), p. 422.

uncivilized tribes, and to whom critical thought and the disinterested need for development were quite alien.

Thus, the author of the *Historical Letters* can be called an ideologist of the intelligentsia as an ethical category, i.e. in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian meaning of the term intelligentsia. He was not a spokesman of professional intellectuals but an ideologist of the intelligentsia as a community of human beings of superior moral and intellectual sensitivity committed to the struggle against social injustice.

## Petr Tkachev

The most serious challenge to Lavrov's views came from PETR TKACHEV (1844-86),<sup>34</sup> mentioned previously as the chief theorist of the "Jacobin" trend in Russian Populism. In the years 1868-69 he was active in the student movement and a close collaborator of Nechaev. With characteristic extremism, he is said to have declared that the radical rebirth of Russia required the extermination of anyone over twenty-five.<sup>35</sup> He was arrested in the spring of 1861, and after having been held in custody for two years awaiting trial was sentenced to sixteen months in prison and subsequent banishment to Siberia. Thanks to his mother's efforts in his behalf, exile was commuted to banishment to his family estates under police surveillance. In December 1873 Tkachev managed to flee to Zurich, where he tried to collaborate with Lavrov until it became clear that differences between them were too great. In 1874, shortly after attacking Lavrov's program in his pamphlet *The Role of Revolutionary Propaganda in Russia*, he broke off relations with him and joined the "Blanquist" *Cercie Slave*, which was headed by two Poles – Kasper Turski and Karol Janicki. In 1875 he published the journal *Tocsin* [*Nabat*] in which he expounded his ideas on the seizure of power by a revolutionary minority and the need for a strong centralized organization.<sup>36</sup>

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34 The most comprehensive monograph on him in any language is Deborah Hardy, *Petr Tkachev: The Critic as Jacobin* (Seattle, Wash. 1977). The author pays much attention to the differences distinguishing Tkachev's world view from those of the other Populist ideologists of the 1870s, and sets forth the thesis that he was in many respects much closer to the radicals of the 1860s.

35 See Kozmin's introduction to P. N. Tkachev, *Izbrannye sochineniia na sotsialno-politicheskie temy*, ed. B. P. Kozmin (4 vols.; M, 1932), vol. 1, pp. 13-14.

36 From the standpoint of Russian Mensheviks, these ideas made Tkachev a predecessor of Lenin (thus undermining the orthodoxy of the Leninist Marxism). Arguments in support

The fullest exposition of Tkachev's views is to be found in his essay *What Is the Party of Progress?* (1870)<sup>37</sup> written in answer to Lavrov's *Historical Letters*. Tkachev's criticism touches on the most sensitive points of Lavrov's doctrine and shows clearly the predicament of Populist thinkers who attempted to reconcile the flowering of individuality with the social advancement of the masses.

Tkachev's main criticism was that in the *Historical Letters* Lavrov had replaced the "real" notion of progress with a "formal" one that was completely useless as a criterion for classifying attitudes as reactionary or progressive: if all ideals are necessarily subjective, he argued, all ideologies, even reactionary ones, are entitled to call themselves progressive. To maintain that everything is important or unimportant, good or bad, only in relation to man is not an adequate argument; it is true that even the natural sciences cannot claim to know the "thing-in-itself," but it would be absurd to conclude from this that they, too, are merely "subjective." The same holds true for the theory of progress: it can attain to objectivity because there are some universally valid elementary and "self-evident" truths that may serve as an absolute yardstick against which to measure progress. "There exists an absolute criterion against which to check the validity of ideologies," Tkachev wrote. "There is, therefore, the possibility of an infallible ideology, that is, of an absolute, universally valid and obligatory formula of progress."<sup>38</sup>

Tkachev's rejection of the subjective method was not, however, entirely consistent. Though he dismissed relativism as an attitude endangering absolute faith in the rightness of one's cause, he did not himself reject all prescriptive norms and made no attempt to justify his ideal by certain objective laws of historical evolution. The notion of progress, he asserted, presupposes three elements: movement, direction, and goal. But only two of these elements are necessary to conjure up a clear notion of progress in the human mind. In the organic world of nature there is always movement in a definite direction; the goal in this case is identical with the direction of the movement. In social evolution it is not possible to find such steady movement in a given direction; contrary to the view of Spencer, the "historical process should not be treated as

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of this view are proposed in A.L. Weeks, *The First Russian Bolshevik: A Political Biography of Peter Tkachev*, New York 1968.

37 The manuscript of this article, dated Sep. 16, 1870, was confiscated by the police and printed for the first time in Kozmin's edition of Tkachev's writings cited in the previous note: vol. 2, pp. 166-224. Tkachev's criticism of Lavrov was, however, known to his contemporaries from other articles.

38 Tkachev, *Izbr. soch.*, vol. 2, p. 174.



an organic process because there is no steady one-way direction in it, and *in itself* it is neither progressive nor retrogressive.”<sup>39</sup> Thus the definition of social progress must make do with two elements, movement and goal; looking for a steady, objective direction in the movement of history is as nonsensical as trying to find deliberate goals in nature. Society’s final and only goal (this was axiomatic to Tkachev) is the happiness of all its members; therefore in order to formulate an “absolute” definition of progress, it is first necessary to establish a scientific and objective definition of happiness.

Looking for such a definition, Tkachev made use of the “excellent and universal,” “scientific and objective” definition of life he had found in Spencer’s *Principles of Biology*. This indicates, he concluded, that happiness consists in the reconciliation or harmonious balance of man’s needs and the means he has at his disposal to satisfy them. The problem, as Tkachev saw it, was that human needs were very diverse and that some could only be satisfied at the expense of others. The artificial needs of the “highly developed individualities” of the privileged minority were satisfied at the expense of the working masses, who were denied even the bare necessities of life. This was a good position from which to attack Lavrov: The fact that the “flowering of individuality” was an essential element of Lavrov’s formula of progress, Tkachev argued, showed that he was basically a spokesman for the privileged minority, who as producers of ideas had become accustomed to thinking of themselves as “the salt of the earth, the lever of history, the creators of human happiness,” and who regarded their very existence as sufficient proof of historical progress.<sup>40</sup> “From this point of view,” Tkachev continued, “historical progress cannot indeed be denied: the salt of the earth has been multiplying and perfecting itself, so that progress is evident. This kind of progress, however, has nothing in common with social progress.”<sup>41</sup>

The personal development of “critically thinking individuals,” as Lavrov himself pointed out, had been achieved at the cost of the masses, whose story was one of constant regress. When at last the situation of the masses became so unacceptable that the privileged minority found itself threatened by it, many pseudo-progressive theories were devised that – like Lavrov’s – called for a fairer division of material and cultural riches. But all these theories “persist in openly defending the view that human individuality should remain at the high level of sophistication attained by the privileged minority and indeed, should

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39 Ibid., p. 194.

40 Ibid., p. 218.

41 Ibid., p. 219.

develop further in the same direction.”<sup>42</sup> This emphasis revealed the essentially reactionary nature of such theories. The “flowering of individuality” was a reactionary postulate because the happiness of society required the intellectual and moral leveling of individualities. Thus the main task facing the “party of progress” was to “stop the chaotic process of differentiation caused by the retrogressive movement of history, to reduce the existing multiplicity of individualities to one common denominator, one common level.”<sup>43</sup>

To counter the formula of progress put forward in the *Historical Letters*, Tkachev proposed the following formula of his own:

To establish the fullest possible equality of individuals (this must not be confused with so-called political, juridical, or even economic equality – it should be an *organic physiological equality* stemming from the same education and from identical conditions of life), and to make sure that the needs of all individuals are in harmony with the means available to satisfy them – that is the final and only possible goal of human society, the supreme yardstick of historical progress. Everything that brings us nearer to this goal is progressive: everything that leads us further away from it is reactionary.<sup>44</sup>

In Tkachev’s view, this formula followed logically from his definition of happiness as applied to society. The satisfaction of everyone’s needs required the adjustment of these needs to “the existing level of labor productivity.” Therefore society must control and regulate the proliferation of needs and deliberately suppress any individual requirements that – at the existing level of economic development – could be satisfied only at other people’s expense. Uniformity of needs is a prerequisite of a happy society, and the liquidation of the sophisticated culture of the elite is the price to be paid for it. Every differentiating process endangers the equilibrium between human needs and the level of production, thereby adding to the total sum of unhappiness. Compulsory egalitarianism, to which all true progressives aspire, means that individuals with greater needs who are unable to satisfy those needs at the expense of others are likely to be unhappy: their own happiness therefore requires the parity of their intellectual and moral development with that of other, less-developed members of society. Any increase in needs should be collective and planned to match an increase in production.

Tkachev’s political theories clearly indicate that the “leveling of individuality” was a task that would fall to the revolutionary vanguard who, after seizing power, would organize a national system of child-rearing and

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42 Ibid., p. 205.

43 Ibid., p. 206-7.

44 Ibid., p. 208.

education, and would deliberately restrain the development of outstanding individuals who threatened the accepted level of social equality. The revolution therefore would not end with the seizure of power, but would only be a prelude to the total future transformation of society.

The polemic with Lavrov was not only about means but also about ends. Cutting himself off from the tradition of Herzen and Chernyshevsky, Tkachev (in sharp contrast to Lavrov) flatly rejected the “personality principle.” For him the ideal of a harmoniously developed, critically thinking personality was a supreme example of bourgeois individualism – an ideology that was antagonistic and alien to the common people. In one article he wrote that the principle of individualism had already been formulated by Protagoras and the Sophists, whose ideology reflected the urban bourgeois civilization of Athens; anti-individualism had an equally venerable and much more impressive genealogy, having been formulated by Plato, whose idealized image of ancient Sparta forcefully expressed the principle of the total subordination of the individual to the community.

These ideas divided Tkachev from the other Populist thinkers no less sharply than his “Jacobin” or “Blanquist” conceptions of revolutionary struggle. His theories cannot be said to fall within the scope of “bourgeois democratic” ideologies, even in the broadest view of this category. A belated disciple of Morelly, Babeuf, and Buonarroti, Tkachev was in Russia – and perhaps in the whole of 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe – the most consistent and extreme spokesman of the “crude communism” that, to use the words of the young Marx, “negates the personality of man in every sphere.”<sup>45</sup> It seems likely, as Kozmin has suggested, that the ominous vision of “Shigalev’s system” in Dostoevsky’s novel *Demons* was in fact an allusion to Tkachev’s ideas on the “leveling of individualities.”<sup>46</sup>

Tkachev’s outright rejection of the importance of individuality was a specific solution to a characteristic dilemma facing Populist thinkers – namely, how to reconcile the value they placed on the archaic collectivism of the peasant commune with the postulate of individual freedom, or, to put it differently, how to reconcile the welfare of the people, which (according to Populist doctrine) demanded a stop to the process of Westernization, with the welfare of the intelligentsia, which was a product of westernization and vitally interested in its

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45 K. Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. and ed. T. B. Bottomore (London 1963), p. 153 (Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, Third Manuscript).

46 See B. P. Kozmin, *P. N. Tkachev i revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie 1860-kh godov* (M, 1922), p. 193. Dostoevsky could have become acquainted with Tkachev’s conception of the “leveling of individuality” from the latter’s article “The People of the Future” published in *Delo* in 1868.

further progress. Unlike Herzen, Chernyshevsky, or Lavrov, Tkachev was convinced that the “individuality principle” (represented by the westernized elite) and the communal principle were mutually antagonistic and would not be reconciled until the full “leveling of individualities” had been achieved.

Tkachev combined his theory of progress with a specific “economic materialism” borrowed directly from Marx. After the preceding pages this must seem rather a surprising statement, and yet among Russian revolutionaries it was Tkachev who made the first serious attempt to assimilate some elements of Marxism. As early as 1865 he had written in the journal *Russian Word* that he supported the idea of “the well-known German exile Karl Marx,” adding that “this idea has now become common to almost all thinking and honest men.” Even earlier – at the end of 1863 – he had expounded in print the notion of the dependence of all spheres of social life (the social superstructure) on the economic sphere.<sup>47</sup>

Social life and all its manifestations, including literature, science, and religion, as well as political and juridical forms, are but the product of definite economic principles that lie at the roots of all these social phenomena.<sup>48</sup>

This quotation from Tkachev was, of course, a paraphrase of the preface to Marx’s *Critique of Political Economy*. It must be added that Tkachev did not stop at a declaration of principle: he also tried, more or less successfully, to apply these principles in his interpretation of ideological struggles past and present. He explained the Reformation, for instance, as a struggle between the feudal aristocracy and the rising bourgeoisie, and suggested that the emancipation of women was a necessary outcome of the advance of capitalism. In his polemic with Lavrov he attacked the latter’s exaggerated emphasis on the role of “critically thinking individuals” and argued instead that the outcome of events was decided not by the human intellect or abstract knowledge but by “affective states stimulated by men’s vital interests and thus having their roots in the sphere of economic relations.”<sup>49</sup> This specific “economic materialism” did not amount to Marxism, but the Marxist influence in it was evident. It would be fair to describe it as a peculiar mixture of Marxism with a rather primitive utilitarian exaggeration of the role of direct economic motivation in individual behavior.

The interpretation of Tkachev’s ideas poses an interesting problem. Economic materialism is a theory that, as a rule, appears in conjunction with a

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47 See Kozmin, *Iz istorii revoliutsionnoi mysli v Rossii*, p. 374.

48 Tkachev, *Izbr. soch.*, vol. 5, p. 93.

49 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 213-15 (“Rol’ mysli v istorii”).

mechanically conceived determinism. How, then, is it possible that in Thachev's theories it coexisted side by side with his very voluntaristic conviction that the future of Russia depended on the will and determination of an active revolutionary minority?

In Marx's *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* Tkachev could read that no social formation was likely to disappear until the productive forces appropriate to it had achieved their full development. In the 1880s and 1890s Russian Marxists used to conclude from this that the socialist revolution in Russia would have to wait until Russian capitalism had exhausted all its potentialities for development. Tkachev naturally found this view unacceptable; he argued instead that revolution was possible *either after* the termination of the whole capitalist development cycle *or before* this cycle was even begun. Every economic principle, he wrote in 1868, has its own inner logic of development; just as in an argument we cannot jump from first premise to conclusion, so in economic development it is impossible to skip the intermediary phases.<sup>50</sup> It is possible, however, to start a completely new cycle, especially in epochs of transition when the old economic relations have outlived their time and the new ones are not yet firmly established. Utopianism, Tkachev declared, is thus not something peculiar to the extreme radicals who try to replace existing economic principles by new ones; the true Utopians are the moderates who wish to preserve the existing economic system while skipping some of its natural phases and attempting to avoid some of its inevitable results. The revolution in Russia could take place *either at once*, while the old feudal system was exhausted and the new capitalist formation had not yet taken root, *or in the distant future*, after the country had passed through all the painful phases of capitalist development. At present, Tkachev concluded, the future of the country was still in the hands of the revolutionaries; tomorrow it would be too late. A similar situation, he suggested, had existed in Germany during the peasant wars. Here he disagreed with Engels, who believed that the defeat of Thomas Müntzer, the German peasant leader, had been historically inevitable. Tkachev thought that Müntzer might very well have won and that his victory would have saved the German masses from the sufferings that awaited them under capitalism.<sup>51</sup>

In 1874 Tkachev launched a sharp attack on Engels. The context of this polemic was international rather than Russian: it arose out of ideological

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50 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 260-62.

51 Ibid. Engel's opinions on the chances of Müntzer's victory (diametrically opposed to Tkachev's) were often quoted by Plekhanov, who used them as an argument against Tkachev's conception of the "seizure of power." In later years he used the same argument against Lenin.

differences between Bakunin and Marx and their struggle for leadership in the First International. After the Nechaev affair, in which the International had been involved by Bakunin, a resolution was passed condemning Nechaev and expressing disapproval of conspiratorial methods. Tkachev, who was in a sense Nechaev's disciple, interpreted this resolution as an attack on the Russian revolutionary movement as a whole. In his famous "Open Letter to Engels" (1874), he accused Engels of lacking revolutionary fervor and defended his own ideas on the chances of revolution in backward countries.<sup>52</sup> To accuse Engels of excessive regard for legalism was to do him an injustice, but the second point – regarding Russia's readiness for socialist revolution – did reflect an essential disagreement on fundamental issues. Engels certainly believed that an indispensable condition of socialism was the advanced economic development of bourgeois society.

The bourgeoisie is just as necessary a precondition of the socialist revolution as the proletariat itself. Hence a man who will say that this revolution can be more easily carried out in a country because, although it has no proletariat, it has no bourgeoisie either, only proves that he has still to learn the ABCs of socialism.<sup>53</sup>

Among Russian revolutionaries of the 1870s attitudes to Tkachev – initially hostile – began to change under the impact of the two unsuccessful "go to the people" movements. Seeing the growing popularity of his ideas, Tkachev tried to bring out his *Tocsin* in St. Petersburg. The move was unsuccessful: the police discovered the printing plant, and the journal ceased to appear.

Shortly afterward Tkachev moved to Paris, where he collaborated with the French "Blanquists" on their journal *Ni Dieu, ni Maître*. In 1882 he began to show symptoms of mental illness and was taken to a psychiatric hospital, where he died a few years later.

## **Nikolai Mikhailovsky**

### *Theory of Progress*

Unlike Lavrov or Tkachev, NIKOLAI MIKHAILOVSKY (1842-1904) was not a revolutionary, although he was in touch with revolutionary leaders and occasionally collaborated with them.<sup>54</sup> He owed his moral and intellectual

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52 Tkachev, *Izbr. soch.*, vol. 3, pp. 88-98.

53 K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works* (London 1950), vol. 2, pp. 46-47.

54 See J. H. Billington, *Mikhailovsky and Russian Populism* (Oxford 1958) as to Mikhailovsky's collaboration with revolutionaries.

authority almost entirely to his serious journalism, first for the *Annals of the Fatherland* and later (after 1892) for the journal *Russian Wealth* [*Russkoe Bogatstvo*]. Mikhailovsky was a prolific publicist, but his most serious theoretical contribution was in the field of sociology. The first outline of his sociological conception of history, to which he remained in all essentials faithful until the end of his life, was contained in the article “What Is Progress?,” published soon after Lavrov’s *Historical Letters*.

Mikhailovsky began his article with a critical assessment of Herbert Spencer’s theory of progress, which he accused of overlooking a fact of fundamental importance, namely that social progress does not necessarily imply the progress of the individual human being. Following Spencer, Mikhailovsky based his argument on the definition known as “Baer’s law” according to which progress in the organic world is a process of transition from simplicity (homogeneity) to complexity (heterogeneity). His conclusions, however, differed from those of Spencer: “Baer’s law” suggested to him that there was an irreconcilable antagonism between Spencer’s “organic evolution of society” and the ideal of many-sided individual human development. Organic social development presupposes social differentiation based on the division of labor, and therefore deprives individuals of their all-around versatility and wholeness, turning them into specialized organs of an allegedly superior organic whole. The heterogeneity and complexity of society are thus in inverse proportion to the heterogeneity and complexity of its individual members. Primitive society is a homogeneous substance, but each of its members, taken separately, is a heterogeneous being and “combines within himself all the powers and capacities that can develop, given the cultural level and the local physical conditions of the times.”<sup>55</sup> In tribal society man lives a primitive but full life, developing all his potentialities and an integral personality<sup>56</sup> [*tselostnaia lichnost*]. The division of labor and social differentiation destroy this equilibrium and turn men into specialized mono-functional organs of the social organism. The growth of this organism is incompatible with the growth of individuals, because the differentiation of the whole organism necessarily depends on the “simplification” of its separate organs, i.e. the loss of independence caused by one-sided specialization. Just as the human body develops (differentiates itself)

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55 Mikhailovsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, p. 32 (*Russian Philosophy*, vol. 2, p. 177).

56 In Mikhailovsky’s terminology the “integral” personality was the opposite of the “integrated” personality, that is a personality that had undergone a process of adjustment (integration) to the social whole. In short, he used “integrality” when he meant “all-aroundness”, and “integration” when he meant specialization.

at the expense of its organs, so the social organism develops at the expense of its human members. The concept “social organism” is, however, an abstraction: only man is a real organism, only his pleasures and sufferings are real, and therefore only his welfare should be the yardstick of progress. From this point of view, Mikhailovsky concluded, Spencer’s formula of progress turns out to be a formula of regress. The reason is simple: “individual progress and social evolution (on the model of organic evolution) are mutually exclusive, just as the evolution of organs and the evolution of the whole organism are mutually exclusive.”<sup>57</sup>

Mikhailovsky underpinned his argument with a philosophical interpretation of history that related the history and intellectual evolution of mankind to changes in the organization of labor or cooperation. In its general outline his scheme closely resembles that put forward by Lavrov in his *Historical Letters*, it is given a further dimension, however, because in Mikhailovsky’s conception the “phases of intellectual development” are linked to the problem of the division of labor and its destructive effect on the human personality.

Mikhailovsky called the first important epoch in his historical scheme the “objectively anthropocentric period.” Man at this time saw himself as the objective and absolute center of nature and explained all natural phenomena by referring them to himself – hence the animistic and anthropomorphic character of his religious representations. At the beginning of this period social cooperation was almost unknown. Later, when the instinct of self-preservation forced people to form groups, two types of cooperation appeared: the simple and the complex. The prototype of the first was the “free group of hunters,” whereas the prototype of the second was the patriarchal family, which established the division into “men’s work” and “women’s work” and the subordinate role of women. Simple cooperation did not require specialization of functions and consequent social differentiation; individuals could preserve their heterogeneity (or all-around versatility) while the group remained homogeneous. In complex cooperation the reverse held true:

In the first case [simple cooperation] we have a homogeneous society whose members are differentiated, equal, free, and independent; in the second, a differentiated society whose members are unequal, unfree, one-sidedly specialized, and hierarchically subordinated to one another.<sup>58</sup>

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57 Mikhailovsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, p. 41 (*Russian Philosophy*, vol. 2, p. 180).

58 Mikhailovsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, pp. 82-83.



Simple cooperation made possible the progressive evolution of man, both physical and spiritual; complex cooperation set in motion *social* progress, the obverse of which was individual regress. The division of labor in the family, for example, increased the differences between men and women, thus depriving both sexes of a part of their human wholeness.

In the objectively anthropocentric period simple cooperation prevailed. Its final displacement by complex cooperation, with its twin evils of division of labor and social differentiation, marked the beginning of a new epoch – the “eccentric period.” Mikhailovsky chose this singular name in order to emphasize the distorted vision of the world he thought characteristic of men who had been damaged by specialization: by “eccentricity” he meant a lack of center, reflecting damaged wholeness. The fragmentation of the human personality resulting from the division of labor led to a fragmented vision of the world: reality disintegrated into a number of autonomous spheres, each claiming to exist “in itself and for itself.” Anthropocentrism, although nominally preserved in the religious sphere, gave way to polycentricism; natural and social phenomena began to appear to man as external and “objective” forces alien to him.

The source of this “eccentricity,” in Mikhailovsky’s view, was the increasing complication of human relationships. In simple cooperation everyone worked for a clearly recognizable goal, and this encouraged a feeling of solidarity and mutual understanding among the members of the group. In conditions of complex cooperation, the common aim became more and more elusive, and finally split into a multitude of separate, autonomous aims; theory became divorced from practice, and science, art, and economy no longer served man but were “ends in themselves”; men ceased to understand each other, although they were “bound together as tightly as possible.”<sup>59</sup> This encouraged the emergence of isolated and antagonistic groups and the loss of all sense of social solidarity. An analogous process took place in the sphere of knowledge, which on the one hand broke up into narrow fields of specialization, and on the other became a metaphysical science, that is an abstract theory perceived in isolation from man and dehumanized in its allegedly “absolute” and “objective” quality. Functions that had once belonged to the all-around, whole individual were divorced from man, and ended up by living their own life and becoming indifferent, if not hostile, to each other. There is, of course, a striking resemblance between these ideas and the young Marx’s comments on the

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59 Ibid., p. 91.

alienation of man arising from the alienation of the various spheres of human activity.<sup>60</sup>

Mikhailovsky did not deny the great achievements of the eccentric period in the domain of art, science, and industry; but he thought that too high a price had been paid for them, and that in any case not all of them were necessarily a consequence of the division of labor. Even the modern age, he argued, had retained some enclaves of “undivided” labor; because complex cooperation had not entirely ousted simple cooperation, with its corresponding social bonds depending on community of aims and solidarity, men were still able to protect their individuality against the forces of alienation threatening its destruction. The survival of simple cooperation was, for Mikhailovsky, proof of the possibility of a human renaissance that would inaugurate a new epoch in history – the long-awaited epoch of universal regeneration. This new epoch Mikhailovsky called the “subjectively anthropocentric period”: at this time man will know that objectively he is not the center of the universe, but he will recognize his “subjective” right and indeed duty to regard himself as such and to judge everything from the point of view of his own vital and indivisible human individuality.

A recapitulation of these ideas was contained in Mikhailovsky’s famous “formula of progress,” which reads as follows:

Progress is the gradual approach to the integral individual, to the fullest possible and the most diversified division of labor among man’s organs and the least possible division of labor among men. Everything that impedes this advance is immoral, unjust, pernicious, and unreasonable. Everything that diminishes the heterogeneity of society and thereby increases the heterogeneity of its members is moral, just, reasonable, and beneficial.<sup>61</sup>

From the sociological point of view this definition is very interesting indeed. It expresses the very essence of the backward-looking Populist utopia, with its idealization of the self-sufficient primitive peasant economy. Mikhailovsky frequently reaffirmed that the interests of the integral individual coincided with the interests of “undivided” non-specialized labor, or, in other words, with the interests of the Russian peasantry. The Russian peasant, like primitive man,

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60 Marx wrote: “The nature of alienation implies that each sphere applies a different and contradictory norm, that morality does not apply the same norm as political economy, etc., because each of them is a particular alienation of man; each is concentrated upon a specific area of alienated activity and is itself alienated from the other” (Marx, *Early Writings*, p. 173).

61 Mikhailovsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, p. 150 (*Russian Philosophy*, vol. 2, p. 187).

lived a life that was poor but full; he was economically self-sufficient; and he could therefore be called an example of an all-around and independent personality. He satisfied all his needs by his own efforts, making use of all his capacities, so that he was farmer and fisherman, shepherd and artist in one person. The peasant community was egalitarian and homogeneous, but its members had differentiated and many-sided personalities. The low level of complex cooperation enabled them to preserve their independence, whereas simple cooperation united them in mutual sympathy and understanding. This moral unity was expressed in the common ownership of the land and the self-government of the Russian *mir*.

Mikhailovsky was quite aware that the existing peasant commune had very little in common with his ideal vision of it; he put this down, however, to destructive influences from outside and the low level of simple cooperation. This particular explanation depended on a distinction Mikhailovsky had made between types and levels (or stages) of social development. From the point of view of the *level* of development, the peasant commune could not match a factory; but at the same time it represented a higher *type* of development. The same distinction held good for peasant Russia and capitalist Europe: Western man's individuality was more highly developed, but nevertheless inferior in kind to the "integral" personality of the Russian peasant. It appears from this argument that for Mikhailovsky the "personality principle" was not something to be introduced into the village commune from outside, as Herzen had suggested; he made it clear that in defending "folk principles" he was also defending a higher type of individuality. Indeed, the very notion of individuality changed its content and came to stand for "wholeness" rather than the personal characteristics distinguishing one individual from another. It followed from this that the individuality of great scholars or thinkers – the individuality of "one-sided specialists" – represented a lower type of development: "The self of a Hegel," wrote Mikhailovsky, "is strictly speaking but a meager fraction of the human self."

It is interesting to note that although Mikhailovsky thought of the "personality principle" as a cornerstone of his world view, this line of argument brought him very close to Tkachev, who violently rejected that principle as the quintessence of bourgeois values. Mikhailovsky, of course, would never have accepted Tkachev's idea of the forced "leveling of individualities"; but nevertheless both men upheld the ideal of a homogeneous society and tried to give theoretical expression to a certain primitive peasant egalitarianism.

It is understandable that the author of the *Historical Letters* should have had many serious misgivings about Mikhailovsky's theory of progress. In a long article entitled "N. K. Mikhailovsky's Formula of Progress (1870),"<sup>62</sup> Lavrov set out his main objections. Abolishing the division of labor, he pointed out, would obstruct technological and scientific advance, and absolute social "homogeneity" would prevent the emergence of "critically thinking individuals," who were to be the carriers of new ideas. The implementation of Mikhailovsky's "formula of progress" would result in a stagnating, non-progressive society; indeed, if this view of progress was accepted, it would be tantamount to proclaiming that history had always been a retrogressive process.

Lavrov's arguments did not convince Mikhailovsky. On the contrary, in his later articles Mikhailovsky's criticism of the accepted view of progress became even more radical, and the backward reference of his social ideal was given even stronger emphasis. In "What Is Progress?" he had shown certain reservations about accepting Rousseau's criticism of civilization, and had tried to convince his readers that he believed the "golden age" of mankind was still to come. A few years later, however, he stated explicitly in one of his articles ("On Schiller and on Many Other Things," 1876) that Rousseau and Schiller had been right in claiming that the "golden age" was already behind us.<sup>63</sup> A symptom of this change of perspective was the importance Mikhailovsky now attached to the idealization of the Middle Ages in Western European working class ideologies and the growing interest in archaic forms of social life shown by both socialist and conservative scholars. The retrospective ideal had been primitive tribal society in "What Is Progress?"; the Middle Ages, as an epoch of rigid social divisions, was seen as the culmination of the "eccentric" period. In fact it was a peculiar feature of Mikhailovsky's "formula of progress" that it could be turned against both feudalism and capitalism or, to be precise, against certain aspects common to both. The ideal of social homogeneity could be used as a weapon simultaneously against the division of society into separate, hermetically sealed estates and against the "complex cooperation" of capitalist society. Bourgeois progress had its positive side as a process corroding feudal privilege, but was to be rejected as a process depriving small independent producers of their economic self-sufficiency. Even in 1869 Mikhailovsky had largely concentrated on criticizing the new capitalist structure of society idealized by Spencer, although he thought of it as a mere continuation of the "eccentric" tendencies of feudalism, which had seemed to him not worth "looking back to" (with the exception of such enclaves of equality and "simple cooperation" as the military

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62 Lavrov, *Formula progressa N. K. Mikhailovskogo*, pp. 12ff.

63 See especially Mikhailovsky's article on Schiller (Mikhailovsky, *Pol. sob. Soch.*, vol. 3).

communes of the Cossacks). In the 1870s, the rapid expansion of Russian capitalism made Mikhailovsky more sensitive still to the specific and (from his point of view) negative features of the emerging bourgeois order; at the same time, too, that expansion showed in a new light some aspects of medieval society to which he had not previously paid much attention. In particular he was struck by the similarity between the peasant commune and the medieval craft guilds. Though he did not deny that the guilds and contemporary Russian communes had restricted individual potential, he appeared to be convinced that such restrictions were less harmful than the effects of capitalism. Using terminology borrowed from Marx, one might say that for Mikhailovsky the commune and guild were superior to capitalist social structures because they represented a type of development in which human relations had not become reified; or, as he put it himself, in them “capital was not united with capital but men were united with men, individuals with individuals.”<sup>64</sup> In the Middle Ages individuals suffered much less from the consequences of social development than under contemporary capitalism. This fact, Mikhailovsky claimed, was becoming recognized both by European workers, who “were reconstructing some purely medieval institutions” (i.e. the trade unions, in Mikhailovsky’s view a reconstruction of medieval guilds), and by a growing number of scholars, who were “looking backward toward the Middle Ages and even to the more remote past.”<sup>65</sup> Therefore there were no good reasons for maintaining that capitalism had liberated the individual or that bourgeois political economy displayed such excessive concern for his freedom or well-being that they were likely to give rise to “individualism and atomism.” Individualism – in the sense of the setting of a paramount value on the human individual – was the only proper philosophical attitude to adopt, but it had absolutely nothing in common with *laissez-faire* economics. The liberal economists had their own phantom (Stirner’s *Spuk*) to which they mercilessly sacrificed the freedom and welfare of concrete human beings. This new phantom was the “system of maximum production.” This system was not even capable of making the rich happy because it set in motion a frantic race of ambitions and needs without offering any real hopes of satisfying them. True individualism, Mikhailovsky concluded, must look to the past, to the Middle Ages and the archaic golden age.

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64 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 457-63.

65 Ibid., p. 432. Mikhailovsky mentioned in this context such scholars as G. L. Maurer, E. Nasse, L. Brentano, Sir H. S. Maine, and E. L. Laveleye. He also wrote about Marx, saying: “Both Marx and the representatives of Kathedersozialismus display a great tolerance in their attitude toward some medieval forms of social life, such a tolerance as would, until recently, have been absolutely impossible.” (ibid.).

There is little doubt that of the various authors whose books had a formative influence on these theories, the most important was Karl Marx.<sup>66</sup> In volume one of *Capital* Mikhailovsky could read a dramatic account of how “great masses of men were suddenly and forcibly torn from their means of subsistence” and hurled as free and “unattached” proletarians on the labor market; by divorcing the producer from his means of production, capitalism deprived him (to use Mikhailovsky’s terminology) of his economic self-sufficiency and wholeness and turned him into a specialized organ of the social organism (capitalist market mechanisms). In Marx’s dialectical scheme, capitalism sets out to annihilate “medieval forms of production” (the abolition of self-earned private property, that is, the expropriation of the laborer); socialism, in turn, being the negation of the negation, will expropriate the expropriators, restoring the means of production to the producers. Like other Populists, Mikhailovsky deduced from this that in order to avoid the costs of primitive accumulation, Russia must do everything possible to bypass capitalism. Moreover, taken in conjunction with his own views, his reading of *Capital* confirmed him in the belief that socialism and “medieval forms of production” – especially the common ownership of the land preserved in the Russian peasant commune – were only different “levels” of the same type. It therefore seemed clear that the shortest way to the achievement of socialism in Russia was through developing the labor and property relations that already existed, although in a crude form, in the Russian villages and in the *artels* of the Russian artisans. Mikhailovsky’s final conclusion sounds paradoxical:

The workers’ question in Europe is a revolutionary question because its solution depends on restoring the means of production to the producers, that is on the expropriation of the present proprietors. In Russia the workers’ question is a conservative question because its solution depends merely on keeping the means of production in the hands of the producers, that is in protecting the present proprietors against expropriation.<sup>67</sup>

It is clear from this argument that Mikhailovsky misinterpreted Marx by adopting only such aspects of his theories as fitted easily into the general framework of his own Populist views. Nevertheless, Marx’s impact on Mikhailovsky went much deeper than this. As early as 1869, in his article on “Darwin’s Theory and the Social Sciences,” Mikhailovsky referred to Marx’s views on the division of labor; indeed, it is not difficult to find in *Capital* many

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66 See Mikhailovsky’s articles “On the Publication of the Russian Edition of K. Marx’s Book” and “Karl Marx Arraigned before Mr. Zhukovsky.”

67 Mikhailovsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, p. 703.

passages that Mikhailovsky could have quoted in support of his own ideas. In chapter 14 of *Capital* (Division of Labor and Manufacture), Marx wrote:

The one-sidedness and the deficiencies of the detail laborer become perfections when he is part of the collective laborer. The habit of doing only one thing converts him into a never failing instrument, while his connection with the whole mechanism compels him to work with the regularity of the parts of a machine. [...] In manufacture, in order to make the collective laborer and, through him, capital, rich in social productivity power, each laborer must be made poor in individual productive powers [...] Some crippling of body and mind is inseparable even from the division of labor in society as a whole.

In conclusion, Marx quoted with approval from D. Urquhart's *Familiar Words*:

To subdivide a man is to execute him if he deserves the sentence, to assassinate him if he does not. [...] The subdivision of labor is the assassination of a people.<sup>68</sup>

For Mikhailovsky, these ideas were something more than just confirmation of his own point of view; it seems more than probable that they were the real starting point for his own conceptions. No doubt it was only after reading Marx that he found references to the problem of the division of labor and its destructive effect on individual wholeness in earlier writers such as Rousseau, Ferguson, and Schiller. The fundamental premise on which this theory of progress was based – that the progress of society is incompatible with the progress of individuals – also presumably derived from Marx's view that the perfection of the "collective laborer" was achieved at the cost of the individual laborer.

In his conclusions, Mikhailovsky of course differed completely from Marx. For the latter, the division of labor culminating in modern capitalism represented a tremendous step forward, enabling the laborer "to strip off the fetters of his individuality" and to "develop the capacities of his species." Mikhailovsky thought the reverse was true. Finding in Marx corroboration of Chemyshevsky's view equating "national wealth" with the poverty of the people, he proclaimed that the welfare of the people – that is the welfare of the individual laborer – must be regarded as the only yardstick of progress. Having learned from Marx about the high price of capitalist development he refused to pay this price and placed all his hopes in the alleged possibility of restoring archaic forms of social life and adapting them to new conditions. He thus became more and more attached to his backward-looking utopianism, which, by analogy with Lenin's category of "economic romanticism," might be called "sociological romanticism."

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68 K. Marx, *Capital* (Eng.-lang. ed.; M, 1954), pp. 349, 361, 363.

*The "Struggle for Individuality"*

In the mid-1870s Mikhailovsky evolved a more comprehensive sociological theory, which he called "the struggle for individuality" (a series of articles with this title appeared in 1875-76). An interesting aspect of this theory is the extent to which it reflects inconsistencies in the author's thought, stemming from his preoccupation with ideas he was trying to oppose. Despite his criticism of biological "organicism" in social theory, Mikhailovsky yielded to it in his own theoretical constructions. Though he rejected the "method of analogy," his own theory of "the struggle for individuality" was based on biological analogies and treated society as an organism, or at any rate as a growth threatening to turn into some kind of super-organism whose human members would be reduced to the role of submissive "organs." Although he accused the social Darwinists of being apologists for bourgeois society, Mikhailovsky himself remained within the confines of naturalism and evolutionism. The only difference was that he challenged the "organicists" complacent trust in the survival of the fittest with the pessimistic theory that "natural evolution" – both in the organic world and in human society – was accomplished at the cost of a constant lowering of quality (in terms of "types" of development) and was therefore a retrograde process from the point of view of the individual of the species. The only hope, therefore, was not to "adjust oneself" to the "natural course of events," but to join other determined individuals in the struggle to adapt society to their own aims.

Mikhailovsky's theory was founded on the proposition that there "are different stages of individuality that struggle against each other and try to dominate each other." This proposition was derived from Haeckel's classification of biological organisms and his thesis that the perfection of the whole is in direct proportion to the imperfection of its parts (and its converse). This implies that the relationship between the whole and its parts is always antagonistic: the organ insists on subduing the "individuality" of the cells and, at the same time, defends itself against submission to the higher "individuality" of the organism; the individual organism, in its turn, wages a struggle for its individuality against the higher "individuality" of the colony. Man represents one of the stages of individuality (the sixth stage in Haeckel's classification) and has above him a whole hierarchy of supra-human "individualities" (factories as units of "complex cooperation," estates, classes, nations, states, etc.), all of them also trying to dominate each other. From the point of view of the individual, all these *social* individualities can only develop at the cost of man's freedom and



wholeness. Therefore, Mikhailovsky concluded, “society is man’s chief, closest and worst enemy, an enemy against whom he must always be on guard.”<sup>69</sup>

It must be remembered, of course, that this warning referred only to a society developing organically according to the laws of “natural evolution” – in other words to capitalist society, which according to Mikhailovsky represented the fullest victory of the social organism over the individual man. In accordance with his “formula of progress,” Mikhailovsky assumed that there was a choice open to men; they could struggle against the imposition of capitalism by creating a nonorganic society based on “simple cooperation.” A society of this type would not overshadow its component parts, and its welfare would coincide largely with the welfare of its individual members. Based on a minimum of “socialization” (in the sense of imposing impersonal and supra-individual social mechanisms on its members) and, at the same time, on a maximum degree of conscious human solidarity and community of interest, such a society was Mikhailovsky’s ideal of true socialism. This point must be stressed, because the theory of the “struggle for individuality” leaves the impression that his ideal was rather the self-sufficiency of a lonely monad. The retrospective aspects of this ideal were connected with Mikhailovsky’s romantic view of archaic social bonds, which in contrast to newer, organic ties were simple, direct, and intelligible, and which united men through a community of feelings and aims without increasing their mutual dependence. At the same time he was too much the conscious intellectual to idealize an unreflective acceptance of tradition or the merging of the individual consciousness in the collective. What he dreamed of was a community based on *conscious consent and the free and rational choice of common aims* – which meant that he was unconsciously reverting to the model of individuality that had been formed due to “bourgeois” progress, as a result of the dissolution of archaic bonds. Though he felt that all he wanted was to raise to a higher level the type of cooperation and community life represented by the archaic peasant commune, his model turned out to be a hybrid combining idealization of the pre-capitalist rural economy with a “bourgeois democratic” conception of individual freedom. Mikhailovsky’s theories in fact exemplify both the backward- and the forward-looking faces of the Populist Janus, and they show clearly that the Populist world view owed its

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69 Mikhailovsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, p. 474. Mikhailovsky’s words should not be interpreted as a declaration of extreme anarchism. He was not an etatist, but his chief enemy was capitalism, the most dangerous form of “complex cooperation.” Like many other Populists, he even thought that state intervention could be utilized to prevent capitalist development, in the interests of human individuality.

unity not so much to its homogeneity as to the peculiar tension existing between two sets of contradictory values.

Mikhailovsky's theory of "the struggle for individuality" had a number of subdivisions that explained, more or less ingeniously, different aspects of biological and social evolution. One of them, presented in the article "The Heroes and the Mob" (1882) dealt with problems of social psychology and the irrational behavior of crowds, and anticipated to some extent Tarde's theory of imitation. Another sub-theory was concerned with "pathological magic" and explained different psychic phenomena (stigmata, mediumism, and hypnotism) as expressions of the revolt of the organs of the human body against forced submission – the result of the breakdown of the personality under the disintegrating influence of the capitalist division of labor.<sup>70</sup>

The most interesting of these secondary applications of the "struggle for individuality" was Mikhailovsky's theory of love,<sup>71</sup> which bears a striking and unexpected similarity to the theories of such romantic philosophers as Franz von Baader, who saw love as an urge to regain the lost unity of primitive androgyny. Love, argued Mikhailovsky, is a striving for reintegration through self-fulfillment in another being. The fact that this urge exists shows that there must be a sense of lost "totality" or "wholeness," and proves the superiority of hermaphroditism as a type of personality. To illustrate this idea, Mikhailovsky quoted an ancient myth told by Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium*. Once the world was inhabited by a race of hermaphrodites, giants in stature and infinitely superior physically and intellectually to the men of today. Vaingloriously they attempted to invade Olympus, and their punishment was to be severed into two halves by the gods. These two halves, however, clung to each other and refused to be parted, so that many died of hunger. Seeing this, Zeus had pity on them and gave each half the shape of a separate human being – man or woman. Love was born of their longing for their lost unity.

The oddest aspect of Mikhailovsky's theory was that through the notion of "self-sufficiency," which the hermaphrodites had in common with the primitive peasantry, he linked this romantic longing for a lost unity to his idealization of the peasant commune. It is true, Mikhailovsky conceded, that human beings had never been hermaphrodites; but nevertheless the distinction between the two sexes had been much less marked in the past, and among the peasants it was still less marked than among the upper classes. Emphasis on the division into two different sexes, and the consequent emphasis on the importance of love, had become stronger with the progress of civilization. As might be expected,

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70 See his article "Patologicheskaiia magia" (1887).

71 Mikhailovsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, pp. 493-579.

Mikhailovsky thought the explanation for this lay in the advance of the division of labor: people who were more “divided” had a greater need of love, which they hoped would help them to regain their primitive wholeness.

*The Social Content of Mikhailovsky's Sociological Theory*

It is a matter of dispute whether Mikhailovsky's ideas represented an important contribution to the development of sociological theory. Yet as a historical document revealing the specific nature as well as the internal contradictions and predicaments of Populist thought, his work is of the greatest interest.

Objectively, his idealization of “undivided” labor expressed the interests of the peasantry as a pre-capitalist social formation, the point of view of the small producer whose livelihood was threatened by industrialization. But the nature of his “peasant” program leaves no doubt that it was formulated by a member of the intelligentsia. Unlike Tolstoy, Mikhailovsky never attempted to identify his own point of view with that of the patriarchal peasantry; he was and remained an intellectual, a product of Westernization, and it was only natural for him to try and adapt his peasant utopianism to the traditions of the Russian “enlighteners” and to the view of the value of individuality generally accepted by the progressive intelligentsia. When he spoke in his own name, he called himself a “layman” – by which he meant not a narrow specialist in a particular branch of learning but a man of wide intellectual interests and all-around ability.<sup>72</sup> The “layman” who consciously refused to yield to pressures for the division of labor in the intellectual domain was the counterpart of the peasant in the domain of physical labor. The two were therefore natural allies in their common struggle against the “complex cooperation” of capitalism, which forced the individual to become a mere cog in a superior social mechanism.

Despite this alleged community of interests, Mikhailovsky conceded that the gulf between peasant and layman was not at all easy to bridge. He even foresaw the possibility of a conflict between the two arising out of the obscurantism of the peasantry, and therefore he was always careful to distinguish between the “interests” and the “opinions” of the people.<sup>73</sup> At a time when these “opinions” were often quoted by notorious reactionaries, fond of holding up the peasantry's loyalty to the tsar as a model to the disloyal radical intelligentsia, Mikhailovsky

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72 In his series of articles “Notes of a Layman” (1875-77).

73 An entirely different point of view was put forward by Y. Yuzov (Y. I. Kablits). In his *Osnovy narodnichestva* (1882) he treats “people” and “intelligentsia” as two poles of an antithesis; his defense of the archaic traditions of the peasantry and his attacks on the intelligentsia were almost obscurantist.

had a tragically clear view of what such a conflict might entail. “I am a layman,” he wrote,

Upon my desk stands a bust of Belinsky which is very dear to me, and also a chest with books by which I have spent many nights. If Russian life with all its ordinary practices breaks into my room, destroys my bust of Belinsky, and burns my books, I will not submit to the people from the village; I will fight [...]. And even if I should be overcome with the greatest feelings of humility and self-abnegation, I should still say at least: ‘Forgive them God of Verity and Justice; they know not what they do.’ For all that, I should still protest.<sup>74</sup>

Here is another quotation in similar vein:

The voice of the village only too often conflicts with its interests, so that what must be done – after we have sincerely and honestly identified our aims with the interests of the people – is to preserve in the village only that which is truly compatible with those interests. What I have in mind is an exchange of values with the people, an honest equal exchange, without cheating or reservations. Oh, that I might be submerged in that uncouth featureless crowd and dissolve irrevocably, yet preserving that spark of truth and idealism which I succeeded in acquiring at the cost of the people! Oh, if only all of you readers were to take the same decision, especially those whose light burns more brightly than mine and without smoking. What a great illumination there would be, and what a great historical occasion it would celebrate! Unparalleled in the annals of the past.<sup>75</sup>

These quotations from the *Notes of a Layman* throw light on the peculiar contradiction in Mikhailovsky’s thought. Unlike Tkachev, he tried to reconcile the egalitarian ideal of social homogeneity with values that – in his own words – had been “acquired at the cost of the people,” that is, as a result of the process of social differentiation he had attacked in his sociological theory. By conceding that the “spark of truth and idealism” had been acquired at the cost of the people, he was in fact returning to Lavrov’s theory of “critically thinking individuals.” This was tantamount to admitting that the Westernized elite in Russia represented certain values which – as Herzen had claimed – should be introduced from outside into the archaic world of the peasant commune. By the same token, Mikhailovsky partially and involuntarily rehabilitated certain ideals associated with Western bourgeois progress.

There is, of course, a certain polemical oversimplification in this statement, which must not be taken too literally; there is no direct causal relationship between Mikhailovsky’s ideals of individuality and the rise of Russian

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74 Mikhailovsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, p. 692 (quoted in the translation by J. H. Billington in his *Mikhailovsky and Russian Populism*, p. 95).

75 Mikhailovsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, p. 707.

capitalism; but it cannot be denied that the ideas of the “layman” could only appear as a result of the processes of modernization, processes begun in Europe by capitalism and brought to Russia as part of the Westernization to which the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian intelligentsia owed its existence.

The values and ideas created by these processes showed a marked tendency to become autonomous and to transcend the framework of bourgeois society, which often proved unable to realize them. This accounts for the fact that the Russian Populists were able to take them over and fit them into their negative critique of capitalism. But it proved difficult – in fact impossible – to adjust these ideals to the archaic institutions and world view of the peasants whom the Populists wished to defend against capitalist exploitation. This fundamental contradiction is a feature of almost all variants of Populism. In Mikhailovsky’s utopianism the archaic peasant element predominated, but it, too, was seen through the eyes of an intellectual. The peasant element was stronger than in the views of Lavrov, the spokesman of the “critically thinking” intelligentsia, but to ignore the other element in Mikhailovsky’s thought would be to give a distorted view of his role. One might say that his world view represented an interesting synthesis of an anti-capitalist and backward-looking utopianism with the bourgeois-democratic Westernizing ideals of Belinsky – a synthesis that expresses very well the Populists’ largely unsuccessful attempts to achieve a synthesis between the archaic world of the Russian peasantry and the ideological heritage of the Russian intelligentsia.

## **Nikolai Chaikovsky and Godmanhood**

The significance of populist ideologies in the history of 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian thought can be measured by the enormous influence they exerted on the minds of the radical Russian intelligentsia, as well as on the revolutionary movement initiated by that group – and thereby on the entire history of Russia after the land reforms. In order to explain this phenomenon, it is not enough to analyze the theoretical content of the populist controversies over “the formula of progress.” From the perspective of intellectual history, the crucial role was played by an extra-theoretical factor, namely, ethical populism, often (though not always) taking on the form of a quasi-religious cult of “the people.”<sup>76</sup> The trend was strongest, of course, amongst the representatives of the “contrite gentry” seeking expiation for their ancestors’ sins and active redemption for their wrongs in

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76 Mikhailovsky’s secret religiousness has been much emphasized by J.H. Billington in his book *Mikhailovsky and Russian Populism*, Oxford 1958.

order to overstep the barrier separating the “Russian Europeans” from the mysterious “folk sea” that lived its own life.

Following the failure of the 1905 Revolution, during the period of squaring up with the radicalism of the intelligentsia, marked by a thriving Russian religious-philosophical renaissance, the problem of religious references to ethical populism was brought out from a twilight and became the subject of public debate. It was opened by Sergei Bulgakov with his excellent essay, *Heroism and Asceticism* [*Some Thoughts on the Religious Nature of the Russian Intelligentsia*], published in the famous almanac *Vekhi* of 1905. As a thinker who had experienced the ideological evolution from Marxism to Orthodoxy, Bulgakov attacked the intellectuals’ cult of the people as “heroic over ambitiousness,” showing symptoms of an ideological possession and autohypnosis, fettering thought and leading to fanaticism.<sup>77</sup> He identified such an attitude with the usurpation of the redemptory mission that was the opposite of Christian asceticism, the latter requiring humility and focusing on individual moral perfection. The Russian intelligentsia, he argued, had rejected Christ, uprooting Him from its heart and committing “religious suicide.” Nevertheless, it had retained unconscious religiousness and a longing for the rejected Savior, and thanks to that it was not quite lost to Christianity. It could yet overcome its apostasy and attain spiritual resurrection. Bulgakov saw proof of that religious potential of the Russian intelligentsia in the Populists’ firm rejection of middle-class ideals. He thus ended his essay with the conclusion:

Despite the anti-Christian element, our intelligentsia is pervaded by religious aspirations, just as if that new historical formation awaited its own spiritualization. The intense search for the Kingdom of God, the striving to follow God’s will, as in heaven, so on earth, are profoundly different from aspiring to a prosaic, worldly happiness, so typical of middle-class culture. The distorted over ambitiousness of the intelligentsia is the result of its departure from religion and only with religion can it be overcome.<sup>78</sup>

After the Bolshevik Revolution, similar ideas were expanded in exile by an expert on the Russian Middle Ages and ideologue of Christian Socialism, Georgy Fedotov. In an essay entitled *The Tragedy of the Russian Intelligentsia* (1926), he argued that the classical populism of the 1870s was an eruption of the

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77 S.N. Bulgakov, *Heroism i podvizhnichestvo (Iz razmyslenii o religioznoy prirode russkoy intelligentsii)*, quoted from *V poiskakh put’i. Russkaya intelligentsia I sud’by Rossii*, Moscow 1992, pp. 56-57.

78 *Ibid.*, p. 82.

intelligentsia's dormant "religious energy,"<sup>79</sup> that the followers of the "go out to the people" movement had been inspired by Christ's martyrdom and that they had compared their own attitudes to the unwavering faith of the Old Rite followers, prepared for an auto-da-fe. He went as far as to propose to treat the revolutionary Populism (*narodovoltsy* included), as a "Christian sect."<sup>80</sup>

An even broader and bolder generalization can be found in Nadiezhda Gorodetzky's book on the "humble Christ" of Russian culture.<sup>81</sup> The author claims that even the seemingly profoundly secularized trends of pre-Revolutionary Russian thought had retained significant ties with Christianity – indeed, with ascetic Christianity, preaching the "kenotic" virtues of voluntary poverty, self-denial and humility. The Populist revolutionary movement obviously supplied numerous arguments in support of this thesis. The followers of the "go out to the people" movement believed themselves to be Positivists, but (in Gorodetzky's opinion) their movement had, in fact, a religious meaning, being aimed not so much at defending the class interests of the peasants, as at giving testimony of moral convictions and inner self-perfection attained through voluntarily sharing the people's sufferings. Vera Figner testified to it in her memoirs: "We did not eat white bread, for weeks on end we saw no meat and when we were looking at this universal poverty and misery, each extra bite stuck like a bone in our throats."<sup>82</sup>

Vera Zasulich directly confessed her own identification with the Gospel: she wanted to be with Christ, wear his crown of thorns, share the hard life of the poor, in short – practice "kenotic" virtues.<sup>83</sup>

Indeed, examples are not lacking. The point is, however, that most of them were far from unequivocal. How should we interpret, for example, the information passed by Stiepnik-Krawczyński that Zasulich wished to repeat the attempt on General Trepov's life "every day or at least once a week" and that she had to be persuaded that "it is impossible to sacrifice yourself every Sunday just like our savior Jesus Christ."<sup>84</sup>

The case of Zasulich (who, by the way, was soon to renounce terrorism, joining Plekhanov's Black Division) well illustrates Bulgakov's observation that the merger of specific religiousness and revolutionary heroism often made

79 Quoted from the anthology *Myslitieli russkovo zarubiezhyia: Berdiaev, Fedotov*, Petersburg 1992, p.293.

80 *Ibid.*, p. 285.

81 N. Gorodetzky, *The Humiliated Christ in Modern Russian Thought*, London 1938.

82 V. Figner, *Trwały ślad*, vol. 1, pp. 139-140.

83 N. Gorodetzky, *The Humiliated Christ*, p. 89.

84 S. Stiepnik-Krawczyński, *Rosja podziemna*, p. 102.

radical Russian intelligentsia seem “strange, crazy, unbalanced, as if possessed.”<sup>85</sup> However, such extremes were not always arrived at and, besides, there were also some revolutionaries free from quasi-religious inspiration and moral scruples (Nechaev, Tkachev), as well as others whose moral-religious motives got emancipated and won over the revolutionary impulse. As for the latter choice, its most interesting exemplification was the ideological evolution of the founder of the Chaikovsky Circle, Nikolai Chaikovsky (1850-1926).

Founded in Petersburg in the early 1870s, the Chaikovsky Circle did not consider itself a political party. It was to be a “fraternity” and a “chivalric order” made up by morally impeccable individuals, eager to serve the social rebirth of Russia. Their service took on the form of organizing self-teaching activities among the young and, later on, amongst the workers of the state capital. The Circle’s goals, however – formulated by Petr Kropotkin in his essay, *Should We Get Down to Discuss the Ideal Future System?* (1872) – were extremely radical, including not only the abolition of private property, but also absolute social equality and obligatory manual work for all. But that radicalism had nothing in common with the radicalism of Nechaev, unanimously condemned by the Chaikovites for its revolutionary immorality. Indeed, it was its opposite: instead of conspiratorial methods and an unscrupulous imposition of the revolutionary minority’s will on the society, it proposed work on the transformation of social conscience, i.e., on delegitimization of the current system and conscious acceptance of the principles of a new one. That is why a precise definition of the advocated ideal of a future society became such a pressing need for the Chaikovsky Circle.

The starting point of their action on a mass scale was to be the great “going out to the people” of 1874. Its preparations were accompanied by enthusiasm verging on religious zeal. But it was just then, while conducting a recognition of the conditions for propaganda in Orlovsk *guberniya*, that Chaikovsky came across Alexander Malikov, a peasant by birth, sentenced to settlement at Orel for his co-operation with the revolutionary circles of the 1860s. When they met, Malikov had been experiencing a period of religious elation and believed himself to be the founder of a new religion which he named “Godmanhood.” Chaikovsky, on the other hand, had just arrived at the conviction that in order to attain intimacy with the people, a “new religion” was necessary. When he shared this conviction with Malikov, the latter asked him: “And what is it that you yourself believe in?” “I believe in man,” Chaikovsky answered. To which Malikov, in a prophetic voice, announced: “And do you know that in order to

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85 S.N. Bulgakov, *Gierozm*, op. Cit., p. 83.



believe in man, you must be able to discover God in man, since otherwise man is a creature as relative and full of contradictions as the whole rest of our everyday life?”<sup>86</sup>

The words made Chaikovsky aware of something that he had long sensed without being able to formulate it. He understood that it was impossible to live only on the relative stuff of the earthly kingdom, “without having the Kingdom of God, with its absolute Truth, absolute Good and absolute Love”; that “winning the combat with evil does not consist in destroying the enemy with revenge and hatred, but in creating a new good out of oneself, from one’s own absolute content.”<sup>87</sup> This meant transferring the combat with evil to the area of moral self-perfection, i.e., radically stepping away from revolutionary changes of social conditions. Toward the end of summer 1874, Chaikovsky announced it to the participants of “going out to the people” who had escaped arrest. Not having managed to convince them, he immediately – by his own account – stopped considering himself a Chaikovite.<sup>88</sup>

Having arrived at that decision, Chaikovsky paid a ceremonious farewell to the members of his circle and left Russia, intending to set up, together with Malikov, a colony of “godmen” in a Western country. Shortly after his arrival in London (at the end of 1874), he read in Lavrov’s periodical *Vperiod* an appeal by a certain William Frey to join his commune in Kansas State, USA. Frey (born Vladimir Geins) turned out to be a Russian captain of the guards who had initially sought the sense of life amongst the revolutionaries of the original *Zemlia i Volia* but, disillusioned, left them in 1868 to go to America where he founded a commune named “Progressive” which was supposed to practice Comte’s “Religion of Mankind,” i.e., absolute equality and common ownership of all goods, unconditional solidarity and mutual love. Seeing his chance in it, the former *narodnik* [Populist] arrived in the USA, joined Frey’s commune and, shortly thereafter, brought down from Russia Malikov and a dozen or so members of his sect. Reality, however, proved ruthlessly cruel. Frey’s commune was ruled by total mutual control, a strict ban on any privacy (including private conversations between man and wife), extreme asceticism – and drastic mismanagement to boot. The local farmers’ enmity and suspiciousness

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86 Chaikovsky’s own account in his “Open Letter to Friends.” See, Nikolai Vasiliievich Chaikovsky, *Religiozniie i obshchestvienniie iskaniiia*, ed. A.A. Titov, Paris 1929, pp. 283-285. The same volume contains a monographic study by Tikhon Polner, N.V. Chaikovsky and “Godmanhood” (pp. 97-167).

87 Ibid., p. 284.

88 Ibid., (“Open Letter”), p. 275. Cf. D.M. Odinec, *V kruzhek “cheikovtsev”*, Ibid., pp. 90-96.

augmented the overall disillusionment. As a result, in 1877, most of the colonists returned to Russia. Chaikovsky was afraid to go back for political reasons but he, too, abandoned Frey's commune, undertaking a journey on foot (since he lacked funds for a train ticket) toward the eastern coast of the United States. Having worked for some time in Philadelphia, he subsequently tried to live amongst the members of the so-called Millenarian Church, i.e., believers in the Second Coming of Christ, commonly known as the shakers (an allusion to their shaking due to religious emotion). And yet, despite some shared principles (e.g., common property), he did not feel at home in the post-Quaker sect. With the help of some friends, he finally raised funds for the journey and, as early as spring 1879, arrived in Paris with his family.

In his own religion of "Godmanhood," to which he had remained faithful throughout all that time, Chaikovsky combined a pantheistic cult of the cosmos and anthropocentrism declaring that "man is the head of the world organism." He believed, however, that the soul of the world was autonomous and manifested itself exclusively in the human soul. Convinced of man's innate goodness, he postulated freedom from natural instincts and strongly condemned the selfish "dollar civilization." He wished to combine Comte's altruism and a noble utilitarianism modeled on J.S. Mill, with religious ecstasy that allowed one to experience the harmony and goodness of the world.<sup>89</sup>

The news of Chaikovsky's fate and ideas highly interested Leo Tolstoy. He even tried to convince the internal minister, General Loris-Melikov, to allow for Chaikovsky's return to Russia. Tolstoy was also in contact with Malikov and exchanged letters with him. But it was with W.I. Alekseyev – Chaikovsky's friend, member of his Circle and his companion in the commune – that the novelist struck up especially close ties. After his return to Russia, Alekseyev became the home teacher of mathematics at Jasna Polana, spending a lot of time with Tolstoy whom he instructed, amongst other things, in shoemaking and some other skills of "simple life."<sup>90</sup> Tolstoy – who had been going through a major breakthrough of his worldview – considered Alekseyev one of his spiritual guides. In his letter of late 1881, he summarized his debt of gratitude to Alekseyev, writing:

You were to me the first man (touched by education) who confessed, not just with words, but with his heart, the same creed that for me had become a bright and absolutely certain light. This made me believe in the possibility of what had always been vaguely present in my soul.<sup>91</sup>

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89 See T. Polner, *N.V. Chaikovsky i "bogochelovechestvo"*, pp. 143-152.

90 *Ibid.*, pp. 156-158.

91 *Ibid.*, p. 157 (*Pis'ma L.N. Tolstovo*, Moscow 1920, p. 126).

According to the author of the fundamental work on Chaikovsky's worldview, Tichon Polner, Alekseyev had never been an orthodox follower of Chaikovsky's teachings, since he rejected their cosmological part. Had it not been so, Tolstoy would never have found a common language with him. Indeed, Tolstoy's doctrine – which, while reducing religion to ethics and focusing on the moral teachings of Christ – left no room for Comte's cult of science or his idea of “the world organism, the soul of the world and the worldly man.” For that same reason, Frey – who, having left America in 1884, came to see Tolstoy at Jasna Polana and spent several days trying to convert him to Comte's “Religion of Mankind” – had no success with him.<sup>92</sup>

Evidently, the phenomenon of Chaikovsky's “Godmanhood” was deeply rooted in the Russian religious investigations of the second half of the 19th century – albeit it escapes unequivocal categorization. It did not fit into Dostoevsky's model that counterpointed “God-Man,” i.e. Christ, with the idea of “Man-God,” i.e., the deified human being. Not being a religion of only man (this being the road from which Chaikovsky had retreated under the influence of Malikov), it did not lead to an institutionalized, church-type Christianity, either. So – neither a Promethean deification of man, nor the Chalcedonian dogma. An immanentization of religion – yes, but (in contrast to Bulgakov) free from the ambitions of sophisticated heroism and implying, in fact, quite the opposite: a kenotic ethos of humble service and asceticism. Inspired to some extent by Comte's ideas (which had fascinated Chaikovsky even in his youth),<sup>93</sup> it was still close in its ethically-oriented program to Tolstoy's anti-scientism. Let us remember, by the way, that Soloviev also, in his sophiological conceptions, referred to Comte's ideas of perfect humanity and the soul of the world.

Is “Godmanhood” a valid argument in favor of the thesis that Russian populism was underpinned with latent religiousness?

In part it is, insofar as it exposes the connection between the Populist cult of the folk and their religious needs. And in part it is not, since the full exposition

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92 Ibid., pp. 159-161.

See also Chapter XI (William Frey) of M. Gershenzon's *Russkoye Propiliei*, vol. I, Moscow 1915, pp. 177-362. The book contains three texts by Frey himself: “Dopolnieniie k pis'mu (piervomu), napisanomu Lvu Tolstomu ot Freya,” “Tretye pis'mo k L.N. Tolstoyu” and “Pis'ma k ruskim druzyam.”

According to Frey, Tolstoy did warm to Comte's idea of “Mankind,” clearly distinguishing it from the theories of Malthus, Darwin and Spencer that defended “the existing misery, competition, individualism” (Ibid., pp. 283-284).

93 See N.V. Chaikovsky, *Iz vospominanii*, in: *Nikolai Vasilievich Chaikovsky*, pp. 37-38.

and realization of those needs brought Chaikovsky to bid farewell to the movement to whose organization he had contributed so much.

The breakup, however, was friendly and not quite consistent, as it turned out. The Populist movement did not blot Chaikovsky out of its tradition – rather, it did the opposite – while Chaikovsky never ceased to sympathize with it. At the break of the new century, when the neo-Populist party of Socialists-revolutionaries (the *Eser*) was being organized, Chaikovsky's co-operation was not sought only because he had been considered an anarchist, opposed to any political party. And yet, Chaikovsky did not resist the magnetic force of the 1905 Revolution: he secretly returned to Russia and joined the *Eser* ranks – he even encouraged his companions to start a guerrilla war. Arrested in 1907, he spent a year in prison but was released without trial due to a lack of evidence against him.<sup>94</sup>

A new chapter in Chaikovsky's life – and in his integration with the *Eserites* – was initiated by the February Revolution of 1917. Chaikovsky came back to Russia to support the continuation of the war and the country's preparations for elections to the National Assembly. Following the October Revolution, he was very active in the anti-Bolshevik Alliance for Russia's Rebirth. Toward the end of 1918, the so-called Northern Government delegated him to Paris to represent anti-Bolshevik Russia in the West. Impressed by General Denikin's offensive of 1919-1920, Chaikovsky once again set out for Russia. On his way there, he stopped in Warsaw where he met and talked to Jozef Pilsudski. He never doubted that the Bolshevik dictatorship must be fought against to the end. Invited by General Denikin himself, he agreed – at his own risk, without formal permission from the *Eser* party – to join the anti-Bolshevik Southern Government of Russia.<sup>95</sup>

In *An Open Letter to Friends*, written in London on January 26, 1926, Chaikovsky made a resume of his own life, addressed to the veterans of the Populist movement and especially to the members of his own circle. He emphasized the rightness of his own decision of 1874, observing that true progress is attained only through creation, synthesis and spiritual rebirth – rather than through demagoguery and revolutionary coups. He condemned – gently but firmly – the terrorist methods of the *narodovoltsy* (party members of the People's Will), and especially tsaricide which, he wrote, had condemned Russia to reactionary rule which ended in bloody revolutions and the victory of Bolshevism.

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94 See E.K. Breshko-Breshkovskaya, "Pamyati druga," in: *Ibid.*, pp. 7-11.

95 V.A. Miakotin, "Iz vospominanii," in: *Ibid.*, pp. 260-263.

The final sentence of the *Letter* took on the form of a rhetorical question: “Was that the goal of the Russian *narodnichestvo*?”<sup>96</sup>

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96 “Otkrytoie pis'mo k druzyam,” *Ibid.*, p. 286.

In one of the Russian political trials of the 1920s, Chaikovsky was sentenced to death in absentia (see V. Markin, *Nieizvestnii Kropotkin*, Moscow 2002, p. 361).



# Chapter 14

## Anarchism

Besides Populism, another characteristic product of radical and socialist thought in Russia in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was anarchism. Both trends overlapped in a number of ways: the outstanding theorist and leader of international anarchism, Mikhail Bakunin, was also one of the men who inspired Populism; and Petr Kropotkin was a member of the Populist revolutionary movement in his youth.<sup>1</sup> Populism, however, developed on its home ground alone and was concerned with specifically Russian problems, whereas the Russian theorists of anarchism were active in the international workers' movement. For the anarchists, the most important problem was the abolition of the state; whereas for the Populists, the chief enemy was capitalism, and their main theoretical interest was in proving that Russia need not necessarily become capitalist. Therefore, though the two trends could appear together, they were not bound to do so. Even in the 1870s, when Bakunin's influence in the Russian revolutionary movement was at its height, there was a Populist grouping (G. Z. Eliseev, followed by V. Vorontsov and the "Legal" Populists) that thought capitalism could be fought by means of increased state interference in the social and economic sector, a postulate that was quite incompatible with anarchist tenets.

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1 See E. Carr, *Michael Bakunin* (New York 1961); B. Hepner, *Bakounine et le panslavisme revolutionnaire* (Paris 1950); E. Pyziur, *The Doctrine of Anarchism of Michael A. Bakunin* (Milwaukee, Wis. 1955); E. Lampert, *Studies in Rebellion* (London 1957); P. Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists* (Princeton, N.J. 1967); and A. Lehning, *Michel Bakounine et ses relations avec Sergei Necaev, 1870-1872* (Leiden 1971). The most comprehensive and best monograph of Bakunin is the four-volume work by the Soviet historian Y. M. Steklov, *M. A. Bakunin, ego zhizn' i deiatel'nost'* (2d ed.; M, 1926-27). On Kropotkin see J. Joll, *The Anarchists* (Boston 1965); G. Woodcock and I. Avakumović, *The Anarchist Prince* (London 1950); and M. A. Miller, *Kropotkin* (Chicago 1976).

## Mikhail Bakunin

### *Biographical Note*

As we found elsewhere, the first philosophical period in Bakunin's life came to a close with his famous article "The Reaction in Germany," which argued the need for the total revolutionary destruction of the old order. The new period that now opened can be seen largely as a preparatory stage for future political action during which Bakunin established contact with many of Europe's leading revolutionary leaders. In Switzerland he met the German utopian Communist Wilhelm Weitling (in 1843), and a little later he became well known in radical and socialist circles and among political émigrés in France. Here Bakunin met two thinkers who were to have an important influence on his social philosophy – Proudhon and Marx. He was also on good terms with Polish émigrés, especially with the historian Joachim Lelewel, who interested him in his theory of Slavic community self-government. He was acquainted with Mickiewicz, but was not convinced by the latter's messianic views on the role of the Slavs put forward in his lectures at the College de France. In 1847, at a meeting to commemorate the Polish uprising of 1831, Bakunin made a moving speech in which he declared that Russia could never be free so long as Poland had not regained her independence. This speech led to his expulsion from France at the instigation of the Russian ambassador. He went to Brussels, but soon afterward was enabled to return by the outbreak of the revolution of 1848.

During the "Springtime of Peoples" Bakunin initially raised the banner of a "revolutionary Pan-Slavism," that is, of a free and democratic federation of all Slavic nations. He was anxious to be close to the pulse of Russian affairs and believed that the national independence movements among the Slavic nations would act as a fuse to detonate a revolution in Russia. At first he intended to go to Poznań, where he wanted to persuade the Poles to give up their "unnatural" anti-Russian alliance with German liberals and turn the uprising in Poznan into an all-Slavic revolution. As he did not have the necessary financial means, he asked the Provisional Government of the French Republic for a loan; this was granted, largely because the French feared his presence in Paris. Caussidiere, the Prefect of Paris during the revolution, summed up this attitude very neatly when he said of Bakunin: "On the first day of a revolution he is a treasure; on the second he ought to be shot."

Bakunin's plans for Poznan were frustrated by the police in Berlin. He was arrested and only released after giving guarantees that he would not go to Poznan. Instead he went first to Wroclaw (Breslau) and then to Prague, where he took part in the Slavic Congress (June 2-12, 1848). At the congress he spoke as a member of the Polish section on the grounds that Polish independence was the



common aim of both Russians and Poles. Together with the Poles, he stood out against the legalistic Austro-Slavic program of the Czech liberals and did his best to persuade delegates to adopt a more revolutionary stance. When the congress was interrupted by the outbreak of an armed uprising in Prague, Bakunin himself helped to man the barricades.

Bakunin's Slavic activities and his articles on this issue (e.g. "A Russian Patriot's Proclamation to All Slavs," 1848) were attacked by Marx and Engels. Their criticism was not always just, since it was based on the assumption that the Czechs and other small Slavic nations – unlike the Poles – lacked conditions for independent development, and that their independence movements were basically reactionary. The conflict was exacerbated by the fact that the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, edited by Marx, published an unconfirmed report (in July 1848) that Bakunin was a Russian agent. Shortly afterward it became obvious that this was a calumny, presumably spread deliberately by the tsarist government. The paper published an apology, but Bakunin continued to harbor a grudge against Marx and suspected that he had not acted entirely in good faith. Bakunin's attitude toward Marx and Engels was also influenced by his instinctive dislike of Germans, which was greatly intensified in 1848 by the abject timidity of most German democrats and, especially, by the Frankfurt Parliament's nationalistic response to the just demands of the Slavs. (For the sake of historical truth it should be added that Marx's and Engels's attitudes toward the Frankfurt Parliament was no less critical than Bakunin's).

After the suppression of the Prague uprising, Bakunin went into hiding in Leipzig; he turned up later (in May 1849) as the most energetic leader of the revolution in Dresden. When this was put down, he was arrested and condemned to death, though this sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment. He was then handed over to the Austrian government, and after spending a year in a Prague prison and in the fortress at Olomouc (where he was chained to the wall) he was again condemned to death. The sentence was not carried out, however, as the tsarist authorities now demanded his extradition as a dangerous political conspirator.

On arrival in St. Petersburg, Bakunin was imprisoned in the famous Peter and Paul Fortress. As in the trial of the Decembrists, Nicholas I now played the part of the paternal sovereign anxious to know what inner motives had led one of his subjects to adopt such evil ways. This was how Bakunin came to write his famous *Confessions*, giving a detailed account of his activities after leaving Russia. This document, which was not published until 1921, is very strange indeed. Bakunin began by expressing his respect for Nicholas I as the only sovereign who had not lost confidence in his imperial calling, and referred to himself as a "repentant sinner"; at the same time his tone was far from humble

and he refused to give any testimony that might incriminate anyone other than himself. He painted a gloomy picture of social evils not only in Western Europe (which met with the emperor's approval), but also in Russia which, he declared, was set apart from other countries by the pervasive rule of fear and deception. He confessed that he might have been mistaken in his endeavors so far, but did not offer to give up his impetuous designs. What is more, he even attempted to convert his "father confessor," suggesting that he assume the mantle of liberator of the downtrodden Slavic nations.

In 1854 Bakunin was transferred to the Schlüsselburg Fortress, and three years later the new emperor, Alexander II, allowed him to settle in Siberia. Thanks to the influence of his uncle, the governor-general of Eastern Siberia, Count Nikolai Muraviev-Amur sky, Bakunin was permitted to live in Irkutsk and to enter government service. He married a Polish woman (Antonina Kwiatkowska) and soon regained his earlier revolutionary fervor. In 1861 he escaped by way of Japan and the United States, and joined his old friends Herzen and Ogarev in London. Right away he became involved in two important developments: the "thaw" in Russia following the emancipation edict, and the patriotic demonstrations in Poland. In connection with the situation in Russia he published a pamphlet entitled *The People's Cause: Romanov, Pugachev, or Pestel?* (1862), in which he suggested that the crisis might be resolved by convening a Land Assembly and transforming the "Petersburg imperial ruler" into a "people's tsar." When the January uprising broke out in Poland, he gave active backing to Teofil Lapinski's hopeless attempt to organize a surprise raid in order to provide support for the insurgents. After the suppression of the uprising he transferred his hopes to Italy – a country with a tradition of conspiratorial political societies and with especially tense unresolved social conflicts. He now became more radical in his outlook: the cause of national independence and political liberties began to pale by comparison with the paramount issue of social revolution, which in Western Europe was to be carried out by the working class, and in Russia by the peasantry.

In 1868 Bakunin became interested in the international League for Peace and Freedom, which he tried to turn into an instrument of his own ideas and plans. With this in view he wrote the lengthy but unfinished essay "Federalism, Socialism, Anti-theologism," which was the first mature expression of his anarchism. Having lost patience with the League's deep-rooted bourgeois liberalism, he founded his own international organization, called Alliance of Socialist Democracy, and began a campaign to have it affiliated – as a separate autonomous body – with the First International. When this maneuver was rejected, the Alliance was disbanded and its members joined the International's various sections. This was, however, a purely tactical measure, for Bakunin's

supporters only joined the International in order to polemicize with the dominant faction represented by Marx and the General Council. Bakunin accused Marx of dictatorial centralism, of “etatism,” and in fact of betraying the revolution by concentrating on legal struggle for reforms and political rights. He regarded Marx as a spokesman of the skilled workers in the bourgeois countries, who in his view were themselves deeply imbued with bourgeois tendencies; he himself claimed to represent the “proletariat of misery,” the laboring masses of the poor and backward countries. In a slightly different depiction, Bakunin presented Marx as a theoretician of communism, that is, of a movement that organized the worker forces with the purpose to “subdue the political power of states” and create a new political system with use of means provided by the state. He described himself as an advocate of “revolutionary socialism” that “has put its trust in liberty only”<sup>2</sup> – and that means, one that strives for complete elimination of states and for replacement of the state guardianship by spontaneous organization of labour and collective property within an unrestrained federation of productive associations.

A dichotomic unambiguity of this conception was nonetheless complicated by Bakunin’s involvement with the Alliance, which was meant to be a centralized Carbonari-type organization, and his entanglement in Sergey Nechaev’s designs. This thread has already been mentioned in relation to Herzen, but now is the time to resume it. Met by Bakunin in late March 1869, Nechaev advocated ideas that had nothing in common with Bakunin’s apotheosis of anarchic freedom or spontaneous social solidarity. His *Catechism of a Revolutionary*, written in a cipher and brought to Russia in this form, demanded that revolutionists observe iron discipline, break severely with the image of morality that was prevalent in the society, stop at nothing in striving to achieve the goal. He postulated that revolutionary forces unite into an extremely centralized organization, a hierarchic and authoritarian one, intolerant of any doubt within its own ranks, and evidently distrustful towards spontaneity of the masses. Bakunin’s would-be complete identification with the *Catechism* would have supplied a valid argument in support of the view that anarchism was merely the measure for him, dictatorship being the objective.

Since the issue is genuine, interpretations of this sort have been proposed by some authors.<sup>3</sup> It may be concluded, though, that most of such doubts have been resolved with the discovery and publication (in as late as 1966!) of an unusual document – Bakunin’s letter, running several dozen pages, to Nechaev, dated 2<sup>nd</sup>

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2 Preface to the second fascicle of “The German Empire of the Knout.”

3 See Aileen Kelly, *Mikhail Bakunin. A Study in the Psychology and Politics of Utopianism*, New Haven and London 1987.

June 1870.<sup>4</sup> Bakunin rejects in it “the Jesuit principle” whereby the ends justify the means, condemned Nechaev’s immorality and resolutely dissented from the Nechaev’s/Tkachev’s idea whereby a revolutionary minority would seize power, as he considered it a grave peril to the freedom of people. Yet, Bakunin’s conviction was, he did admit, that clandestine organizations were necessary for the revolution to prove successful; that they had to be formed not with takeover of power in mind but, conversely, in order to kindle the revolutionary energy among the masses and to take care to prevent it from being used by a political organization that would be willing to establish itself as a state authority.

Obviously, this explanation does not change the fact that, unlike Herzen, Bakunin fell for the charismatic power of Nechaev’s personality for quite a long time, yielding to his mystifications. He also involved the International in them without authorization, of which the press did not hesitate to take advantage during the trial of Nechaev’s followers in 1871, in an attempt to discredit the organization in the eyes of world public opinion.

The General Council of the International, for its part, responded with a determined and bitter struggle against the Bakunin line. The final outcome was the resolution passed at the Hague Congress (September 1872) expelling Bakunin for dissenting activities and personal irregularities. The latter accusation was not entirely just, as many supporters of Marx were later to admit. Bakunin had taken an advance payment for translating Marx’s *Capital*, and after failing to produce the work was said to have blackmailed the publisher when he asked for a return of his money.

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4 The letter, first published by M. Confino in *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique*, 1966, is available, in the Russian original and a French translation, in the *Archives Bakounine*, vol. IV: *Michel Bakounine et ses relations avec Sergei Nečaev*, ed. by Arthur Lehning, Leiden 1971, as well as in: M. A. Bakunin, *Filosofiiā, sotsiologiiā, politika*, selected and edited by V. F. Pustarnakov, Moscow 1989. Also, see *Violence dans la violence: Le débat Bakounine – Nečaev*, ed. by M. Confino, Paris 1973; S.T. Cochrane, *The collaboration of Nečaev, Ogarev and Bakounine: Nečaev’s Early Years*, Giessen 1977; P. Avrich, “Bakunin and Nechaev,” [in:] idem, *Anarchist Portraits*, Princeton, N.J. 1988.

It is worth pointing out that Nechaev’s ideas have been referred to by leaders of American and European terrorist organizations. Eldridge Cleaver, the ideologue of the Black Panther Party, considered the *Catechism of a Revolutionary* his “Bible” (E. Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*, New York 1968). Renato Curcio, the leader of the Italian *Brigate Rosse*, in the 1970s, quoted Bakunin’s approvingly and had the principles of his own organization based on Nechaev’s guidelines (cf. P. Avrich, *Anarchist Portraits*, pp. 51, 275).

The General Council had to pay dearly for its victory: in effect the split was to put an end to the first International. Weakened by the removal of Bakunin's supporters, who opened their own anarchist organization, the International moved its headquarters to New York and shortly ceased to function. The last congress took place in Philadelphia in 1876. Bakunin died on July 1 of the same year, and the anarchist International closed down a year later.

Bakunin's last years were spent in a fever of revolutionary activity. In 1871 he took part in an uprising in Lyon, in 1873 in the Spanish revolution instigated by his followers, and in 1874 in a rebellion in Bologna. All these enterprises ended in failure, and the aging Bakunin nearly lost his life on the barricades – a death he apparently most desired. During these years he also found time to write his most important theoretical works: *The German Empire of the Knout and Social Revolution* (1870–1), and *State and Anarchy* (1873).

### *Bakunin's Philosophical Views*

During his anarchist years Bakunin thought of himself as a consistent materialist, atheist, and positivist. As the greatest thinkers of his time he admired Feuerbach, Comte, Proudhon, and Marx. From Feuerbach he took over the notion of religious alienation – the assumption that man, the creator of God, became the slave of his own creature and that “as heaven became richer, earth became poorer.” Comte he praised for transcending the theological and metaphysical stages of thought with the help of “positive science,” and for conceiving of philosophy as a systematization of the data of the individual sciences. In his analysis of the differences between positivism and materialism, Bakunin called Comte a thinker who, in contrast to Hegel, had “materialized the spirit by showing that the sole basis of psychic phenomena is matter.”<sup>5</sup> Proudhon he admired not only as a great theorist of anarchism, but also as a philosopher who had attempted to transcend historical idealism. The most important contribution in this sphere had admittedly been made by Marx, whom Bakunin admired as a thinker even when he was most at loggerheads with him over political issues. By building his argument on an “abstract idea of law,” Bakunin wrote, Proudhon had remained committed to idealism and metaphysics; Marx, by contrast, had proved scientifically that the economic structure of society preceded and determined its legal and political structure.<sup>6</sup> Bakunin considered Marx to be the greatest economist of his day and called *Capital* a

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5 M. Bakunin, *Izbrannyye sochineniia*, preface by James Guillaue, Petrograd and Moscow 1919–22, vol. 3, pp. 149, 154.

6 *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 246–47.

“magnificent” work. Nonetheless, he accused its author of making a fetish of his own discovery – that is, of the dependence of ideals on “economic facts” – thus encouraging a fatalistic interpretation of history.

Bakunin, like Marx and Engels, thought that the basic problem of philosophy was the dispute between materialists and idealists. In accepting materialism he was prompted not only by theoretical considerations but also – and even primarily – by moral principles. “By making things that are human divine,” he declared, “idealists invariably pave the way for the victory of brutal materialism [...]. All those who defend idealism are inevitably drawn into the camp of the oppressors and exploiters of the masses.”<sup>7</sup> In practical day-to-day affairs, he argued, it is materialism that is the real idealism; this is because every development contains within itself the negation of an attitude or starting point, so that if the starting point is material, then the negation must be ideal. In this way materialism leads to true idealism, postulates the complete and entire liberation of society, and holds aloft “the red standard of economic equality and social justice.”<sup>8</sup> Bakunin illustrated his argument by pointing to the contrasting examples of Italy, which he considered to be a country with a materialistic civilization, and Germany, the home of the loftiest idealism. In Italy, he wrote, it was possible to breathe freely, whereas the name of Germany was “synonymous with brutal and triumphant servility.”<sup>9</sup> In compensating for the shortcomings of real life by a spiritual flight into the sphere of metaphysical ideas, the Germans had become the worst kind of philistines, servile henchmen and obedient executors of the most anti-humanitarian orders of the government: “One might say that the more noble-minded the ideal universe of a German is, the more repulsive and shabby are his life and his actions in the sphere of concrete reality.”<sup>10</sup>

Man is himself a product of nature, Bakunin argued, and therefore the starting point of his development is the animal stage. The first step toward his emancipation is thought – the act of abstraction – the awakening of reason to which man owes his ability to arrive at a conscious self-definition, to control his instinctive reflexes, to perceive the interdependencies of the objects surrounding him, and to transform his environment in accordance with his needs.<sup>11</sup> Initially, however, man thinks in images; he therefore hypostatizes his own abstractions and, while overcoming his animality, becomes a slave to the products of his own

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7 Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 179, 184.

8 Ibid., p. 184.

9 Ibid., p. 181.

10 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 231.

11 Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 170-71.

imagination. The supreme and most dangerous of these personified abstractions is God. The creation of the Deity was a historical necessity but at the same time a terrible error and misfortune. The idea of God is the most emphatic negation of human freedom. Every religion – and especially Christianity – implies the “impoverishment, subjugation, and annihilation of humanity in favor of divinity”;<sup>12</sup> every religion is cruel, sanctifies the principle of sacrificing life to abstractions, and continually demands blood. Hence the annihilation of God is a necessary precondition of human freedom. Reversing Voltaire’s well-known aphorism, Bakunin wrote: “If there were really a God, one would have to make sure he ceased to exist.”<sup>13</sup>

It is clear, therefore, that Bakunin – like Proudhon – called for a rejection of God not only in the name of science but also (and above all) in the name of freedom. This fitted in with his overall conviction that in order to achieve total emancipation it was not enough to rely on thought – rebellion was equally important. Man had become human through an act of insubordination and cognition; therefore his model should be Satan, “the eternal rebel, first freethinker and first fighter for the emancipation of the universe.”<sup>14</sup> The whole of human history was a triad in which stage one, animality, was followed by stage two, thought, and stage three, revolt. In a synchronic interpretation of society these three stages had their counterparts in the three spheres of economics, science, and freedom.

For Bakunin (as for Feuerbach), the prototype of all forms of idealism were religion and theology. That was why he insisted that the victory of materialism and positivism over idealistic philosophical systems was synonymous with the victory of freedom. A materialist or positivist approach in science (for Bakunin there was little difference between the two) meant working out a view of the world “following the natural path, from the bottom upward,” and not, as in idealism, “from the top down, from the center to the periphery.” The fact that nature was subject to causality was not incompatible with freedom, because freedom was the opposite of external constraint, not of internal necessity. The laws to which man as a product of nature must submit were the laws of his own being, against which it would be absurd to revolt. Freedom should be opposed not to determinism but to coercion and different forms of alienation, as represented by religion and the state. There was nothing humiliating in

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12 Ibid., vol. 2, p. 159

13 Ibid., p. 163. The same was the view of Proudhon. See G. Crowder, *Classical Anarchism. The Political Thought of Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin*. Oxford 1991, pp. 88-96.

14 Ibid., p. 145.

dependence on the laws of nature; this could not be called slavery, for “there is no slavery without a master, a lawgiver who is external to the being to whom the commands are given.”<sup>15</sup>

Though Bakunin stressed the importance of science as a force liberating men from theology and all external dictates, he criticized it for its tendency to reduce to a regular pattern the infinite diversity of life. He rebelled against scientific abstractions in the name of the particular, of the individual flavor that could not be expressed in abstract concepts or explained by theories. This anti-intellectual strand in Bakunin’s world view provided a link between the anarchist philosophy of his maturity and the romanticism of his youth; at the same time it was an interesting anticipation of Bergsonian ideas and the idealistic “philosophy of life”<sup>16</sup> a startling association considering that Bakunin thought of himself as a materialist and follower of positivism). The essence of life, he declared, is spontaneity, unforced creativity that does not yield to rationalization. Science is always “unchanging, impersonal, general, and abstract,” and abstractions, as history teaches, easily become transformed into vampires feeding on human blood.<sup>17</sup> Science is indispensable to man, but to give science the power to govern men – even though it were “positive science,” without any trace of idealism – would prove fatal. Men of learning, like theologians, can neither understand nor sympathize with individual and living creatures; they would always be ready to accommodate life to theory, to experiment on the body of society – something that must be prevented at all costs.<sup>18</sup>

The cutting edge of these arguments was directed against Marxism. Bakunin regarded Marx as a typical doctrinaire thinker and felt that the very term “scientific socialism” revealed a tendency to give science authority over life, to make the “untaught” masses subservient to the “learned” leaders of the Social Democratic party.<sup>19</sup>

He even suggested that an important objective for Marx was to ensure a privileged position to the educated elite: the Marxist state would be “nothing other than an apparatus where the masses are managed by the authorities, assisted to this end by the intelligentsia, the privileged minority.”<sup>20</sup>

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15 Ibid., p. 164.

16 See H. Temkinowa, *Bakunin i antynomie wolności [Bakunin and the Antinomies of Freedom]*, Warsaw 1964, pp. 95–6.

17 Bakunin, *Izbr. soch.*, vol. 2, pp. 192–6.

18 Ibid., p. 193.

19 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 295.

20 Ibid., p. 197 (*State and Anarchy*).



By way of chronological (rather than content-related) digression, it is worth noting that these ideas have given rise to an interesting line of thought concerning the potential transformation of the intelligentsia into a new ruling class.

A simplified and extreme version of warnings against such potential developments is known as “makhaevism” [Polish, *machajszczyzna*], so named after its originator Jan Waclaw Machajski (using the pseudonym “A. Wolski [Russ., translit., Volskii]”; 1867–1926), a friend of the influential Polish novelist and essayist Stefan Żeromski, former member of the Polish Socialist Party, associated in the later period with the Russian revolutionary movement.<sup>21</sup> His main study, *Umstvennyi rabochiy* (originally published in Siberia, 1898–9, and then in Geneva, 1905), interpreted socialism as the rationalized endeavor of the intelligentsia – those “proprietors of intellectual capital” – for winning the position of a new, privileged ruling class.<sup>22</sup> The means to pursue this aim would be “*escamoting*” the labor movement (a Frenchism by which he meant winning by false pretences): penetrating into its ranks, beating the head of it, and taking advantage of it for their own egoistic purposes. This theory evolved from the confrontation of Bakunin’s critique of Marxism with the actual situation of the workers’ movement in Poland and in Russia. The Polish Socialist Party served Machajski as a glaring case of using the class movement of the workers as an instrument of the patriotic intelligentsia striving for formation of a state of their own. Marxism in Plechanov’s version was, to his mind, an excellent illustration of the argument that “scientific socialism” was in essence a new

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Marx did not disregard these charges. To become acquainted with their theoretical foundation, he read *State and Anarchy* in the Russian original (published in Geneva in 1873) and compiled a minute synopsis based on it, adding the excerpts with his own emotion-imbued remarks. On the relation between Marx’s views and anarchism, with particular focus on Stirner, Proudhon and Bakunin, see P. Thomas, *Karl Marx and the Anarchists*, London 1980.

- 21 For more on the friendship between Machajski and Żeromski, see S. Pigoń’s essay *Zygzaki przyjaźni* (in S. Pigoń, *Miłe życia drobiazgi*, Warsaw 1964). Żeromski portrayed Machajski as characters in his novels: “Radek,” in *Szyzofowe prace*; “Żłowski,” in *Nawracanie Judasza*; “Zagozda,” in *Róża*.
- 22 See A. Volskii [J.W. Machajski], *Umstvennyi rabochiy*, Inter-Language Literary Associates, New York and Baltimore 1969, with introductions by Albert Parry (*J.W. Machajski: His Life and Work*) and P.N. Redlich (*Osleplenny utopiiei*). Marshall S. Schatz, a monographer of Machajski, argues that Machajski knew Bakunin’s works and it was these works that became the source for his theories (M.S. Schatz, *Jan Waclaw Machajski. A Radical Critic of the Russian Intelligentsia and Socialism*, Pittsburgh, Pa., 1989, p. 37).

religion that legitimized the leadership of the educated elite and promised salvation to the workers, but in some indefinite future.

The American sociologist Alvin W. Gouldner, an influential theoretician of so-called Western Marxism, owed to Max Nomad, a disciple of Machajski, a vision of the intelligentsia as a “new class.”<sup>23</sup> Gouldner has directly built upon Bakunin’s and Machajski’s concepts but imbued them with a positive meaning, free of the class denouncement and apology of anarchism: he namely decided that the rule of the “owners of pecuniary capital” had become functionally anachronous and thus deemed it expectable that the owners of “cultural capital” establish themselves as a new ruling class. Marxism, in its appropriately revised version, would be the language uniting this “new class.”

With the USSR having collapsed and in face of the worldwide revitalization of capitalism, these concepts seem to appear shockingly “leftist,” or Left-oriented. In the 1970s, however, they could be perceived as quite realistic and far from extreme. From Bakunin’s point of view, they obviously constituted an unmasking of the intellectual elite and served as a spectacular corroboration of the legitimacy of anarchism.

### *Bakunin’s Social Philosophy*

Because of its emphasis on the importance of the collective, Bakunin’s anarchism differed from the individualist anarchism of Proudhon and was at the opposite pole from the antisocial and amoral anarchism of Marx Stirner. Unlike Stirner, Bakunin did not rebel against society or glorify egoism; on the contrary, he made it clear that to rebel against society was as senseless as to rebel against the laws of nature. Dependence on laws governing social behavior does not restrict the autonomy of the individual, because social norms – unlike political legislation – have not been imposed by an alien will but represent an inner necessity. Where there are no external dictates, a sense of freedom and fulfillment are only possible within society, for they arise from the spontaneous fusion of the individual will with the will of the collective.

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23 Max Nomad wrote of Machajski (“The Saga of Waclaw Machajski”) in his *Aspects of Revolt* (New York 1959, pp. 96–117) and in *Dreamers, Dynamiters and Demagogues*, New York 1964. Gouldner took a position with respect to Machajski’s theory (regarding it as a follow-up of Bakunin’s theses) in an essay titled “Prologue to a Theory of Revolutionary Intellectuals,” *Telos*, no. 26, Winter 1975–6, pp. 3–36. Gouldner presented his own theory of a “new class” (referring to Machajski, giving it a positive sense) in a book entitled *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class*, New York 1979.

As these arguments show, Bakunin's anarchism was founded on a view of state and society as diametrical opposites; society is man's natural element, providing a form of internalized control, whereas the state is an alien, antisocial force that must be destroyed in order to liberate the social instinct deeply embedded in the human personality (Bakunin glossed over the fact that in revolutionary practice it would hardly be possible to differentiate between the two spheres). Society is a product of nature, whereas the "social contract," with its postulate of a superior pre-social state and its view of society as a mechanical and entirely artificial aggregate of individuals, is a harmful metaphysical theory that in practice (regardless of the liberal intentions of those who hold it) sanctions the absolute authority of the state.<sup>24</sup> The entire political-legislative sphere is, in fact, an artificial product of the stage of thought in human evolution, and politics is closely related to theology: both assume that man is evil by nature and must be restrained and subjected to enforced discipline. Every state is essentially a temporal Church, and every Church nothing but a divine state.<sup>25</sup> Using more modern terminology, we might say that Bakunin thought of the state as an alienated social force that expands by tearing apart "vital" and "natural" social bonds. It is worth adding that he recognized certain parallels between his own conception and Konstantin Aksakov's view of the state as an "external truth," "the principle of evil, of external constraint."<sup>26</sup> This partial identity of views is interesting because it reveals that anarchism, too, had a tendency to look backward – a tendency expressed most clearly in its idealization of the non-rationalized, pre-political level of social life.

In attacking all forms of political organization – monarchies as well as republics – Bakunin also appealed to a universalist ideal. The state, he wrote, is "the most flagrant, the most cynical, and the most complete contradiction of everything human";<sup>27</sup> because it divides people from each other, sets the citizens of one country against the citizens of another, and arrogates to itself absolute sovereignty, it nullifies the universal bonds of human solidarity. The patriotism cultivated by governments is essentially a means of justifying all crimes as long as they are committed at the behest of the authorities. The most perfect embodiment of the *esprit d'état* is the German officer, "a civilized beast, a lackey by conviction and an executioner by vocation"; a man who combines "education with boorishness, boorishness with valor, orderliness with bestiality,

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24 Ibid., vol. 3, pp. 184-85.

25 Ibid., p. 195.

26 See V. J. Bogucharsky, *Aktivnoe narodnichestvo semidesiatykh godov*, Moscow 1912, pp. 20-21.

27 Bakunin, *Izbr. soch.*, vol. 3, p. 190.

and bestiality with a curious honesty”; someone who is always ready in an instant “to slaughter tens, hundreds, thousands of human beings at the merest nod on the part of his superior officers.”<sup>28</sup>

These arguments of Bakunin’s were directed not only against the bourgeois state but also against what he called “state socialism” – a trend represented in his view by Marx and Lassalle (Bakunin ignored the essential differences between the two). Socialism and freedom, he insisted, must be inseparable; “freedom without socialism means privilege and injustice,” but “socialism without freedom means slavery.”<sup>29</sup> It was because freedom could not be reconciled with political organization that it was necessary to strive to abolish states or at least to transform them by a thoroughgoing decentralization that would grant every constituent part the chance of voluntary secession. Social organization ought to proceed “from the bottom up” in keeping with the true needs and natural tendencies of society’s different parts. In this fashion “individuals and associations, communes and districts, provinces and nations, would unite on the principle of a free federation to form – humanity.”<sup>30</sup>

A characteristic aspect of Bakunin’s social vision was his demand for the “abolition of science as a moral entity existing outside the social life of the community and represented by a body of titled scholars.”<sup>31</sup> Science ought to be the property of all, and this goal could be attained by equal universal education for everyone. Once it belonged to the community and had lost its own separate organization, science would lower its aspirations for a time but in return would become a part of real life, would be better able to serve the needs of real life, and would cease to produce an arrogant and socially destructive aristocracy of the intellect.

On the issue of private property Bakunin was far less radical than Tkachev: the latter’s egalitarian communism did not suit Bakunin’s ideal of freedom and dislike of uniformity. Nevertheless, he was utterly opposed to the right of inheritance. The sole heir of all dead men ought to be “a public fund devoted to the upbringing and education of all children of both sexes and providing for their maintenance until they reach maturity.”<sup>32</sup>

When describing his collectivist ideal, Bakunin occasionally referred to the “ancient social instincts of the Russian people,” whose institutional expression was the village commune. His attitude to the commune was not entirely

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28 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 158-61.

29 Ibid., vol. 3, p. 147.

30 Ibid., pp. 192-93.

31 Ibid., vol. 2, p. 201.

32 Ibid., vol. 3, p. 146.

uncritical. He discussed the issue in some detail in an essay published as Appendix A to *State and Anarchy*. In the essay he listed the three main positive features of “the ideal of the Russian people.” These were (1) the conviction that the whole of the land ought to belong to the people, (2) the attachment to the communal ownership of land, and (3) the principle of self-government and consequent hostility to officials and state institutions. There were, however, three negative features as well, namely (1) patriarchalism, (2) the engulfing of the individual by the *mir*, and (3) faith in the tsar.<sup>33</sup> For these reasons Bakunin did not believe in the commune as a revolutionary force, although he held the archaic collectivism of the peasantry in high esteem. At the same time he was convinced that the revolution could only be carried out by means of the people and in the name of popular ideals, and he had a deep-rooted faith in the vitality of the great tradition of the peasant revolts of Stenka Razin and Pugachev. He was therefore bound to believe that within the people there slumbered a revolutionary force capable at any moment of challenging the patriarchal conservatism of the commune, and impelling the masses to revolt against the artificial civilization of the state.

Bakunin pointed to the long history of robber bands in Russia as proof of the existence of such a revolutionary force. “Brigandage,” he wrote, “is an important historical phenomenon in Russia”; the first rebels, the first revolutionists in Russia, Pugachev and Stenka Razin, “were brigands.”<sup>34</sup> This idealization of peasant banditry – the most archaic form of social protest – was one of the most characteristic aspects of Bakuninism. The English Marxist historian E. J. Hobsbawm has called Bakunin a classic example of a markedly archaic and romantic revolutionist.<sup>35</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Bakunin’s variety of anarchism, which struck roots to a remarkable extent in Italy and Spain (especially in Andalusia), was the political movement that best reflected the spontaneous revolutionary aspirations of backward peasant populations.<sup>36</sup>

Bakunin’s ideas exerted an important influence on the Russian *narodniks* (Populists) of the 1870s. The Populists’ preaching amidst the people was the way to deliver the postulate Bakunin had announced in as early as 1868 in the *Narodnoe delo* journal, with a focus on Russian youth. Those who joined the

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33 Like Belinsky, Bakunin considered the peasantry’s religious devotion to be superficial and therefore did not list it as one of the aspects of the ideal.

34 Quoted from *Bakunin on Anarchy*, ed., trans., and with an Introduction by Sam Dolgoff, New York 1972, p. 347.

35 See E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels. Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Manchester 1963, p. 165.

36 *Ibid.*, pp. 82–3.

great “Go to the People” movement of 1874 would not associate Bakunin with Nechaev; the latter, similarly as Tkachev, considered considered work among the people to be an utter waste of time. Within their own group, they adhered to either of the two subgroups (as already mentioned): the Bakuninites were in the majority, representing the “romantic” side of the movement, whereas the Lavrovites, while sharing the overall romantic enthusiasm, would rather place thier bets on the intellectualistic, enlightenment-oriented heritage of the sixties. While the former highlighted the emotional sphere, the instincts of the people, the latter wished to teach the peasants, to mold their consciousness. The Bakuninites were also rightly known as “rebels,” believing with Bakunin that the Russian peasants were always ready to rise in rebellion; they accordingly went to the villages – particularly in the Ukraine and Volga regions – hoping to resuscitate the traditions of the Cossack peasant uprisings and to “incite” the local people. The followers of Lavrov, called “propagandists,” went to the villages with a peaceful propaganda of revolution, hoping to prepare the peasants for a future revolution that would be a conscious socialist enterprise rather than a spontaneous revolt.

As is known, the Bakuninists’ hopes did not come true, a fact that materially affected the evolution of Populism towards “political struggle.” Nevertheless, Bakunin was quite right as far as his evaluation of the revolutionary potential of the Cossack steppes was concerned, as testified by the astonishing activity of the peasant partisan movement led by Nestor Makhno (1889–1945) in the years of the Russian Revolution and civil war. Makhno’s movement was at that time in control of a great territory and represented in Ukraine a greater military power than both General Denikin’s White Army and the Red Army commanded by Trotsky. The movement’s leader, a self-taught peasant, *bat’ko* Makhno, knew the ideas of the anarchists, and even managed to arrange a meeting with Kropotkin in person; his army, fighting under the black banner of anarchism and consciously referring to the Cossack traditions, had their own ideologues, periodicals, and educational program. Under the shield of this program, Makhno’s men attempted to implement in several villages an anarchistic vision of unrestrained communities, following the principle “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.” The fact that the first such community established was named “Rosa Luxemburg” attests to the movement’s sense of solidarity with the radical fraction of the international revolution.<sup>37</sup>

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37 See P. Avrich, “Nestor Makhno: The Man and the Myth,” [in:] idem, *Anarchist Portraits*, pp. 111–124.

Regardless of the intents of Bakunin himself, his ultra-revolutionism, combined with idealized “people’s banditry” and his indulgent (in any case) attitude to Nechaev, unfortunately contributed to blurring the borderline between revolutionary action and ordinary banditism. Unscrupulous terrorist groups could make use of this situation as a means of their legitimization. However, the reputation of anarchism as an intellectual trend was remarkably ameliorated by Bakunin’s ideological successor Petr Kropotkin, who represented a declaredly ethical version of anarchism. Let us add, though, that Bakunin, too, daydreamed in his later years about writing a book on ethics, which would give grounds for universal human and commonly binding moral criteria.<sup>38</sup>

A separate issue which we can only mention here is the influence Bakunin had on the international anarchist movement. This influence proved crucial in the Latin countries. Bakunin’s arrival in Italy in 1864 is considered to have initiated the Italian anarchist movement: the ideological foundation was provided by Bakunin’s polemics with Mazzini (*An Internationalist’s Response to Giuseppe Mazzini*, June 1871; the treatise *Mazzini’s Political Theology and the International*, autumn 1871). The organizing center was the circle of young Bakuninites led by Carlo Cafiero, Errico Malatesta and Carmelo Palladino, sons of landowners from the south of Italy, who were disturbed by the fate of the peasants and resembled in this respect the Russian “repentantly confessing nobility.”<sup>39</sup> A few years later, in 1878, a Bakunin League was set up in Mexico. But it was doubtless in Spain that Bakunin’s ideas played the greatest role, where they were taken over by the anarcho-syndicalist movement which grew to become the leading force of revolutionary socialism. It was broken only by the bloody civil war of 1936–9. In 1936, Barcelona, the capital of the revolutionary Catalonia, remained four months in the hands of workers’ councils that organized the public and economic life in all its aspects according to the principles of equality-based socialistic anarchism.<sup>40</sup> This large city functioned at that time without state authorities; its public services and factories operated efficiently, doing quite well without specialized managerial staff.

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38 This thread is emphasised by Max Nettlau in the biographical essay “M. Bakunin,” published as part of *Ocherki po istorii anarkhicheskogo dvizheniya v Rossii*, Moscow 1926, p. 128.

39 See G. Woodcock, *Anarchism. A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements*, Cleveland and New York 1962, pp. 332–3.

40 *Ibid.*, pp. 394–5. This author says that General Franco’s victory in the civil war put an end to the movement initiated in Spain by Bakunin (*ibid.*, p. 468).

## Petr Kropotkin

### *Biographical Note*

The other leading figure in 19<sup>th</sup> century anarchism was Prince PETR KROPOTKIN (1842-1921), a member of an ancient noble family that claimed to trace its ancestry back to Rurik, the legendary founder of the first Russian state. After completing his education at the *Corps de Pages* in St. Petersburg (where future high government officials were trained), he astonished his relations and teachers by choosing the modest post of officer in a Siberian Cossack regiment in the Amur district of Transbaikalia. During his years in Siberia (1862-67) he carried out research into local ethnography, geology, and geography (for his work he received a gold medal and was appointed secretary of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society). The bloody suppression of a revolt among Polish exiles in Transbaikalia led him to decide to give up army service – which he felt could not be reconciled with his convictions – and to devote himself to scientific work at the University of St. Petersburg.

Kropotkin owed his successes as a scholar to the research he pursued on the remains of the Ice Age in Finland and Sweden. In the autumn of 1871, while in Finland, he received a cable message from the Geographic Society offering him an appointment as Secretary to the Society. The offer was extremely honorable, and it opened wonderful career opportunities for the scientist. But the young prince once again rejected this very promising career opportunity, giving ethical reasons for his decision: he said he had no right to take advantage of the highest joy in his efforts as a research scientist when he is surrounded by omnipresent poverty and the tormenting struggle for a piece of bread.<sup>41</sup>

As a logical consequence of this decision, the promising young scholar eventually quit his studies at the university and threw himself wholeheartedly into revolutionary activities. In early 1872 he went to Switzerland and got in touch with the Bakuninite wing of the International. He also acquainted himself with the life of the Jura Canton clockmakers, among whom the impact of Bakunin's ideas was extremely strong, and identified himself ideologically as an anarchist. Once back in Russia, he joined the Populist Chaikovsky Circle, for whom he drafted a detailed program entitled *Should We Undertake to Consider*

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41 In his *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (1st ed., Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston and New York, 1899) Kropotkin put it thus: "But what right had I to these highest joys, when all around me was nothing but misery and struggle for a mouldy bit of bread"; quoted after: <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/petr-kropotkin-memoirs-of-a-revolutionist> (Chapter 1 – "Childhood", III).



*the Ideal System of the Future?* (1873).<sup>42</sup> He advocated in it a redevelopment of society in the spirit of a radical egalitarianism which would go so far as cancelling the categorizations of physical and mental work, whilst also completely rejecting any central state or public authority. Opposing Nechaev's concepts, he combined these ideals with an unconditional negation of the principle of authority within the revolutionary organization, arguing that there is no room for using fellow fighters as tools.<sup>43</sup>

On the eve of his "going to the people," he very successfully carried out revolutionary propaganda among the workers of St. Petersburg. In 1874 he was arrested and imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress; two years later he planned a daring escape which friends outside (with whom he communicated by means of a special code) helped him to put into effect. His escape infuriated the whole of tsarist officialdom, but in spite of an intensive police search, he managed to flee abroad. Late in the following year, a great trial of the "Go to the People" movement members began, called the "trial of the 193," with Kropotkin's draft of a future social and political system being the central piece of evidence in their indictment.

Having fled from Russia, Kropotkin settled in Switzerland and was soon recognized as one of the chief theorists and leaders of international anarchism. In 1879 he founded the famous anarchist journal *Le Révolté*. After being expelled from Switzerland in 1881, he moved to France, where he was arrested two years later and sentenced to five years imprisonment. He was amnestied in 1886, after a successful public campaign for his release, and settled in London, where he wrote his more important works. He established there the journal *Freedom* which had an essential impact on the evolution of British socialism; he also participated in a wide range of lectures. Moreover, he became a recognized name in the scientific milieu as he participated in geographic congresses, contributed on a regular basis to T.H. Huxley's journal *The Nineteenth Century* as well as to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. The ceremonious celebration of the seventieth anniversary of his birth in 1912 testified to the enormous respect he had earned. To celebrate the date, a special Anniversary Committee of outstanding scholars, writers, and even politicians was set up in Great Britain. The solemn message "from his friends from Great Britain and Ireland" handed to Kropotkin on this occasion had as many as seventy pages of signatures

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42 See above, chapter on Chaikovsky.

43 A clearly anti-Nechaev motif in this text is Kropotkin's resolute rejection of "inequalities in the relationships between members of the organization" as well as of "reciprocal fraud and violence used in order to achieve one's individual goals." See *Filozofia społeczna narodziństwa rosyjskiego*, vol. 2, pp. 64–5.

attached, featuring those of individuals such as G.H. Chesterton, G.H. Wells and G.B. Shaw, among the many others.<sup>44</sup> Shaw delivered a speech at the ceremony held in honour of Kropotkin in London.

Kropotkin's anniversary was celebrated also in France and the United States. No official ceremony could be held, obviously enough, in his native Russia. His compatriots nonetheless sent him numerous personal letters as well a collective message signed by 738 individuals, mainly authors and artists.<sup>45</sup>

Kropotkin's best-known book is the celebrated *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, written in English for the *Atlantic Monthly* (1898–9), in which he gives a vivid account of his life. His theoretical views are contained in *Aux jeunes gens* (Paris 1885); *Paroles d'un Révolté* (Paris 1885); *L'anarchie dans l'évolution socialiste* (Paris 1887); *La conquête du pain* (Paris 1892); *L'anarchie, sa philosophie, son idéal* (1896); *Fields, Factories, and Workshops* (London 1899); *Sovremennaia nauka i anarkhizm* (London 1901); *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (London 1902); *The State: Its Historic Role* (London 1903); *Gosudarstvo i ego istoricheskaiia rol'* (Moscow 1917). For the use of English-speaking readers, he also wrote an outlined history of Russian literature (*Ideals and Realities in Russian Literature*, London 1905; Russian translation 1907); a valuable history of the French Revolution (*The Great French Revolution*, London 1909, French and German editions published in tandem); and, the unfinished work *Ethics*, published posthumously (*Etika*, Petersburg and Moscow 1928). A collective edition of Kropotkin's works was issued in Russian after the Revolution of 1905 (*Sochineniia*, vols. 1–7, Petersburg 1906–7).<sup>46</sup>

### *Kropotkin's Philosophy of History*

Kropotkin's classic work *Mutual Aid, a Factor of Evolution* was an attack on the unrestrained competition of capitalist society and its defense by the social Darwinists. As a natural scientist, Kropotkin thought of himself as a Darwinist also, but he felt that the facts discovered by Darwin had been given a one-sided interpretation: though he was ready to concede that the struggle for survival and the "self-affirmation of the individual through competition" were important

44 See W. Markin, *Neizvestnyi Kropotkin*, p. 314.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 315.

46 There is no existing scholarly edition of Kropotkin's collective works, and it does not appear that one is forthcoming. An incomplete list of his works encompasses almost 2,000 items. There also exists a large Kropotkin archive which should be researched and described (see S.A. Mndojants, introduction to: P.A. Kropotkin, *Khleb i vol'ia – Sovremennaia nauka i anarkhia*, Moscow 1990, p. 10).

factors in evolution, he drew attention to another, equally important factor whose validity, he maintained, Darwin had accepted (though apologists for capitalism passed over it in silence). This factor was cooperation between members of the same species. Examples of cooperation or mutual aid were common in the animal world, Kropotkin argued. There were highly organized animal communities, such as anthills, where competition was unknown. As they progressed up the ladder of evolution, animal societies formed more highly organized and more “conscious” social groups that allowed individual members greater independence without depriving them of the benefits of social organization (Kropotkin cited beaver colonies as an example).<sup>47</sup>

Primitive human communities were also based on mutual aid, Kropotkin contended. He dismissed as absurd the idea that during an allegedly pre-social state primitive man had been engaged in a constant struggle against others of his species. Unrestrained individualism, he insisted, was the product of modern times and would have been incomprehensible to so-called “savages.” Tribal or clan communities lived by the principle of mutual solidarity, sharing food supplies and putting on public view all the trophies any individual member had acquired during the course of the year. This principle was only applied within the clan, and regrettably the “dual morality” that divided people into “us” and “them” had still not been abolished.

The emergence of separate families disrupted the clan and ushered in a new and higher stage of evolution, which Kropotkin called “barbarism.” The basic social unit and organization through which mutual aid was realized at this time was the rural commune – now no longer a clan based on blood bonds but a neighborhood unit. The populations of all countries had passed through the stage of rural communes (Kropotkin illustrated his argument with examples taken from the works of the English historian Sir Henry Maine); the communes had shown great vitality and had not disappeared by themselves, whatever apologists for bourgeois individualism might say to the contrary. In England rural communes had partially survived until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and in France they had only been destroyed by the legislation of Turgot and the French Revolution.

Urban communities had reached a particularly advanced stage of mutual aid by the Middle Ages. Kropotkin thought that the great age of the medieval free cities (including the Russian city-states of Novgorod and Pskov) represented the highest peak in the history of mankind. Material civilization developed rapidly then and brought immediate benefits to the urban populace (in this the age differed from that of the Industrial Revolution); neither before nor after were

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47 P.A. Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid, a Factor of Evolution*, Boston, 1955, chapter 2.

manual workers so well off. Medieval towns were informal associations of streets, parishes, and craft or trade guilds. Kropotkin thought particularly highly of the guilds as organizations that had perfected, on a higher level, the cooperative principle of the older rural communes. By restricting competition and establishing an efficient system of mutual aid for their members, the medieval guilds guaranteed stability and prosperity; work was a pleasure and the distinction between craftsman and artist was almost negligible. The magnificent medieval cathedrals were testimony to the high level of both the craftsmanship and the artistry of the age.

On reading these reflections, two other 19<sup>th</sup> century thinkers immediately spring to mind: the Englishmen John Ruskin and William Morris. Ruskin, a writer who turned from art criticism to criticism of social evils, also admired the medieval cathedrals and condemned industrial civilization in the name of an ideal of beauty. Morris, a poet whose cult of the Middle Ages led him to try and revive medieval craft techniques in printing and wallpaper design, was – like Kropotkin – active in the socialist movement. Kropotkin himself was aware of the similarity in their views and called Morris the only Englishman who understood the Middle Ages and gave them their due.<sup>48</sup>

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the civilization of the free cities was destroyed. Although Kropotkin was aware that growing social antagonisms within the towns were partly responsible for their decline, he thought that outside factors were more to blame. The cities were invaded by “new barbarians” – kings, prelates, and lawyers (representatives of the Roman tradition) – who joined forces in order to impose their rule and establish a single center of government. This led – for the first time in the history of Christian civilization – to the establishment of the state in the true meaning of the word, that is (according to Kropotkin’s definition), to “the concentration of the leadership of local life in one center, or in other words territorial concentration,” and to “the concentration of many or even all functions of the life of society in the hands of a few.”<sup>49</sup> The prototype and consciously imitated model of the new state was ancient Rome; its basic aim was to tear apart all immediate human bonds in order to become the sole force linking men and to prevent the emergence of “states within the state.” The old federalist spirit – the spirit of unforced initiative and voluntary agreements – withered away and was replaced by the spirit of discipline, of a “pyramidal” (hierarchical) organization of government.<sup>50</sup>

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48 P.A. Kropotkin, *The State, Its Historic Role* (London, 1943), p. 19.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

50 *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

The bourgeois revolutions against absolute monarchies did not change the overall trend in social evolution – on the contrary, they helped to establish this trend more firmly by attacking what was left of the corporate spirit of the Middle Ages. The French Revolution was a late offspring of the Roman juridical tradition (in a republican interpretation), and it refused to accept the survival of enclaves of common law and gave the last, mortal blow to the rural communes. In the post-revolutionary period the “etatist” spirit penetrated deeply into even those social and political movements that questioned the existing system and were opposed to the class government of the bourgeoisie. In the words of Kropotkin, the contemporary radical “is a centralizer, a state partisan, a Jacobin to the core, and the socialist walks in his footsteps.”<sup>51</sup>

One would suppose that this diagnosis could only lead to pessimistic conclusions. Kropotkin, however, was an incurable optimist with a deep-rooted belief in man’s innate goodness, the spirit of cooperation, and a future based on the avoidance of force in human relations. He was convinced that, despite many defeats, the natural bent for cooperation had not died out in the masses but was only buried deep in their unconscious.<sup>52</sup> Revolutionaries whose object was to bring about a radical transformation of the world should, therefore, base their efforts on this natural instinct. It was a dangerous illusion to suppose that the state – which throughout its history had prevented men from becoming united, suppressed freedom, and paralyzed local initiative – could now suddenly change into its opposite. A choice would have to be made between two conflicting traditions: one Roman and authoritarian, the other popular and free.<sup>53</sup>

Kropotkin’s opposition of two traditions and two types of human relationships can be compared to the two contrasting types of social bonds – “community” and “society” – posited by T. Tönnies, who was mentioned earlier in this book in connection with the Slavophiles. Tönnies, like Kropotkin, contrasted organic communal bonds based on mutual cooperation [*Gemeinschaft*] with bonds based on the assumption that society is an aggregate of conflicting individuals whose relations must be regulated by a strong external state apparatus [*Gesellschaft*]. Like Kropotkin, he regarded the rural commune and medieval cities as examples of the former, organic type of bond, and Roman civilization and capitalism (based on competition, synonymous with conflict) as classic examples of the latter type of bond. This comparison cannot, of course, be taken too far: Kropotkin, for instance, did not emphasize the role of tradition or religion in the formation of communal bonds, or the importance of

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51 Ibid., p. 41.

52 P.A. Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid, a Factor of Evolution*, p. 223.

53 P.A. Kropotkin, *The State, Its Historic Role*, pp. 41-44.

rationalism in establishing political-legal bonds – those aspects of Tönnies’s sociological theory that are paralleled most closely in the Slavophile conceptions. Nevertheless, the comparison with Tönnies throws an interesting light on the sociological content of Kropotkin’s philosophy of history, explaining in particular his characteristic tendency to idealize archaic forms of social cohesion. This tendency was something he had in common with the Slavophiles, although Slavophilism was an ideology of the gentry, whereas Kropotkin’s anarchism – like Russian Populism – was a nostalgic expression of the longing for a lost ideal community of immediate producers, craftsmen, and peasants.

### *Kropotkin’s Vision of the Future*

In contrast to Bakunin, who was more interested in criticism of existing social relations and the actual act of revolution, Kropotkin might be called a systematizer of anarchism. In his book *The Conquest of Bread*, for instance, he set out in great detail his vision of an anarchist utopia. Another difference in emphasis is that Kropotkin’s anarchism was not only collectivist but also communist in character. The immediate aim of the social revolution, he declared, should be to transform economic relations in keeping with the principle “to each according to his needs.” The principle “to each according to his work,” he thought, did not ensure social justice and was incompatible with personal freedom: there were many different types of work that were obviously not comparable, and therefore settling the value of any particular task would entail bargaining or, in other words, constant conflict. This, in turn, would make it necessary to set up some kind of authority above the community to act as mediator and ensure social harmony. In practice, therefore, “work credits” would not differ from money.

Kropotkin was convinced that the enormous production potential of modern technology would make it easy to implement the communist principle of paying “each according to his needs.” The scheme he proposed was set out in considerable detail. If technology were harnessed to the common sense and resourcefulness found among the common people, he suggested, the results would exceed all expectations: the workday could be reduced to four or five hours, and output would show a fourfold increase in industry as well as in agriculture. Members of communist communities would be obliged to work a certain number of hours and in return would be able to satisfy their basic needs for food, accommodation, education, etc. without restriction; those who wanted more than this would be able to produce luxury goods in their spare time. Kropotkin was optimistic about the future of his scheme and suggested that it

was already being applied in capitalist countries where public libraries made their books available to all borrowers, and where season tickets could be used for unlimited travel over certain distances.

One of the problems Kropotkin had to consider was what should be done with people who were too lazy to work. No one is lazy by nature, he argued, and if exceptions occur they too deserve to have their basic needs satisfied, since every human being is entitled to stay alive. Nevertheless, the community would have to treat such individuals differently from its other members and deal with them as if they were sick or social misfits. The inborn human dislike of being isolated would be enough to induce such people to join in the common tasks (unless they really were sick). On the other hand, any persons who consciously rejected the basic principles of communism would be permitted to quit the community and look for something that suited them better. Possibly they would choose like-minded companions and establish a new community founded on different principles.<sup>54</sup> There would be very few such people, Kropotkin assumed, so that their noncommunist enclaves would not represent a threat to the principles of social cooperation accepted by the great majority.

Kropotkin was an opponent of the division of labor, as were Tolstoy and Mikhailovsky, although he avoided extremes in his views on the subject; he realized that certain types of work required specialization, and in any case he assumed that in his ideal society thousands of different specialist associations would cater to different tastes. What he was absolutely firm about, however, was that the division between physical and mental work must be abolished. People who wanted to write and publish books, for instance, ought to join together to form associations, establish printing presses, train as compositors, and print their own works. No doubt some books would be slimmer, Kropotkin commented, but in size rather than substance.<sup>55</sup>

The injurious division into mental and physical labor was a subject Kropotkin had touched on even earlier when, as a member of the Chaikovsky Circle, he had drafted a blueprint for the ideal social system of the future. In it he had insisted that even scholars of genius ought not to be exempt from carrying out various unpleasant manual tasks: "A Darwin employed in clearing away refuse only strikes people as preposterous because they cannot get rid of notions borrowed from present-day society."<sup>56</sup> Not only the privilege of birth but

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54 P.A. Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread* (New York and London 1968), p. 207.

55 *Ibid.*, p. 139.

56 See P. A. Kropotkin, "Dolzhny-li my zaniat'sia rassmotreniem ideala budushchego obshchestvennogo stroia?" (reprinted in *Revoliutsionnoe narodnichestvo 70kh godov XIX veka*, ed. B. S. Itenberg [Moscow 1964], vol. 1). In the name of social equality

also the privilege of education would have to be abolished as one of the sources of social inequality.

Rather than call for a leveling “down,” however, as Tkachev had done, Kropotkin’s optimism and dislike of force led him to put the emphasis on leveling “up,” which he thought would become possible thanks to widespread mechanization and more efficient organization. In particular this would benefit women, who would at last stop being slaves to domestic work. He forecast the widespread introduction of machines for washing dishes, cleaning shoes, and doing laundry, as well as central heating and home delivery of food products or even complete meals by special vans. Such labor-saving devices, he pointed out, were already being introduced under capitalism, especially in the United States, which was ahead of the rest of the world in this respect.

Another sphere that would benefit from the abolition of the division of labor was the human environment. Art would fuse with industry just as it had once been an integral part of craftsmanship. As Kropotkin argued:

Art in order to develop must be bound up with industry by a thousand intermediate degrees, blended, so to say, as Ruskin and the great socialist poet Morris have proved so often and so well. Everything that surrounds man, in the street, in the interior and exterior of public monuments, must be of pure artistic form.<sup>57</sup>

In a society where all men had achieved a certain degree of affluence and leisure, where all worked to satisfy their own wants, it would not be difficult to achieve such a standard of beauty.

Kropotkin’s reflections on the subject of revolution are interesting, though completely utopian. Unlike Bakunin, who made use in his activities of conspiratorial methods borrowed from Carbonari secret societies, Kropotkin utterly rejected this tradition; he was himself so strictly ethical and had such a horror of violence that he would have found it impossible to collaborate with an adventurer like Nechaev, who was convinced that the end sanctified the means. Once the revolution had been successful, Kropotkin believed, its gains would not be challenged. Factories, shops, and houses would be taken over by the armed populace, who would make a fair redistribution of social wealth, and further violence would quickly become unnecessary. Curiously enough, he assumed that an anarchist revolution might be successful on a relatively small territory, for instance Paris and two neighboring departments (Seine and Seine-

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young Kropotkin called for “the closing of all universities, academies, and scientific institutes and the establishment of school-workshops that will very quickly undertake the necessary lectures and will soon attain and even surpass the standards of present-day universities.”

<sup>57</sup> See *The Conquest of Bread*, p. 152.



et-Oise). In *The Conquest of Bread* he explained his plan for making such autonomy possible. All that was needed was for half the adult population of Paris and its environs to devote 58 five-hour days a year to working on the land (in the Seine and Seine-et-Oise departments); efficient modern agricultural techniques would enable them to become self-sufficient and independent of the rest of the country.<sup>58</sup> Apparently Kropotkin thought it possible that the rest of France would be content to apply economic sanctions to its revolutionary capital and would not dare to take recourse to armed intervention. It is difficult to avoid the impression that despite his passionate attacks on the bourgeois state, Kropotkin had rather too much confidence in the democratic achievements of Western Europe. This was part of his deep conviction that the evolutionary cycle unfavorable to the instinct of “mutual aid” had completed its course, and that modern states were already about to “abdicate” in favor of free social initiatives.<sup>59</sup>

Kropotkin’s *Ethics* offered an important complementation of these considerations. What is peculiar to it is a combination of an approach to the origins of morality that is typical of natural sciences with an ideal of heroic perfectionism which had nothing to do with a naturalistic ethos of optimal “adaptation” but was very close, instead, to the Gospel commandment to unconditionally love your neighbor. Kropotkin himself stressed his acceptance of Gospel-based ethics in his exchange of thoughts with Tolstoy (which he carried out via Tolstoy’s close associate V. Chertkov).<sup>60</sup> He did not approve of Tolstoy’s principle of “opposing evil without violence,” but nonetheless extended brotherly love to everybody, including foes. In the peak years of the civil war in Russia, he considered it appropriate to emphasise that the grandeur of Christianity is summarised in the phrase “Do not take revenge on your enemy.”<sup>61</sup>

Kropotkin saw in the history of mankind the appearance of two equally legitimate endeavors: the striving for socialization, uniting people through their mutual affection, and the struggle for the utmost happiness and individual

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58 Ibid., p. 298.

59 Ibid., p. 188.

60 Chertkov met Kropotkin in London in 1897. Kropotkin wrote him more than a hundred letters, which was a form of indirect communication with Tolstoy. Both authors valued each other very much and strongly emphasised everything they would have in common (see V. Markin, *Neizvestnyi Kropotkin*, pp. 267–271). In his outline history of Russian literature, Kropotkin focuses on Tolstoy’s religious and social views and named him the “most movingly loved man in the world” (P. Kropotkin, *Ideali i deistvennost’ v russkoi literature*, St. Petersburg 1907, p. 163).

61 See V. Markin, *Neizvestnyi Kropotkin*, p. 379.

development. He regretted to find that the conflict of these endeavors had so far been the main reason for the impossibility to create a social/political system based on brotherhood, be it Christian or communist. He nevertheless believed that these tendencies are reconcilable, and not by way of mutually restricting concessions but in an organic synthesis that would raise the two strivings to a higher power.<sup>62</sup>

These hopes were based on his conviction that egoistic forms of individualism had come to a complete failure; this was particularly true for economic individualism, which evidently had failed to keep its promises. It therefore became clear that the real triumph of individuality consisted in a maximum intensification and expansion of one's individual life, which is achievable through disinterested identification with supra-individual, universal social purposes. Kropotkin found a confirmation of this observation in J.M. Guyau's book, *Esquisse d'une morale sans obligation ni sanction* [A Sketch of Morality Independent of Obligation or Sanction] (1884). He made references to this study in his critique of a religious morality that required heteronomous sanctions, as well as in his critique of Benthamian utilitarianism, which endeavored to a base morality on egoistic calculations.

Another essential element in Kropotkin's ethics system was the differentiation between two levels of moral ideal: justice, based on mutually recognized and strictly determined rights and obligations, and morality – in the higher and stricter sense, one that consists in the spontaneous doing of good without expectation of reward – “without count or measure.”

In this respect Kropotkin differed from Proudhon who apotheosized “justice” secured by legal contract. He postulated that the sphere of justice should be transgressed and a society be formed that would do without a codified legal system. Law, to his mind, inhibits the spontaneity of development, solidifies the outcome of committed appropriations, always defending the advantage of the stronger party.<sup>63</sup>

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62 See the respective fragments in Kropotkin's *Ethics* quoted in W. Rydzewski's book *Kropotkin*, pp. 303–317.

63 See the chapter on “Law and Authority” in Kropotkin's book *Paroles d'un Révolté*. For a detailed analysis of his views on law, in comparison with the outlooks of Proudhon and Bakunin, see my book *Filozofia prawa rosyjskiego liberalizmu* (chapter I: “Tradycja krytyki prawa” [The tradition of critique of law]), Warsaw 1995, pp. 75–82.

*Revolution as the Test*

In the history of anarchism – a movement in which the ultra-revolutionary and ultra-leftist wing has often indulged in irresponsible political extremism, the glorification of violence, and primitive anti-intellectualism – Kropotkin holds a very special place. He was without doubt one of the most principled and attractive personalities in the movement – the naiveté of many of his views was an essential aspect of his innate goodness and boundless faith in humanity. In theory as well as in daily practice he was a revolutionary, but many of his ideas were closer to a pacifist or even Christian anarchism (Tolstoy’s brand of anarchism, for instance) that condemned any form of violence. His theories were also very influential in the cooperatist movement, which advocated the peaceful transformation of society through the establishment of cooperatives and associations founded on the principle of mutual aid. Among his disciples was the outstanding Polish theorist of “stateless socialism” and the cooperative movement, Edward Abramowski, one of the great educators of the Polish progressive intelligentsia.<sup>64</sup>

The reception of the ideas of the “silver prince of revolution” was not always in agreement with his actual intentions. The revolutionary anarchist organizations that appeared in Russia between 1905 and 1907 and were active particularly in Jewish proletariat milieus were ardently involved in terrorist activities and accused the rather moderate syndicalist varieties of anarchism – such as e.g. Kropotkin’s Bread and Will group – of representing the interests of “monopolistic owners of knowledge.”<sup>65</sup> This is also true of the American admirers of Kropotkin – such as the Lithuanian-born Emma Goldman (1869–1940), the outstanding American anarchist and radical feminist, closely associated with Alexander Berkman, also of Lithuanian origin, who in 1892 made an attempt to assassinate the American industrialist H.C. Frick, known for his ruthlessness with his workers, who did not shun terrorism. Kropotkin’s

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64 As a theoretician, Kropotkin became in the West a source of inspiration for currents in twentieth-century thought such as ecological anarchism and so-called postmodern anarchism. Murray Bookchin (b. 1921), the most eminent American “social ecologist” (which basically means anarchist), author of *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (1971), and *The Ecology of Freedom*, (1982), is deemed “the most important anarchist thinker since Kropotkin’s time” and is considered very close to Kropotkin in a number of respects (R.D. Sonn, *Anarchism*, New York 1992, p. 108). In his book *Postmodern Anarchism*, Lanham 2002, p. 103, Lewis Call perceives Kropotkin as the major trendsetter of the postmodernist concept of subjectivity.

65 See P. Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists*, Princeton 1967, p. 104.

position was awkward in that he morally sympathized with anarchistic ultra-radicals while distancing himself from their practical methods.

Middle-class radicals, too, recognized Kropotkin's authority. Oscar Wilde termed him a "white Jesus." Georg Brandes, the famous Danish literary scholar and critic, did not hesitate to state that, after Tolstoy's death, Kropotkin held the position of the largest and the most noble man in Russia.<sup>66</sup> He made this statement though he knew better than anyone else that Kropotkin's attitude toward terrorism was ambivalent: the thinker deemed terrorist attacks and attempts to be an ineluctable product of societies whose founding principle was oppression and violence.<sup>67</sup>

The outbreak of the world war heightened the tensions between Kropotkin and the extreme socialist and anarchist left wing. Regarding the German empire as the gravest threat to the progressive forces, Kropotkin assumed the position of "defender of the Homeland" – a stance that was equal to "social-chauvinism" from the standpoint of the Zimmerwaldian anti-war Left as well as of the Russian anarchists and leftist social democrats.

The Russian Revolution posed ideological and moral dilemmas that were even tougher to grasp for this theoretician of anarchism. In June 1917, after forty years of political exile, Kropotkin returned to Russia. A pathetic welcome ceremony was held at the Finland Railway Station in St. Petersburg, with 60,000 participants attending, including ministers of the Provisional Government; a military band played the *Marseillaise*. Kierensky offered him to take a position with the Government of his own choice and a considerable state pension.<sup>68</sup> Kropotkin, consistently an anarchist, declined the offer. He agreed instead to participate – along with G. Plekhanov and other veterans of the Russian revolutionary movement – in a conference of political parties, *zemstvos* and trade unions which was due to be held in August in Moscow.

At the conference, after receiving a long standing ovation, Kropotkin astonished the attendees with his moderation. He requested the right-wing representatives of great capital and business to assist in organizing the country's economy and to collaborate in the political area in bringing the war with Germany to an end and to hold back the menace of civil war. In spite of the

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66 G. Brandes, *Revolutionsgrüblerier*, Copehagen, 1917 (see V. Markin, *Neizvestnyi Kropotkin*, pp. 346–7).

67 Kropotkin explained his stance with respect to terrorism in a comprehensive letter to Brandes, which he wrote in connection with the then-recent terrorist murder of the Empress of Austria. See G. Woodcock and I. Avakumović, *The Anarchist Prince*, p. 288.

68 See *ibidem*, pp. 397–8. Also, cf. V. Markin, *Neizvestnyi Kropotkin*, pp. 349–350.

class-oriented revolutionary slogans, he used the phrase “We all have one Homeland, after all”<sup>69</sup> – all that at a time when Russian anarchists were the closest allies of the Bolsheviks in their attempt to overthrow the Provisional Government.

In the October attack on the Winter Palace, the event that marked the beginning of the Bolshevik Revolution, a crucial role was played by Anatoly Zheleznyakov, a Kronstadt sailor who adhered to Bakunin’s and Kropotkin’s ideas. In January 1918, Zheleznyakov dispersed the legally elected Constituent Assembly.<sup>70</sup> This move was in complete agreement with the anarchist doctrine, according to which representational forms of government were but a variety of authoritarianism, general election being – quoting Proudhon’s words – a counterrevolutionary act whereby the people voluntarily put a yoke on themselves, hand their own freedom to a political authority and let the latter prove its legitimacy by referring to “the will of the people” (such authority being intrinsically anti- the people). Lenin’s decision to bring about a proletarian revolution immediately, without following the two stages – “bourgeois” and socialist – in the revolutionary process, with an interval allowed between them for peaceful civilizational and economic development, was perceived by Orthodox social democrats as an actual relinquishment of Marxism in favor of Bakuninism.<sup>71</sup>

Yet, Kropotkin adhered to his own individual opinion on these matters. He considered Lenin’s revolution to be a madman’s experiment; he condemned the dispersion of the Constituent Assembly and the terroristic practice of the Chekists – while at the same time he opposed the attempts at overthrowing the revolutionary authority by the White Army or through external intervention.<sup>72</sup>

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69 G. Woodcock and I. Avakumović, *The Anarchist Prince*, pp. 399–402; V. Markin, *Neizvestnyi Kropotkin*, p. 354–5.

70 See the essay on Zheleznyakov in P. Avrigh, *Anarchist Portraits*, pp. 107–110.

71 I.P. Goldberg, a veteran of Russian Marxism, opined that Lenin proposed himself for “the only vacant throne in Europe – the throne of Bakunin” (cf. P. Avrigh, *The Russian Anarchists*, p. 128). Plekhanov accused Lenin of implementation of Bakunin’s program (see G.V. Plekhanov, *God na rodine*, Paris 1921, vol. 1, p. 28; vol. 2, pp. 34, 267). Y. Steklov, author of the four-volume study on Bakunin (*Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin, ego zhizn’ i deiatelnost’*, Moscow 1926–7), gave this thought a positive meaning, presenting Bakunin as the great predecessor and prophet of the October Revolution. (Let us remark that on 25<sup>th</sup> September 1919, Steklov was wounded in an anarchistic attempt at the Moscow Committee of the Communist Party. See Avrigh, *The Russian Anarchists*, p. 188).

72 P. Avrigh, *The Russian Anarchists*, p. 226. June 1920 saw Kropotkin receive in Dimitrov a delegation of the British Labor Party and supplied them with a *Letter to the*

The victorious Bolsheviks approached him with considerable respect and endeavored to solicit moral approval from him; they offered him regular financial support, a State-sponsored edition of his collected works, and even a residence at the Kremlin.<sup>73</sup> But the anarchist veteran rejected these privileges, limiting himself to receiving safe-conduct from Lenin, which enabled him, in June 1918, to quietly settle down in Dimitrov near Moscow. There, he went about pursuing his scholarly activities, received visitors, and worked on his *Ethics*. In April 1919, he worded his political creed in a long letter to Georg Brandes, where he found that albeit the objective pursued by the Bolsheviks: socialization of the land, industry and commerce was aligned with socialism, the method they selected, a Babeuf-style communist dictatorship, made realization of these goals absolutely unfeasible.<sup>74</sup> Early in 1920, in a talk with representatives of Spanish labor unions, he expressed this thought in more powerful terms, stating that the Bolshevik methods would only lead to a point where the word “communism” would be commonly hated.<sup>75</sup>

In the years 1918–9, Kropotkin met Lenin at least twice; the second meeting took place on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1919 at the apartment of the Bolshevik veteran V.D. Bonch-Bruевич, to whom we owe a detailed description of the encounter.<sup>76</sup> Kropotkin declared to Lenin then that, given the fundamental difference in their respective methods, he could only help Lenin in a negative fashion – that is, by drawing his attention to the errors committed by the Bolshevik authorities. Since Lenin requested him to do this, and he received afterwards no less than three intervention letters from Kropotkin. The most important of them, written in autumn 1920 in connection with one of Lenin’s visits to Moscow, concerned the medieval practice of taking hostages in the struggle against the White Army. The letter contained very strong phrasing, comparable in their expressiveness – according to Kropotkin’s biographers – to Tolstoy’s 1908 brochure *I Cannot Keep Silence*, which protested against Stolypin’s repressive measures against the revolutionaries.<sup>77</sup>

Soon afterwards, on the request of his family and friends, Kropotkin wrote an essay *What Shall We Do Then?* (23<sup>rd</sup> November 1920).<sup>78</sup> He presented it a

*Workers of the West*, calling for defying the economic blockade of Russia and the intervention plans (G. Woodcock and I. Avakumović, *The Anarchist Prince*, pp. 424–5).

73 See V. Markin, *Neizvestnyi Kropotkin*, p. 364.

74 G. Woodcock and I. Avakumović, *The Anarchist Prince*, pp. 414–5.

75 *Ibid.*, p. 417.

76 *Ibid.*, p. 415–6. Cf. V. Markin, *Neizvestnyi Kropotkin*, pp. 375–7.

77 G. Woodcock and I. Avakumović, *The Anarchist Prince*, pp. 426.

78 The text, in Russian, is reprinted in V. Markin’s *Neizvestnyi Kropotkin*, pp. 403–5.

perception of the revolutionary developments from the standpoint of a naturalist: as a devastating element that, like a typhoon or a powerful river that ruptures all the dams. The riverbed into which he (together with the trends in socialism and anarchism he found close to his own concepts) desired to redirect the river appeared too shallow; having burst its banks, the river dashed forth blindly, causing overall damage. The river cannot be tamed or controlled any longer. It is certain, however, that once its power is exhausted, a re-action would occur, such demands the law of nature. The only thing to do today is to gather the people (regardless of their party membership) who can prove their ability to inhibit the momentum of this expected response through concrete labor and effort, everyone in his or her area.

The thinker had first presented similar thoughts a few months earlier, in a letter he handed over to a delegation of the British Labour Party, in which he described the post-revolutionary system in Russia as “autocracy in its worst form.”<sup>79</sup>

Kropotkin’s death (8<sup>th</sup> February 1921) united all the Russian socialists for a short time. A special train brought his corpse to Moscow, where farewells were bid to him for three days. His family rejected Lenin’s offer of a state funeral, and he was buried close to the Novodevychy Convent along with his princely ancestors. Lenin and Dzierżyński agreed to release imprisoned anarchists so that they could take part in the funeral; a promise was taken from them that they would return to their prisons soon after, which they did. The funeral ceremony was attended by some 20,000 people, in spite of a severe frost. Emma Goldman delivered a speech over the coffin. To commemorate the deceased scientist and revolutionist, it was decided that a Kropotkin Museum would be established, with the site arranged at the former Kropotkin family home in Moscow. The resources for the purpose were collected by an All-Russian Public Committee led by Vera Figner; the Museum operated between 1923 and 1940.<sup>80</sup>

In the following month, March of 1921, the Kronstadt sailors, regarded until then as “the Revolution’s pride,” incited a rebellion, animated by the anarchic spirit as they demanded the power of councils (*sovets*) without the dictatorship of communists, and thus proclaimed a revolution against the “new lords.” The rebellion was considered by anarchists to be “a second Paris Commune.”<sup>81</sup>

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79 See *ibidem*, p. 389. Cf. G. Woodcock and I. Avakumović, *The Anarchist Prince*, pp. 429–430.

80 See *ibidem*, pp. 391-3; P. Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists*, pp. 227–8. Also, cf. W. Ryzewski, *Kropotkin*, pp. 53–6.

81 For a discussion on other trends in Russian anarchism, see A.A. Kamiński, *Nieklasyczne nurty rosyjskiej myśli anarchistycznej (1900-1930)*, [in:] *Między reformą a rewolucją*.

From the standpoint of Lenin's party, "the lesson of Kronstadt" meant that it became necessary to quit any form of tolerance for anarchism. Consequently, the "workers' opposition" was eliminated from the Party's ranks, and all the anarchist clubs, bookstores and printing houses were closed down. Foremost, the anarchism-oriented threads in the communist utopia, including the idea of direct passage to socialism, were ultimately rejected.



# Chapter 15

## Boris Chicherin and Conservative Liberalism

An implacable opponent of the Russian radicals and revolutionists of the Great Reforms era – and, at the same time, a firm defender of the process of the top-down modernization of Russia started by those reforms – was Boris Chicherin (1828-1904), a pupil of Granovsky and Kavelin, the most eminent theorist of 19<sup>th</sup> century liberalism in Russia.<sup>1</sup>

Chicherin's work is impressive. Apart from Russian history, it ranges through political studies, jurisprudence, philosophy and the history of ideas. Chicherin presented his opinions on politics, jurisprudence and economics in a vast volume entitled *On National Representation* [*O narodnom predstavitelstvie*, 1866; second edition 1899], in the two-volume *Property and the State* [*Sobstvennost' I gosudarstvo*, 1882-1883] and in the three-volume *Course of Political Science* [*Kurs gosudarstvennoy nauki*, 1894-1898]. He was also the author of a number of strictly philosophical books, such as: *Science and Religion* [*Nauka i Religiiia*, 1879], *Mysticism in Science* [*Mistitsizm v naukie*, 1880], *Positive Philosophy and the Unity of Science* [*Polozhitelnaya filosofia i jedinstvo nauki*, 1892] and *Principles of Logic and Metaphysics* [*Osnovaniia logiki i metafiziki*, 1894]. He elaborated on the connection between metaphysics and the theory of law in his excellent *Philosophy of law* (1900) and on the relationship between philosophy and the history of political thought – in the five-volume *History of Political Doctrines* (1869-1902) which still remains useful as a source of interesting analyses and reliable information. Even his ideological opponents appreciated the value of Chicherin's work. Vladimir Soloviev paid tribute to him as “the most universal and educated of

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1 See the opinion of L. Schapiro (*Rationalism and Nationalism in Russian Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, New Haven-London 1967, pp. 89-90) and of W. Leontowicz (*Geschichte des Liberalismus in Russland*, p. 129). A similar opinion was recently voiced by Gary Hamburg in his introduction to the American edition of Chicherin's selected political writings (*Liberty, Equality and the Market. Essays by B.N. Chicherin*. Ed. and transl. by G.M. Hamburg, New Haven-London 1998, p. 1). See also, the chapter on Chicherin in my *Legal Philosophies of Russian Liberalism*, Oxford 1987.

contemporary Russian and, possibly, European scholars.”<sup>2</sup> Soviet publishers of Chicherin’s *Memoirs* described him as “the most prominent Russian liberal” and a man whose scientific output was “absolutely unique” in the Russian social sciences of his times.<sup>3</sup>

It is, however, very often stressed that, in Russia, Chicherin was a “lonely figure” whose ideas had no real influence. An especially drastic opinion was voiced by Nikolai Berdiaev who in his book *The Russian Idea* called Chicherin a thinker completely foreign to anything Russian. “On Chicherin’s example one may study a spiritual formation contrary to the Russian idea as expressed in the dominating tendencies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>4</sup>

The opinion was a result of the meditations that had brought Berdiaev to identifying “the Russian idea” (i.e., Russian spiritual identity) with anti-capitalism and anti-legalism, with the tension between nihilism and apocalypticism, as well as with messianic religiousness and eschatological intimations. Let us note, however, that the same Berdiaev, in the initial period of his activity, considered Chicherin an important ally in the struggle against Positivism and valued him, along with Vladimir Soloviev, as a writer superior in his broad thinking to his contemporary Western philosophers.<sup>5</sup>

A reverse evolution of the attitude toward Chicherin can be observed in the writings of Peter Struve. In 1897, as a “legal Marxist,” Struve treated Chicherin as a “bourgeois-doctrinarian” liberal, faithful to the outdated dogmas of the Manchester school and thus being, at the close of the century, a kind of “fossil”<sup>6</sup> – in Struve’s opinion, a liberalism much better suited to the Russian conditions was that of Kavelin, in that it recognized the specifics of the economic backwardness and was ready to make concessions for the peasant-supporting *narodnichestvo* [Populism]. Yet, following the experience of the 1905-6 Revolution, the same Struve – then a “liberal on the right” – decided that Chicherin had understood the tasks of liberalism in Russia far better than the

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2 V.S. Soloviev, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 8, Brussels 1966, p. 267.

3 S. Bakhrushin, Introduction to *B.N. Chicherin, Vospominaniia*, Vol. 1 – Moskovskiy Universitet, Moscow 1929, p. 6.

4 N. Berdiaev, *Russkaya idea. Osnovniie problemy russkoy mysli XIX veka i nachala XX veka*, Paris 1946, p. 148.

5 N. Berdiaev, *Sub specie aeternitatis. Opyty filosofskiiie, sotsyalniie i literaturniie (1900-1906)*, Sankt Petersburg 1907, p. 163 (essay entitled “Politichesky smysl religioznogo brozheniia v Rossii, 1903”).

6 P.B. Struve, “Chicherini i evo obrasahcheniie k proshlomu,” in: Struve, *Na raznye t’emy*, Sankt Petersburg 1902, p. 94.

Conservative Democratic Party [Kadets].<sup>7</sup> His opinion was shared by V.A. Maklakov, the leader of the right wing of the Kadets, who deeply regretted that Chicherin had not had a greater influence on the mainstream of the Russian liberal movement.

Thus, apparently, the concord of opinions on Chicherin may be reduced to the statement that he had few supporters in his lifetime and therefore could work no important influence on the course of events. There is, however, no agreement as to the reasons of the fact. It is certainly true that Chicherin's ideal collided with "the Russian idea" in the Berdiaevian sense of the term – this need not, however, result in a negative opinion that would charge Chicherin with the sin of proud, self-estranging doctrinarism. In the light of the Russian Revolution, it seems evident that Struve was in many ways right to revise his former opinion of Chicherin's liberalism and to direct the accusation of abstract doctrinarism against the Chicherin-criticized radical intelligentsia.

## The Tasks of Liberalism in Russia

Chicherin shared the view of his master and friend Kavelin on the special role of the state in Russian history. He fully accepted the opinion that the size of the national territory which, lacking natural boundaries, was threatened by constant invasions from without, had forced Russia to create a strong, militarized central authority, endowed with more autonomy from social powers than its Western counterparts enjoyed. He also approved of Kavelin's idea that the development of centralized statehood helped to liberate the individual from the bounds of traditionalism and that a special role in this process had been performed by Peter's reforms. He placed his accents slightly differently, however, stressing the fact that in Russia the development of the state had been achieved at the cost of social powers, the price being their complete loss of independence from political authority. The climax of this development was the serfdom of all the social classes: even the landed aristocracy became a group of forced "servants of

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7 Cf. R. Pipes, *Struve, Liberal on the Right, 1905-1944*, Cambridge, Mass. 1980, pp. 375-376. Struve, among other things, stressed the symbolic meaning of the fact that the Chicherin family protoplast was an Italian who had come to Moscow with the train of Zoe Paleolog who, in 1472, married Grand Duke Ivan III. See, P. Struve, "N.B. Chicherin i ego mesto v istorii russkoy obrazovannosti i obshchestvennosti," in: Struve, *Politika, kultura, religia, sotsyalizm*, Moscow 1997, p. 451.

the state,” bereft of personal freedom and of the right to inherit their estates, since owning land was made dependent on state service.

It is hard to resist the impression that one of the reasons for a greater sensitivity toward autocratic repressiveness was an intensified administrative control over intellectual life, introduced in Russia as a result of Tsar Nicholas I’s reaction to the 1848 revolutions of Europe. A young Chicherin considered it an enthronement of “Eastern despotism” in Russia.<sup>8</sup> His negative sentiments toward the Nikolaevan regime were so strong that he wished the Tsar to suffer defeat in the Crimean War – rightly anticipating that a victory for tsarism would block the road to indispensable reforms.<sup>9</sup>

In the first year of the political “thaw” initiated by the new tsar’s accession to the throne, an optimistic conviction gained popularity, namely, that the desire for freedom and progress could in some way unite all thinking Russians. In such an atmosphere, Kavelin took the initiative to organize in Russia an off-censorship circulation of political articles in manuscript, meant for the use of the opinion-forming elites and reform-supporting authorities; he also entered into co-operation with political emigration. Published in the first issue of Herzen’s series *Voices from Russia* (1855), intended as a forum for independent national opinion, was a letter signed “A Russian Liberal.” The letter’s authors – Kavelin and Chicherin – made therein a following declaration of intentions: “We are prepared to stand side by side with any liberal government and to support it with all our might, because we are deeply convinced that we can act and attain particular results only through a government.”

The position was concordant with the chief thesis of the “state school” which had it that, in Russia, the state had always been the main engine of progress. It also expressed the conviction shared by both the ideologists that the inner logic of statehood in Russia was identical with that in the West and therefore was necessarily leading to the replacement of the feudal system with that of “universal citizenship,” based on equality before law and thus incongruous with the serfdom of the peasants and arbitrary restrictions of civil rights.

An extensive motivation of those views, as well as the first attempt at formulating the liberal political program, was Chicherin’s article *The Modern Tasks of Russian Life* (written as part of Kavelin’s action of 1855 and published in *Voices from Russia* in 1857).<sup>10</sup> It elaborated on the idea that in Russia, despite

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8 B.N. Chicherin, *Vospominaniia*, vol. 1, Moscow 1929, p. 158.

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 149-150. A similar stand was then being taken by T. Granovsky.

10 Quoted in *Liberty, Equality and the Market. Essays by B.N. Chicherin*, ed. G. Hamburg, New Haven-London 1998.

its being part of the “European family,” an unfavorable relationship had developed between the state and the society, with the state thwarting spontaneous social life, which brought on the passivity of the people, the lack of a civic spirit, the general corruption and lawlessness, as well as the omnipresence of official lies. The immediate necessity for Russia was thus freedom and the banner under which all the Russian patriots ought to gather, regardless of their outlook and social belonging, was liberalism.

In Chicherin’s interpretation, however, this was not a program that would diminish the prerogatives of the Crown in the political sphere. Following the tradition of Speransky’s autocratic liberalism, Chicherin’s program assumed a clear division between political rights that restricted autocracy, and civic rights realized beyond the political sphere of life. The latter, according to Chicherin, comprised seven fundamental freedoms: freedom of conscience, freedom from serfdom, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, academic freedom and the transparency of administrative procedures and court trials. Another article by Chicherin, published a year earlier, *On Serfdom (Voices from Russia, 1856)*, made it clear that by “freedom from serfdom” the thinker understood the right to choose profession and to dispose of property – in other words, freedom of individual enterprise in the economic sphere.

Civic rights thus encompassed the sphere of individual, private freedom – clearly distinguished (as it was by Benjamin Constant) from freedom in the political sphere, i.e., from the principle of the people’s sovereignty, implying representative institutions. Chicherin very strongly maintained that the freedom which the Russian liberals had in mind was that of individual activity, requiring protection by civic law, yet reconcilable with the monarch’s unlimited power in the political domain. Indeed, he emphasized the fact that Russian society was not yet mature enough to enjoy political freedom, while Russian absolutism had not yet ended its historical mission.

Let us add that in his polemics with Mikhail Katkov who then represented the Anglophile version of liberalism, Chicherin supported liberalism of the French type, justifying the French model of the centralized state by means of Hegelian argumentation.<sup>11</sup> It was concordant with the state-controlled Westernism of Hegelian provenance preached by Kavelin as early as the 1840s. It did, however, provoke a strong resentment in Herzen who interpreted

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11 See V.A. Kitaev, *Ot frondy k okhranitelstvu. Iz istorii russkoy liberalnoy mysli 50-60kh godov XIX veka*, Moscow 1972, ch.2. Cf. G.M. Hamburg, *Boris Chicherin and Early Russian Liberalism 1828-1866*, Stanford, Calif. 1992, pp. 164-175.

Chicherin's views as "adoration of the State" and the "philosophy of bureaucracy."<sup>12</sup>

Chicherin, for his part, accused Herzen of irresponsible impatience and of toying with the idea of revolution that, in the existing circumstances, might serve only the reaction. The meeting of the two thinkers – during Chicherin's journey abroad in 1858 – deepened the mutual feeling of foreignness and brought both of them to the conclusion that any kind of co-operation was impossible.

Chicherin explained his attitude in an accusatory *Open Letter* to Herzen published in *Kolokol* in December 1858. The letter was written in a very sharp tone, without any regard for the author's reputation in the circles of the intellectual opposition. This duly worried Kavelin, making him distance himself from the tone of Chicherin's *Letter*. In fact, however, Kavelin basically agreed with Chicherin and even recommended him sometimes to exercise a greater political caution. This can be illustrated by the meaningful fact that, in the first version of *Contemporary Tasks*, Chicherin had delineated the perspective of a future (once the reform was completed) transformation of autocracy into constitutional monarchy – yet he removed the fragment under the influence of Kavelin's persuasions.

Completion of the work on the agrarian reforms brought to the agenda the issue of changes within the political structure of the Empire. A group of wealthy landowners surrounding Senator Nikolai Bezobrazov demanded an oligarchic Constitution that would compensate the gentry for the loss of control over the peasants and the increased influence of bureaucracy. In the pro-liberal circles, the problem of the Constitution turned out to be a dividing, rather than unifying, factor. The provincial assembly of the Tver gentry, presided by Alexei Unkovsky, astonished the government by renouncing their noblemen's privileges and issuing an appeal for proclaiming national elections for the Constituent Assembly. An even more radical attitude was manifested by an emigrant aristocrat, Prince Petr Dolgorukov, who in his booklet *On the Change of the Governing Way in Russia* (Leipzig 1982) called for an immediate transformation of the Russian autocracy into a parliamentary constitutional monarchy. Kavelin, however – this time disregarding his own reputation in the oppositionist circles – very strongly opposed ideas of that kind. In his leaflet

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12 Kavelin tried to defend himself from Herzen's accusations by referring to the success of the reforms which – in absence of a strong middle-class in Russia – could be introduced only by the aristocracy. See, V. Kantor, *Russkii Yevropeets kak yavlenie kulkury*, Moscow 2001, pp. 183-187.

entitled *The Gentry and Liberation of the Peasants* (Berlin 1862)<sup>13</sup>, he elaborated on the idea that, in Russian circumstances, a Constitution would serve only the gentry, curbing the process of transforming the state-class system into that of “common citizenship” and impeding the integration of landowners with the all-national community.

No wonder it was understood as an act of political support for the Government. Herzen – who was, in fact, also wary of the oligarchic consequences of constitutionalism – deemed it necessary to cross out Kavelin’s name from his list of personal friends.

This is the context in which to view the genesis of Chicherin’s seminal work, *On National Representation*. Chicherin approved in it the liberal ideal of constitutional monarchy with representative institutions, arguing, however, that the realization of that ideal required the fulfillment of many conditions – such as, attaining a certain level of legal culture and social discipline, discerning freedom from anarchy, learning responsible co-operation and pragmatic compromise. Those indispensable premises of political freedom had been shaped in the West, while in Russia, under the influence of adverse circumstances, they had not. The Russians had organized themselves as a nation familiar with obedience and anarchy – but not with freedom under the rule of law; a passive nation, with no sense of its own rights, yet, at the same time, dreaming of an unbridled, absolute liberty, free from any self-limitations.

In Chicherin’s opinion, this was not an unalterable, essential quality of Russianness. It was, however, an additional argument in favor of gradualism and political caution. The premature limitation of the absolute monarchy that was still performing its modernizing mission in Russia would threaten to block, or even to reverse, the historical process aiming at bringing Russia closer to European norms. Therefore, the introduction of representative institutions in Russia ought to be preceded by completion of Alexander II’s reforms and making full use of the possibilities they allowed.

According to Chicherin, such an order of events would mean the application in Russia of a certain general principle, namely, the priority of social emancipation over political emancipation. In this respect, Russia was on the right track and progress could not be abandoned. Abolition of serfdom had ended the dismantling process of the system of general serfdom that had been initiated by the Manifesto on the Freedom of the Gentry. The reforms of 1864 had created a legal framework for an authentic local self-government encompassing all the social classes (the *zemstvo* or Land Assembly system), as

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13 See K.D. Kavelin, *Nash umstvennii stroi. Statii po filosofii russkoy istorii i kultury*, Ed. V.K. Kantor, Moscow 1989, pp. 124-157.

well as introducing independent courts of justice, juries and the formal organization of defense lawyers. All these offered society the chance to develop a legal culture, an economic independence and a self-governing system at a local level. Chicherin interpreted that task as a gradual process of shaping the conditions for a civilization in which it would be possible to “crown the edifice,” i.e., transform the absolute monarchy into a constitutional one. He emphasized, however, that a premature limitation of the monarch’s monopoly on political power would sanction a chaotic war of particular interests, thus disjoining the logic of the reforms.

For the political radicals, this was, of course, an unacceptable argumentation. The government, on the other hand, which not so long ago had considered Chicherin its ally, could not accept the thesis that the success of the reforms that were being introduced would legitimize the constitutional demands. Following Dmitri Karakozov’s attempted assassination of the Tsar (in April 1866), the very tackling of the problem of representative rule seemed politically suspicious and dangerous. The conservative Minister of Education, D.A. Tolstoy, promptly made use of Chicherin’s personal conflicts with the Academic Council of Moscow University to force his resignation from the department chair.<sup>14</sup>

Having left the University, Chicherin settled permanently in his country estate, focusing on intense scientific work and activity in the Tambov Land Council. In the 1870s, his ideas underwent a certain evolution, caused, amongst other reasons, by the development of revolutionary movements in Russia and disillusionment with the results of the Russian reforms. The reforms failed especially in respect to the peasant question by maintaining the institution of the village commune which allowed for treating the peasants as a separate, isolated social class, subject to separate administration and to an archaic common law, contradictory to the general state law (in allowing, e.g., for bodily punishment). A constant and omnipresent control by a small, tight-knit community based on common ownership of the land and on collective responsibility for taxes and other payments to landowners, supported the sad heritage of serfdom, namely, the infantile mentality of the peasant that made unfeasible the development of entrepreneurship, as well as awareness of proper rights and a sense of personal responsibility. This was exactly what the Russian conservatives wanted to achieve, wishing to save the peasants from “corruption.” On the other hand, the existence of the village commune was adhered to also by the Populist revolutionaries who claimed to see in it a budding Socialism. To Chicherin, this

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14 Since 1861, Chicherin had been professor of Moscow University, heading the State Law Chair.



seemed to be the “post-reform paradox of Russia” – the paradox consisting of the thought that nearly everyone in Russia, both on the right and on the left, demanded paternalist care over the peasant, while next to nobody wanted the peasant to enjoy more freedom.

A telling exemplification of this paradox was Chicherin’s close friend, Konstantin Kavelin.<sup>15</sup> While understanding that the communal rule of the land tied the peasant to the soil and took his liberty, he still treated it as the “talisman” that protected the country population from going proletarian, and the gentry – from dangerous social upheavals.

At the preparatory stage of the land-ownership reform, Chicherin had not yet proposed formal abolition of the village communes – he believed that it would be better if they fell apart of their own accord, without the authorities’ intervention. And yet, a close observation of the countryside’s fate following reform brought him to the conclusion that sustaining the *obshtshchina* any further would become one of the major obstacles on the road to liberal progress. He expressed this standpoint in his programmatic manuscript, entitled *The Tasks of the New Rule*, handed into the Minister of the Interior, Count Loris-Melikov, after the assassination of Alexander II. In the document, Chicherin also suggested completing the State Council with elected representatives of the Land Assemblies in order to create a “living link” between government and society.

Evidently, Alexander III chose a diametrically different political road, namely, that of “counter-reform,” including legal strengthening of the village communes that were at the same time subjected to a more strict bureaucratic control, depriving the village *mir* [Council of Elders] of any likeness to self-government.

By the end of 1881, Chicherin was elected the Mayor of Moscow. He held the office competently and with much dignity, never relenting to bureaucratic pressures. His term, however, proved to be extremely short. The speech he gave on the occasion of the Tsar’s coronation on May 10, 1883, included an appeal to unite the local self-governing forces of Russia, which was interpreted as a demand to limit bureaucratic absolutism – upon which the legally elected Mayor was forced to give up his chair.

As a result of his experiences, Chicherin came to the conclusion that the omnipotence of bureaucracy in Russia could not be limited without restricting the absolute power of the monarch, and that further development of Russia demanded the transformation of tsarism into a constitutional monarchy. He justified this conviction in a booklet entitled *Russia on the Threshold of the 20<sup>th</sup>*

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15 See Kavelin’s essay, “Vzglyad na russkuyu sielskuyu obshchinu” (1859) (reprinted in: V. Kavelin, *Nash umstvennii story*, pp. 95-123).

*Century [Rossiia nakanunie XX stoletii]*, published in Berlin in 1900. At the same time, he gave in to a growing pessimism. He prophesied major catastrophes, revolutions and wars, a triumph of brutal force (epitomized by Bismarck's Germany) in international relations, degeneration of democracy and the inevitable victory of Socialist despotism. As Evgen Trubetskoi pointedly observed, Chicherin was at that time a Hegelian lacking Hegel's faith in the rationality of history: "He seemed as if universal reason had become for him a matter of the past."<sup>16</sup>

## Philosophy of the State

Chicherin's liberalism relied on a strong theoretical basis. It was a philosophical reflection on the state and the law, setting off from Hegel's philosophy which, however, it interpreted in the spirit of classical liberalism. The theme is present in all of Chicherin's works, but it is two of his books – *Property and the State* and *Philosophy of law* – that offer its most systematic rendering.

Following Hegel, Chicherin considered the state to be the highest form of human co-existence. What differed him from Hegel, however – placing him, at the same time, closer to Kant – was his attitude toward the individual whom he conceived as intrinsically purposeful. In keeping with the ideas of the Russian Westernism of the 1840s, he believed that the ultimate value was the "principle of personality," i.e., the autonomous human individual. This made him accept the Kantian ethics of autonomy that had been rejected by Hegel, and even describe his own standpoint as "individualist."

The state, in Chicherin's system, was the ultimate union of three social relationships: the family or natural union, civic society or legal union and the Church or moral union. However, the supreme union of the state must not annihilate the autonomy of its subordinate social unions. Each sphere of human life (the state sphere included) had a distinct range and was governed by its proper laws, so any attempt at leveling the differences, cancelling the autonomy of the respective spheres of life and "absorbing" them into a single sphere decreed supreme, must lead to the destruction of freedom. Back in the Middle Ages, the state had been subservient to private persons, which made it a tool of the monarchs' and feudal lords' willfulness. It was the modern absolute monarchies that liberated statehood from that subservience, securing freedom by distinctly separating the private sphere, i.e., the domain of civil law, from the public sphere, monopolized by political authority. Chicherin, however, left no

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16 E. Trubetskoi, *Vospominaniia*, Sofia 1921, p. 122.

doubt that further historical development demanded also freedom in the public sphere, i.e., the transformation of absolutism into a constitutional monarchy.

Chicherin's concordance with Hegel on the essential supremacy of the state had nothing in common with an apology for submitting individuals to state authority of which he was erratically accused by Herten. Quite the opposite: Chicherin tried to free Hegelianism from its anti-individualist tendencies, typical (he admitted) of all the post-Kantian systems of idealist philosophy in Germany. He did it by developing Hegel's ideas on the autonomy of civic society as the space of civil law, distinctly separate from the state and defined as a "reality of the ethical idea." Just like Hegel, he conceived civic society as a sphere of contradictory private interests, i.e., the domain of individualist freedom, negative and consisting (in keeping with Locke's definition) of a lack of external coercion. He admitted (echoing Hegel) that the supreme kind of freedom is positive freedom consisting in rational and moral self-creation which can be realized only in the public sphere, i.e., within the state. Yet, contrary to stereotypical interpretations of Hegelianism, he firmly rejected contempt for individualist ("private") freedom and for juridical individualism representing the point of view of "abstract rationalism." Indeed, he emphasized the importance of individualist freedom, or freedom in the Lockean sense, as an *indispensable condition* of the "higher" freedom postulated by the German idealists.<sup>17</sup> He pointed out the threats of an idealistic apotheosis of the state, accusing holistic metaphysics, from Plato to Hegel, of reducing the human individual to the role of "a transitory phenomenon of the spiritual substance" objectively present in the institutions. He opposed those threats by defending individualist freedom guaranteed by civil law or the law of a civic society, autonomous from the state.

In the years of the post-Sevastopol "thaw," the radicals perceived Chicherin as a right-wing Hegelian preaching the German cult of a bureaucratic state in Russia, along with all the cult's anti-individualist consequences. In fact, however, Chicherin's Hegelianism did not approve of an omnipotent state aiming at extending bureaucratic control to all the aspects of its citizens' lives. Just the opposite: Chicherin never ceased to underline that, in Hegel's conception, the very idea of the state implied freedom of conscience, inviolability of individual rights and autonomy of civic society defined as the "sum of private relations amongst free individuals." What made Hegel's theory of the state so attractive to Chicherin was, among other things, precisely the fact that it allowed for accentuating the modernizing functions of the state without posing any danger to individualist values in the private sphere. Adherence to

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17 B.N. Chicherin, *Sobstvennost' i gosudarstvo*, vol. 1, Moscow 1882, pp. 3-7.

thus conceived Hegelianism was easily reconciled with the liberalism of the Benjamin Constant type, i.e., a liberalism preaching the primacy of “private” freedom over the “public” one.<sup>18</sup> Chicherin’s liberalism was then exactly the same, clearly distinguishing between civic freedoms and political freedom.

A real threat to individualist freedom was observed by Chicherin in the 1870s, during the triumphant period of naturalist Positivism. The threat took on the form of anti-individualist tendencies in sociology, present especially in the organicist school whose followers (like Schäffle) openly denied the existence of individuals, treating them as mere cells in the supra-individual social organism. The very fact that the word “society” in social science stopped denoting the private sphere which it had referred to in Hegel’s theory of “civic society,” seemed unwelcome and dangerous to Chicherin. In his introduction to *Property and the State*, he wrote:

Now, a new monster has grown over the state: its name is “society.” Before, society was seen as the sum of free-acting forces, now it has been transformed into a mysterious being, devouring both the state and the private sphere; a being that governs everything, making impossible any independent manifestation of life. It is, in fact, a new name for the state, but this time the state is endowed with much broader prerogatives.<sup>19</sup>

Expanding on the idea, Chicherin owned up to a certain modification of priorities in his own political views. Back in the 1850s, he had defended a centralized, active state authority – the only kind that was capable of effectively executing reforms. Presently, however, his main priority was to fight against the state-controlled collectivism justified by Positivist sociology, as well as by left-wing and right-wing anti-individualist ideologies, that demanded an ever greater submission of the individual to the interests of a mythicized “society” represented by the interferential politics of the state.

It confirms the acuteness of Chicherin’s ideas that he perceived the progress of democracy in Western Europe as one of the major factors adverse to classical liberalism. The concept of freedom as participation in making political decisions had to strengthen the tendency to expand the *range* of those decisions, thus limiting the private, uncontrolled sphere of life. Political freedom – freedom in the public sphere – thereby gradually absorbed individual, non-political freedom. Political democracy, previously meaning an institutional assurance of

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18 Chicherin accepted Constant’s distinction between “ancient freedom” (in the public domain) and “modern freedom” (in the private domain), arguing that it was the historical task of liberalism to join the two while maintaining the priority of private freedom (*Sobstvennost’ i gosudarstvo*, vol. 1, pp. 32-33).

19 B.N. Chicherin, *Sobstvennost’ i gosudarstvo*, vol. 1, pp. XIX-XX.

the individual's freedom, was becoming an objective in itself, fully revealing its collectivist ethos. While combating authoritarian political structures, it was becoming more and more attached to the idea of an increasing regulation of life by the government and ever more inclined to endowing democratic governments with unlimited power – in other words, more and more adverse toward classical liberal values.

In these circumstances, Chicherin decided to focus on the defense of individual freedom in the economic sphere. This implied making private law and the space of freedom it protected more independent from political authority than had been the case in Hegel's philosophy which, despite making many serious reservations, preached the doctrine of the state's superiority.

That meaningful shift finds a clear reflection in Chicherin's stand on human rights.<sup>20</sup> In his book on national representation, he firmly rejected the liberalism of natural rights which treated human rights as natural, pre-political and inalienable. In fact, he argued, people acquire rights only as members of a certain political body – the rights being a product of historical development, any attempt at making them absolute will lead only to the institutionalization of anarchy. Fifteen years later, in *Property and the State*, the emphasis on a political foundation of all legal rights has been replaced by accentuating the basically non-political attributes of civil law and the "natural" character of its rudimentary principles, such as personal immunity and private property, freedom of making contracts, keeping promises etc. Chicherin did not claim that those principles (especially the fundamental rule of formal equality before law) had always been expressed in positive regulations – in other words, they need not have been sanctioned by the supreme political authority. He stressed, however, that there existed some "eternal legal principles" that were "inscribed in people's hearts" and served as the ideal norms for historically shaped systems of positive law.<sup>21</sup>

Another step toward releasing law from the demands of politics and changing historical circumstances was Chicherin's acknowledgment of the non-relative and unchangeable nature of the basic principles of modern civil law. He found his crowning argument on the issue in Hegel's idea of "the end of historical development." According to Chicherin, this was precisely what had happened with law: its historical development had reached its summit, all the ideal norms included in the notion of law had been revealed and clearly

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20 It has been observed by P. Struve (*Na razniie t'emy*, p. 543) who, however, could not have been more wrong when he ascribed the shift to the influence of Positivism.

21 B.N. Chicherin, *Sobstvennost' i gosudarstvo*, vol. 1, p. 96.

formulated. “It is impossible to move any further in this domain. The ideal has been attained.”<sup>22</sup>

Hence his conclusion was that at this modern stage of historical development no political system could ignore basic human rights. This implied that in all countries, the authority of the government should be *restricted* by civil law and the rights of individuals, as well as by the rights of various associations, such as commercial companies, churches etc. In other words, respect for the law demanded that state authority not be extended to the domain of non-political (“private”) relations between persons.<sup>23</sup> Until recently, civic rights had not been a “natural” and inalienable thing, but now it was obvious that they ensue from the very essence of law and should thus be *made* universally observed and inalienable.

## Philosophy of Law

In keeping with the spirit of classical liberalism, Chicherin treated law as a system of general rules of conduct protecting individual freedom and, at the same time, setting its definite limits. He obviously did not agree with the doctrine of legal Positivism blurring the distinction between law in the normative sense and utilitarian decrees of state authority. He observed that many theorists defined law as a means to achieve particular goals and believed that attitude to be a symptom of a deep crisis of legal culture. He tirelessly pointed out that law possessed an intrinsic value and its own “idea,” best seen in civil law.

In his own works on jurisprudence, Chicherin features in two different roles: (1) of a historian and great expert on the history of Russian law, and (2) of a philosopher employing the method that could be called a phenomenological insight into the gist of law as such. In the present context, only Chicherin’s philosophy of law will be of interest to us. It focuses on the relationship between law and freedom, law and utilitarian objectives, and law and morality.

Law, Chicherin argued, is freedom determined (i.e., limited) by rules.<sup>24</sup> “Freedom” in that definition obviously signified the morally neutral external freedom, rather than the “supreme freedom” of German idealism consisting in rational and moral self-determination. The supreme, moral freedom is the freedom of the good, and yet, law cannot demand moral perfection of people –

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22 B.N. Chicherin, *Kurs gosudarstvennoy nauki*, vol. 2, Moscow 1896, p. 424.

23 B.N. Chicherin, *Sobstvennost’ i gosudarstvo*, vol. 2, Moscow 1883, p. 214.

24 See B.N. Chicherin, *Filosofia prava*, Moscow 1900, p. 84.

on the contrary: law-defended freedom of the individual included also, within described limits, freedom of the immoral and the egotist, i.e., the freedom to do evil. That is why, to Chicherin, “the fullest expression of legal principles, free from any external contamination” was the private, civil law, or law of a modern civic society.<sup>25</sup>

This, essentially, echoed Hegelianism, since Hegel, too, believed that private law was the purest expression of the idea of law, clearly distinct from public law, realizing objectives of the state defined as the “reality of the ethical idea.” Unlike most Hegelians, however, Chicherin hence drew the conclusion that public law must not collide with the private one and no goal of the state, be it the highest, justified violation of the legally sanctioned freedom of the individual. In *Property and the State*, he justified this view with metaphysical personalism, obviously polemic toward Hegel’s metaphysical impersonalism:

Metaphysics, while it seeks expression of freedom in law, must admit that the real source of freedom is not a universal, impersonal spirit, but an individual person, his inner self-determination. Therefore, it must not allow for private law to be absorbed by public law. From the metaphysical point of view, private law is the true domain of freedom; public law soars above it not in order to annihilate it, but in order to guard it against violation.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, the inviolability of private law, or true law, got sanctioned “metaphysically.” And the same “metaphysical” restriction was put on state authority. For, by Chicherin’s reasoning, omnipotence and omnipresence contradicted the very “idea” of the state, and so, the highest state authority must not impinge on the autonomy of civic society.

Chicherin was, naturally, aware of the fact that metaphysical idealism was not immune to temptations of this kind. In his *History of Political Doctrines*, he illustrated its succumbing to them, recalling Plato’s utopia and arguing that a consistently teleological vision of the state inevitably led to complete enslavement of the individual. He counterpointed that utopia with Aristotle’s *Politics*, recommending especially some of its themes, such as: the theory of mixed government, the concept of politics as the art of moderation, or the recognition of the middle class as the social basis of freedom. He also warned against attempts at resuscitating the Platonic cult of the state by German idealism, evident especially in the Socialist-bound visions of Fichte and K. Ch.F. Krause.

No less threatening to law and freedom were, according to Chicherin, the manifestly anti-metaphysical trends in 19<sup>th</sup> century thought, such as Bentham’s

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25 B.N. Chicherin, *Sobstvennost’ i gosudarstvo*, vol. 1, pp. 88-89.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 90.

utilitarianism or naturalist Positivism, and especially juridical Positivism. These were the trends that made law instrumental, subjecting it to the realization of practical, socially defined objectives, and thus cancelling the liberal principle of leaving the choice of objectives to individual subjects. The tendency was – according to Chicherin – especially strikingly evident in Ihering’s “jurisprudence of interests” and Bismarck’s social legislation that subordinated law to social practice.

Chicherin’s uncompromising hostility toward social politics resulted from his seeing of politics as a series of irreversible concessions for Socialism. And in his principled hostility toward Socialism, the author of *Property and the State* had no equals among 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian thinkers. He defined Socialism as a system that combined extreme oppression with extreme ineffectiveness<sup>27</sup> – a system in which every individual becomes a civil servant and everything is based on prohibition, which makes it absolutely irreconcilable with freedom. A system like that contradicted Chicherin’s vision of law, as well as his views on the society and the state. The society as a field of interactions among independent persons would no longer exist in Socialism, while the state would transform itself into a supra-state, directly administrating all the affairs of its population. That drastic expansion of the state’s activity would entail a drastic departure from its very idea: the modern state which was the ultimate form of unity in multiplicity would be substituted with a form of primitive, unmediated unity, irreconcilable with the autonomy of its constituting elements. That, according to Chicherin, would be a catastrophic regression – a retreat into the tribal-type unity that preceded the differentiating process of historical progress.<sup>28</sup>

Chicherin was fully aware of the fact that social reforms are often enforced not so much by the demands of the economy and other utilitarian factors, as by a growing power of the moral ideal of social justice. That is why he paid so much attention to the problem of a proper relationship between morality and jurisdiction, as well as morality and the state.

Chicherin saw an especially striking manifestation of Socialism’s backward tendency in its odd, yet essential, similarity to a theocracy. Both Socialism and theocracy make no distinction between the legal and the moral, and both accept the realization of moral goals by means of state coercion. Chicherin was deeply convinced that it could lead only to “the worst possible tyranny.”<sup>29</sup> Law, he argued, should be distinctly separated from morality, for any mixing of juridical and moral laws leads to the undermining of the very foundations of both

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27 B.N. Chicherin, *Kurs gosudarstvennoy nauki*, vol. 2, p. 193.

28 B.N. Chicherin, *Sobstvennost’ i gosudarstvo*, vol. 1, p. 434.

29 B.N. Chicherin, *Mistitsizm v nauke*, Moscow 1880, p. 60.



morality and law. Law is not a “minimum of morality” (as Leibniz and Russian Vladimir Soloviev had believed) – rather, Thomasiaus was right when he claimed that morality ensues from love and cannot be reconciled with legal coercion.<sup>30</sup> Law is concerned with the external doings of men – and not with the salvation of their souls. A morality that tries to institutionalize itself by legal means becomes an instrument of immoral and lawless oppression. Juridical law defines the external limits of freedom, while moral law defines the internal directives of duty. A legal definition of the limits of freedom does not cancel the autonomy of an individual – just the opposite: it marks off a certain sphere within which the individual must not be subjected to any kind of pressure and is allowed to be both moral and immoral. A legal definition of a moral duty, however, is irreconcilable with freedom of conscience – and thus with morality itself. It is also discordant with true law, since freedom of conscience is inseparable from the very idea of law.

Even in his early book on representative government, Chicherin stressed that freedom of conscience was a “basic human right, independent from social conditions.”<sup>31</sup> He believed both legal coercion and organized psychological pressure to contradict freedom of conscience. Morality, he wrote, must not imitate law while striving to impose its norms – it ought to realize its goals by setting an example, rather than by creating an atmosphere of enforced conformism.

And yet, Chicherin’s standpoint had nothing in common with the Positivist thesis that the content of law was decreed exclusively by the will of its legislator and therefore law could not be evaluated in terms of “rightness” and “justice.” For a better understanding of his ideas, let us summon Kant’s distinction between “justice” (a principle of law) and “virtue” measured by love of one’s neighbor. The only difference between Chicherin and Kant was that the Russian thinker reserved the term “morality” for the ethics of love, treating “justice” as an entirely separate domain of law. Law must be “just,” i.e., it must guarantee to everyone his due (*suum cuique tribuere*) – yet, juridical law must not be confused with the moral law of love which demands sacrifice for the other, since that mistake had “always brought mankind to the most fatal error.”

Chicherin’s argumentation was aimed at many thinkers, both Russian and non-Russian. In *Mysticism in Science*, Chicherin directed it against Soloviev’s utopia of “free theocracy.” He must have also been thinking of the Slavophile ideal of a unanimous community, as well as Aksakov’s criticism of law as an

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30 B.N. Chicherin, *Istoriia politicheskikh ucheny*, vol. 2. Moscow 1872, pp. 195-210, 229.

31 B.N. Chicherin, *O narodnom predstavitelstvie*, Moscow 1866, pp. 490-491.

“external truth” that made possession of the soul redundant.<sup>32</sup> In a way, Chicherin’s concept of law was also a warning against conservative, anti-individualistic interpretations of Hegelianism – as well as, obviously, a criticism of the conservative-Romantic trends in German thought. Chicherin also held a negative and contemptuous opinion of biological organicism in sociology.

Obviously, the right wing was not the main object of Chicherin’s attacks. He saw the greatest danger in Socialism – in the Socialist instrumentalization of law that often stemmed from an erratically defined ethical perfectionism and in the Socialist idea of “social justice.” He predicted that Socialist transformations would result in a total bureaucratization of life and in the establishment of an Oriental-type of despotism. He grew increasingly pessimistic. His memoirs end in a prophecy that the victory of Socialism in Europe is near and that it will bring on a “boundless despotism of the masses” and a complete destruction of civilization.<sup>33</sup>

Chicherin’s view on social justice situated him on the extreme right of liberalism. The state, he believed, should not realize distributive justice (as opposed to the commutative justice which was the proper concern of law), since that would imply increasing the role of arbitrariness and coercion in social life.<sup>34</sup> The rich had a moral obligation to help the poor, but the poor had no legal title to demand that help. The government could assist the needy only in extreme situations on a philanthropic basis. It must neither institutionalize that assistance as an object of legal entitlements, nor demand extra money from taxpayers to finance that end.<sup>35</sup>

At the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, ideas like that were, obviously, rather anachronistic. European liberalism was becoming increasingly socially-oriented, admitting that freedom of the individual required not only the absence of arbitrarily imposed restrictions, but also a materially secured chance of

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32 Cf. Aksakov’s statement: “Law aspires to such perfection that, indeed, man will not need to be moral at all, but just to act morally, or in accordance with law. Its aim is to introduce so perfect an order that man will no longer need the soul, that even soulless, people will act morally and be decent men.” Hence, domination of law in social law “undermines man’s moral dignity, teaching him to act without inner moral inspiration” (K.S. Aksakov, *Polnoye sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1, Moscow 1861, p. 52).

33 B.N. Chicherin, *Vospominaniia*, vol. 4, Moscow 1934, p. 301.

34 Chicherin admitted, however, that state interventionism in the area of the economy might be helpful in backward countries: the more backward a country, the greater the role of its government in conducting economic modernization (cf. V.D. Zorkin, *Iz istorii burzhuzno-liberalnoy politicheskoy mysli Rossii poloviny XIX-nachala XX vekov*, Moscow 1975, pp. 118-121).

35 B.N. Chicherin, *Kurs gosudarstvennoy nauki*, vol. 2, pp. 181-186.

unrestrained development. Russian liberalism was undergoing an analogous evolution.<sup>36</sup>

## Metaphysics and the Philosophy of History

It was not until the 1870s that Chicherin had commenced his writer's activity in the field of philosophy, mainly to oppose the dominating Positivist orientation. A systematic account of his philosophy, combined with polemics with the theorists of Positivism, is contained in *Science and Religion* (1879). More than a dozen years later, he published *Positive Philosophy and the Unity of Science* (1892), entirely devoted to a critical analysis of Comte's philosophy (which he valued much higher than Mill's or Spencer's). Attacking Positivism from the position of Hegelianism – an “absolute rationalism,”<sup>37</sup> by his own account – he firmly renounced the mystical idealism of Soloviev, devoting an entire book – *Mysticism in Science* (1880) – to its criticism. While he admitted Soloviev's superiority over the “narrow-minded ignorance of the Positivists,”<sup>38</sup> he pointed out that Soloviev's ideas defied logic and facts, and that by encroaching on the area of religious epiphany, they compromised philosophy, supplying arguments for its Positivist critics. In *Foundations of Logic and Metaphysics* (1894), Chicherin announced that the period of Positivism's defeat and a new flourishing of metaphysics had already begun, adding, however, that metaphysics itself ought to become a positive science.<sup>39</sup>

He believed dialectics to be the “supreme philosophical science,” seeing the moving force of any development in the “inner contradiction of principles,” while Hegel's *Logic* was to him the final word of the true and great philosophy. He named the Absolute as both the starting and the terminating point of dialectic development, claiming that the decisive argument against Positivism was the human mind's aspiration to soar above the relative into the absolute – and even in the very existence of the idea of the Absolute. Opposing empiricism and materialism, he also argued that the notion of a “rule” without which any science would be impossible implied the existence of the universal Mind, since it was impossible to establish rules on the basis of experience alone. He used the

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36 B.N. Chicherin, *Mysticism v nauke*, p. 2. See also, G. Planty-Bonjour, *Hegel et la pensee philosophique en Russie 1830-1917*, La Haye 1974, pp. 245-255.

37 Cf. D.I. Chizhevsky, *Gegel v Rossii*, Paris 1939, p. 291.

38 B.N. Chicherin, *Mysticism v nauke*, p. 2. See also: G. Planty-Bonjour, *Hegel et la pensee philosophique en Russie 1830-1917*, La Haye 1974, pp. 245-255.

39 B.N. Chicherin, *Osnovaniia logiki i metafiziki*, Moscow 1894, p. 2.

traditional term “metaphysics” to denote the ontological aspect of dialectic laws and, in his polemics with the Positivists, forcibly claimed that the entire world was ruled by metaphysical (*aka* dialectic) laws and that metaphysics alone could bring the desired unity into science.<sup>40</sup>

Yet, Chicherin’s Hegelianism was far from orthodox. On the one hand, he considered Hegel’s “absolute rationalism” a unilateral system, holding that rationalism and realism (of which Positivism, in this rendering, was a part) ought to combine in “universalism.” On the other hand – and more importantly – he went further than Hegel toward reconciling philosophy with religion by identifying the universal Reason with personal God and (contrary to Hegel) by naming religion – i.e., the “concrete unity”- as superior to philosophy. This implied a departure from Hegel’s “theological evolutionism,” i.e., the concept of the Absolute in the process of formation, attaining self-knowledge through man.

In his *Memoirs*, Chicherin motivated his views by his own religious experience that had made him feel the transcendence of the Absolute. “I realized – he wrote – that if the spirit is the final form of the Absolute, then it is also the initial form – an inexhaustible, omnipotent force, the source of all existence.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, the philosopher stopped halfway between Hegel’s immanentism and the traditional theist concept of a transcendental Creator of the world. Interpreting the dogma of the Holy Trinity in philosophical terms, he argued that the Absolute was simultaneously immanent and transcendent in relation to the world.<sup>42</sup> As Force, Reason (the Word) and Spirit, it was endowed with personality, the only impersonal moment of the Absolute being the matter – an element opposed to Reason – which, however, also attained a rational consciousness within man.

Naming the four moments of the Absolute – the creative force, then its ensuing contradictory reason and matter, and, finally, the spirit as the mediated final unity – exemplified, according to Chicherin, the fundamental law of dialectics. This meant another significant departure by the author of *Science and religion* from orthodox Hegelianism. According to Chicherin, Hegel had committed an error by starting his *Logic* from the totally nondescript notion of “pure being” – while the thinking process must start at “something,” a definite being, a concrete unity of the general and the individual.<sup>43</sup> Secondly, the rhythm of dialectic development ought to include four moments, rather than Hegel’s three: the original unity, its ensuing contradiction of abstract generality and

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40 B.N. Chicherin, *Polozhitelnaya filosofii i yedinstvo nauki*, Moscow 1892, p. 318.

41 B.N. Chicherin, *Vospominaniia*, Moscow 1929, p. 2, 148.

42 B.N. Chicherin, *Nauka i religii*, Moscow 1901, pp. 95-98.

43 *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

abstract individuality (moments two and three) and, finally, their ultimate, superior unity (moment four, after which the cycle of development starts again). Discovering this pattern in all the examined phenomena was Chicherin's main objective, as well as the cognitive proof. Chicherin was convinced that his own modification of Hegel's dialectics was a historic discovery, resulting from the application of two basic mental acts – analysis and synthesis – to dialectics of development, as well as coordinating dialectics with the Aristotelian theory of the four causes. The efficient cause, Chicherin believed, found its equivalent in the moment of the original unity (creative force in the concept of the Absolute), the formal and material causes corresponded to, respectively, abstract generality and abstract individuality (Reason and the matter in the concept of the Absolute), while the final cause had its equivalent in the new, superior unity (Spirit in the concept of the Absolute).

Let us now look at how that model applied to the philosophy of history which Chicherin identified with the philosophy of philosophy's history. Key to the identification was Chicherin's conviction that, with ideas being the moving force and the quintessence of history, the history of philosophy was crucial to understanding history, rather than the other way round.<sup>44</sup>

Humanity – Chicherin argued – has been developing from the original unity, through division, to the ultimate unity. Each of those three great phases of development splits into the synthetic (religious) period and the analytic (philosophical) one, the latter being a transition to a new synthesis. Each of the two periods, in turn, is marked by one or more cycles encompassing the development of the four basic moments of thought and being, namely, the original unity, or effective cause; the two opposites, or the formal and material causes; and the final unity, or final cause. Development within a cycle may follow either the subjective way – i.e., from the original unity to the ultimate one, through opposition of matter and form; or the objective way – i.e., from the formal cause to the material cause, through opposition of the effective and the final causes. In its development theretofore, mankind had already passed through two of the great phases of development: the phase of original unity and the phase of division. The synthetic period of the first phase was marked by the growth of natural religions, while the analytic period (transitory to the next phase) was marked by the growth of Greek philosophy, from universalism through realism to rationalism. The fall of Antiquity was accompanied by transition to the second phase – that of division, in which the initial, synthetic period, was represented by the Christian Middle Ages. The analytic period of the

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44 Ibid., pp. 129, 243.

second phase brought the development of modern philosophy, from rationalism through realism to universalism (i.e., in reverse order to the development of ancient philosophy). Humanity was now going through the stage of realism that expressed itself in the twofold advantage of the individual over the general: in materialistic realism (i.e., materialism and Positivism) and in spiritualistic realism (i.e., spiritualistic monadology). Confident that the knowledge of dialectic laws allowed for infallibly prognosticating the future, Chicherin prophesied the imminent coming of the stage of philosophical universalism that would pave the road for a new grand religious synthesis. Humanity that had started from God would thus go back to God. The original religious synthesis was a revelation of Force, or God the Father; the second, Christian synthesis – the synthesis of the stage of division – was a revelation of the Word, or God the Son; the third, final synthesis, would be a revelation of the Spirit, or the third hypostasis of the Trinity.<sup>45</sup>

Chicherin looked on his own philosophy as embodying the transition to that ultimate stage of thinking history. Nevertheless, he became increasingly doubtful about a happy ending for history.

## **Chicherin's Place in the History of Russian Thought**

Despite Chicherin's own sense of abandonment, the connection of his social philosophy with the Russian intellectual tradition is all but profound and clearly evident today. Chicherin's conservative liberalism was, after all, the culminating point of the Russian tradition of state-controlled liberalism as articulated in Speransky's reform projects, historically justified by Kavelin and introduced by the "enlightened bureaucrats" of the Great Reform period. The tradition emphasized the modernizing function of absolute monarchy which liberated the individual from the narrow traditionalist structures; it pointed out the priority of civic rights over political rights, advising a focus on civil law and maintaining caution in respect to representational government – in short, it opposed political radicalism, holding that Russia ought to first finish the juridical, economic and self-administrational reforms, before she started thinking about a political reform that would overthrow absolutism.

The order was obviously reversed in the revolutionary years of 1905-1906 by the party of Constitutional Democrats committed to fighting for a parliamentary monarchy, i.e., for a system directly opposed to the "historical system." That was one of the reasons why Chicherin as a thinker could not be

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45 Ibid., pp. 444-451.

popular with the liberal politicians of the time. However, further developments proved that the Kadets' strategy of confrontation made the liberals excessively dependent on the radical left, which destabilized the political situation, facilitating the activities of revolutionary extremists.<sup>46</sup>

Chicherin's metaphysical idealism did not win much respect in Russia, overshadowed by the enormous success of Vladimir Soloviev's religious philosophy. Still, it is worth noting that, apart from being an epigone of Hegel's classical idealism, Chicherin was also a pioneer of the anti-Positivist breakthrough in Russia. The fact has been strongly emphasized by Soloviev's pupil and monographer Prince Evgeny Trubetskoi in his memoirs. Trubetskoi calls Chicherin a "monumental figure" of an impressive integrity of mind and heart.<sup>47</sup> The opinion was shared by Marian Zdziechowski who considered Chicherin "the noblest of the Russian thinkers" and the greatest rival of Soloviev in promoting the rebirth of metaphysical idealism in Russia.<sup>48</sup>

Chicherin's place in the history of Russian liberalism is thus a specific combination of its three trends: the state-controlled liberalism of the 1840s, the economic liberalism – which in his books (especially in *Property and the State*) was given a profound, albeit slightly overdue, philosophical justification – and the so-called new liberalism, connected with the anti-Positivist crisis and the so-called religious-philosophical renaissance in Russia.<sup>49</sup> To the latter, Chicherin contributed (especially in *Philosophy and Law*) by justifying the necessity of a metaphysical grounding for individual rights, making references to Kantianism and the tradition of the natural law amongst other things. It needs to be stressed, however, that, in the philosophy of law, the coincidence of Chicherin's thought with that of neo-idealist Russian liberalism had distinctly drawn limits: the liberals of the turn of the century accepted Soloviev's idea of "the right to a

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46 Leonard Schapiro hence concluded that, in fact, the Kadets had been radicals, rather than liberals, while the true Russian liberal tradition had been represented by Chicherin, rather than Pavel Milukov. See, L. Schapiro, "The Vekhi Group and the Mystique of Revolution," in: Schapiro, L., *Russian Studies*, ed. Ellen Dahrendorf, London 1986, pp. 89-90.

47 E.N. Trubetskoi, *Vospominaniia*, pp. 118-122.

48 See, M. Zdziechowski, *Wybór pism*, Krakow 1993, pp. 321-322, 483. Zdziechowski published "Wspomnienie pośmiertne" (In memoriam) on Chicherin (*Przegląd Polski*, vol. 151, 1904) and an essay on his philosophy ("Filozofia Chicherina," *Świat Słowiński*, No 2, 1907, reprinted in: *U opoki mesjanizmu. Nowe szkice z psychologii narodów słowińskich*, Lvov 1912).

49 Cf. Randall Poole, "Philosophy and Politics in the Russian Liberation Movement," in: *Problems of Idealism. Essays in Russian Social Philosophy*, ed. R.A. Poole, New Haven-London 2003, pp. 1-78.

respectable existence,” thereby distancing themselves from the “old-liberal” criticism of the social and economic rights of the individual.<sup>50</sup>

From the historical perspective, Chicherin’s place in the all-European history of liberalism becomes evident, too – as probably the greatest 19<sup>th</sup> century theorist of liberalism east of the Elbe.

Notwithstanding its Hegelian genesis, Chicherin’s liberalism in many respects confirms the suggestive reconstruction of “classical liberalism” by Frederic Hayek.<sup>51</sup> The main coincidence between the two thinkers is their concept of law as combined general rules of the right conduct, serving no utilitarian purpose (*end-independent*) and independent from the legislator’s arbitrary will (criticism of legal Positivism) – yet clearly distinct from the norms of morality. Chicherin, however, corrects Hayek’s model, shifting the accent from the free market (of which, by the way, he thoroughly approves) to law itself by arguing that a good law is more important than both the mechanisms of political democracy (a point made by Hayek) and the market which – unless it is constrained by a strong legal frame – fails to create social bonds and serve liberalism. Law, indeed, enables co-operation of independent individuals, strangers to one another, subject to neither hierarchical structures, nor personal dependencies. The idea of the Russian thinker is thus marked by a strong emphasis on the state’s role in liberating individuals from the stifling dependencies of the traditionalist kind that Hayek has overlooked – being free, Chicherin wrote, “is possible only within the state.”<sup>52</sup> Last but not least, there is Chicherin’s conviction that law is founded on freedom of conscience and the worldview neutrality of the state – and that law thus conceived is more vital to individual freedom than economic freedom. Hence, we have a good reason to consider Chicherin’s social philosophy as a serious argument against identifying classical liberalism with an unconditional apology for the free market, let alone with the conservative moralizing of the “new right.”

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50 This was especially true about Pavel Novgorodtsev who, incidentally, believed himself to be the continuator of the last phase of Chicherin’s idea (cf. A. Walicki, *Filozofia prawa rosyjskiego liberalizmu*, pp. 304-305).

51 See F.A. Hayek, “Liberalism” (entry for the Italian *Enciclopedia del Novecento*, 1973) in: Hayek, F.A., *New Studies in Philosophy, Politics, Economics and the History of Ideas*, London-Henley 1978, pp. 119-151.

52 B.N. Chicherin, *Opyty po istorii russkovo prava*, Moscow 1858, p. 368.



## Chapter 16

# Between Populism and Marxism

In the chapter on Populism in the 1870s mention was made of the Populist reception of Marxism. Marx's description of the cruelties accompanying primitive accumulation and the Industrial Revolution horrified the Populists and confirmed them in their belief that the price to be paid for capitalist progress was too high and that all efforts should be directed toward enabling Russia to bypass capitalism. At the same time the Populists of the first half of the 1870s did not notice any contradictions between Marxist theories (which they frequently quoted) and "subjective sociology," or the notion of Russia's distinctive development according to "native" principles. They thought of Marx chiefly as an economist, a critic of capitalism and the man responsible for the theory of surplus value, which they greatly admired for its exposure of the mechanism of capitalist exploitation. Even the Bakuninite wing, which followed Bakunin himself in accusing Marx of political opportunism, was inclined to accept Marxism as an economic theory. One of that wing's most representative members, Jakob Stefanovich, wrote: "Marxism as a theory – not as membership in the Western Socialist Party and espousal of its practical policy – does not exclude Populism."<sup>1</sup>

Engels's polemic with Tkachev (1875) drew attention to the fact that Marxism was also a theory of social development which postulated that an indispensable condition of socialism was the high-level development of productive forces attained under capitalism. The evolution of every economic formation, Marx wrote in the Preface to the first German edition of *Capital*, is a process of natural history, objective and independent of the human will: a society "can neither clear by bold leaps nor remove by legal enactments the successive phases of its normal development." The laws of social development operate with "iron necessity," and backward countries must pass through the

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1 See Grupa "Osvobozhdenie truda" (M – L, 1926), no. 4, p. 196. For more information about this early stage of the Populist reception of Marxism, see A. L. Reuel, *Russkaia ekonomicheskaiia mysl' 60-70-kh gg. XIX veka i marksizm* (M, 1956), and V. F. Pustarnakov, *'Kapital' Marksa i filofskaia mysl' v Rossii* (M, 1974). Cf. also A. Walicki, *The Controversy Over Capitalism*, pp. 132-39.

same phases that the advanced countries have already completed: “The country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future.”<sup>2</sup>

The Populists found this a proposition hard to accept. The case was put most dramatically by Mikhailovsky in his article “Karl Marx Arraigned before Mr. Zhukovsky” (1877). For the Western European socialist, Mikhailovsky wrote, Marx’s theory of social development provides a scientific explanation of the past and arguments for the inevitability of socialism; its acceptance, therefore, does not involve a moral dilemma, a cleavage between ideal and reality. Yet a Russian socialist who came to accept the correctness of Marxian theory would be in a different position: for him the description of capitalist development would be an image of Russia’s immediate future, and Marxian historical determinism would force him to become reconciled to the tragic aspects of capitalist progress, with all its painful consequences for the masses. As a socialist he would have to accept the need for capitalist development, and therefore the ruin of his own ideal. Faced with the choice of either participating in the progress implemented by the “knights of accumulation” or struggling for the realization of his ideals (knowing that “iron necessity” had doomed this struggle to failure), he would no doubt reject both choices and become merely a passive onlooker – a dispassionate observer of social processes.<sup>3</sup>

Marx himself disputed this point of view in a letter to the editor of *Notes of the Fatherland* (*Otechestvennye Zapiski*), the journal in which Mikhailovsky’s article had been published. Though in the end Marx did not in fact submit the letter, he stated that the process of accumulation described in *Capital* only concerned Western Europe during the period of transition from feudalism to capitalism, and could not be mechanically extended to other parts of the world; processes that might be strikingly similar but that took place in different historical circumstances could have entirely different outcomes. Every separate sequence of historical-economic development must be investigated on its own merits and compared with others; one can never arrive at scientific explanation of a concrete historical development “By the universal passport of a general historico-philosophical theory, the supreme virtue of which consists in being super-historical.”<sup>4</sup>

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2 K. Marx, *Capital* (Eng.-lang. ed.; M, 1954), p. 9.

3 N. K. Mikhailovsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (4th ed.; St. Petersburg 1909), vol. 4, pp. 167-73.

4 K. Marx and F. Engels, *Correspondence, 1846-1895* (London 1936), p. 354.

This letter was only published in 1886.<sup>5</sup> By this time Russian Marxists (especially Plekhanov) had worked out their own theories, in which the thesis of the inevitability of the “capitalist phase” was given special emphasis. The fact that Marx himself had doubts on the matter was passed over in silence by Plekhanov, and its significance was belittled. In the 1890s, when industrialization in Russia was beginning to make obvious headway, Engels ascribed these doubts to tactical considerations: Marx, he thought, had been reluctant to dampen the ardor of the Russian revolutionaries, whose courage was kept alive by faith in the future socialist possibilities of the peasant commune.<sup>6</sup>

Engels’s explanation is contradicted by the three drafts of a letter Marx wrote to Vera Zasulich in 1881, which make it clear that he both believed Russia might bypass the capitalist phase and considered the issue to be of great theoretical significance. A detailed analysis of Marx’s views on the future of the underdeveloped countries does not, however, fall within the scope of this book. For the purpose of this study it need only be said that Marx gave this problem very brief consideration and that his comments, though extraordinarily penetrating, were not generally known; his best-known works, on the other hand, contained formulations suggesting that capitalism was an inevitable natural stage through which every country must pass.

Marxist views began to make headway among the Russian revolutionaries as the latter became increasingly disillusioned with the methods of struggle formerly used and were no longer able to overlook the obvious progress capitalism was making in agriculture. The break with Populism was neither easy nor painless, and the radical polarization of attitudes was often preceded by attempts to reconcile Marxism with the old dream of bypassing the capitalist stage.

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5 In 1884 Engels gave Marx’s letter to the “Emancipation of Labor” group. Plekhanov’s group refrained from publishing the letter, but it appeared two years later on the pages of the *Populist Messenger* of the “People’s Will” (no. 5, Geneva, 1886) and was later reprinted in a legal journal in Russia (*Juridical Messenger*, no. 10, 1888). The Populist publicists (Mikhailovsky, Vorontsov, and Krivenko) interpreted it as proof that Marx himself had not shared the view of his Russian followers and immediately took advantage of it in their polemics with the Russian Marxists.

6 Cf. Perepiska K. Marksa i F. Engelsa s russkimi politicheskimi deiatel’iami (M, 1951), p. 296.

## Plekhanov's Road to Marxism

Of particular interest in this context is the ideological evolution of GEORGY PLEKHANOV (1856-1918),<sup>7</sup> who was associated in his youth with the orthodox Populist revolutionary movement (orthodox in the sense of advocating activities solely “among the people” and “through the people”). In his article “The Law of Society’s Economic Development and the Tasks of Socialism in Russia,” published in the journal *Land and Freedom (Zemlia i Volia)* in January 1879, Plekhanov attempted to interpret Marxian theory in such a way as to bring it into line with the program of the “Land and Freedom” organization.

The article opened with an attack on the followers of Tkachev and their theory of the “seizure of power” – a highly significant fact in the light of Plekhanov’s future political evolution. Even then, while still a spokesman for the orthodox Populists, Plekhanov (who was to remain uncompromisingly hostile to all forms of “Blanquism” for the rest of his life) turned to Marxism for arguments against what he thought of as the political adventurism of his opponents. The times have passed, he wrote, when people thought that in order to establish a better social system it was enough to “form a conspiracy, seize power, and shower one’s subjects with a number of benevolent decrees.” Views of this type were an expression of the *theological* phase in sociology; at present, however, sociological understanding had entered the *positive* phase, represented in socialist theory by Marx and Engels (Rodbertus and Diihring were also mentioned). The author of *Capital*, Plekhanov continued, had shown that a country’s social system was determined by economic development, and that society was governed by laws that could not be changed at will. This did not mean that one must agree with liberal publicists who used these arguments to suggest that there was no point in struggling for socialism in backward Russia. The laws of economic development were not by any means the same everywhere; “history was not a monotonous or mechanical process”; and Karl Marx did not belong to the “category of persons who would be glad to stretch mankind on the Procrustean bed of ‘universal laws.’”

At this point Plekhanov – probably without realizing it – repeated Tkachev’s chief argument that socialism was possible in Russia only because capitalism had not yet made headway there. Marx tells us, he declared, that when a society “has got upon the right track of the natural laws of its movement” it can “neither skip the natural phases of its development nor remove them by legal enactment”; Russia, however, Plekhanov insisted, had not yet entered upon this disastrous

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7 The most important monograph on Plekhanov in English is S. H. Baron, *Plekhanov: The Father of Russian Marxism* (Stanford, Calif. 1963).

track. Western Europe was forced to develop along capitalist lines because the village commune there had disintegrated in the struggle with feudalism; in Russia, though, the village commune had been preserved relatively intact. In Europe the objective basis of socialism was the “socialization of labor,” introduced by capitalism; in Russia it was the communal possession of the land. The socialization of labor, on the other hand, (i.e. the communal cultivation of the land) would come about in agriculture with the advance of technology and the introduction of agricultural machinery. The Russian people were capable of undertaking the spontaneous organization of all aspects of social life according to socialist principles, and were only prevented from doing so by the interference and demoralizing influence of the state (at this point the views of Plekhanov and Tkachev begin to diverge, since the latter, as we know, had no faith in popular “spontaneity”). Even if the government succeeded in destroying the institution of the village commune, Plekhanov concluded, the collectivist ideals and traditions of the masses would take some time to change. The program of the “Land and Freedom” organization therefore rested on firm foundations and did not need to be amended.

Unfortunately for Plekhanov’s case, his argument rests on a mistranslation (and misinterpretation) of the phrase quoted from Marx. The correct and unabridged version reads as follows:

[...] Even when a society has got upon the right track for the discovery of the natural laws of its movement – and it is the ultimate aim of this work to lay bare the economic law of motion of modern society – it can neither clear by bold leaps nor remove by legal enactments the obstacles offered by the successive phases of its normal development.<sup>8</sup>

It is obvious that “to get upon the right track *for the discovery* of the natural laws” is not the same thing as “to get upon the right track of the natural laws,” which Plekhanov interpreted as “coming within the sphere of influence of” these laws. What Marx intended to say in *Capital* is that even a scientific understanding of the laws of economic development cannot change the natural sequence of a society’s development. Plekhanov’s conclusion that the laws of capitalist development did not apply in Russia because she had not yet come within the orbit of capitalism was therefore based on a misunderstanding.

If we take Plekhanov’s line of reasoning to its logical conclusion and ask what he thought would happen if Russia did finally enter the orbit of capitalism, we can only give a pessimistic answer. Tkachev would have said that it was all a matter of the relative strength of the two conflicting forces – the spontaneous

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8 Marx, *Capital*, p. 10.

capitalist tendency and the disciplined revolutionary vanguard. For Plekhanov, who disapproved of political conspiracies and of the very idea of opposing natural laws of development, the problem was a much more difficult one. Recognizing capitalism as a natural tendency meant turning his back on Populism. By a peculiar historical paradox, Plekhanov's break with the classical Populist thesis about bypassing capitalism resulted from his orthodox position in the Populist movement, i.e. from his opposition to "Blanquism," which he attempted to continue in the "Black Reparation" organization after the split among members of "Land and Freedom." One might even say that Plekhanov became a Social Democrat because he wanted to remain true to the old "Land and Freedom" program, which proclaimed that "Revolutions are made by the masses and prepared by history."

From this point of view it was crucial for Plekhanov to establish whether (and to what extent) capitalism could be considered a "natural" tendency in the Russian economy. It was with some agitation, therefore, that he studied the statistics collected by Orlov on the development of capitalist relations in the Russian countryside.

His observation of the headway made by capitalism in Russia was not, however, the only reason why Plekhanov rejected the Populist conception of bypassing capitalism. The break was determined in equal measure by the lessons learned in the course of Populist revolutionary agitation—i.e., that socialist propaganda was more likely to appeal to the urban working class than to peasants living in the village commune, and that the first task of Russian socialists must be to overthrow the tsarist system. Members of the "People's Will" were the first to draw these conclusions—which of course meant giving up the characteristic Populist disregard for political struggle—but they were divided on the goals to be achieved. Some wanted to seize power (the Tikhomirov faction), whereas others (led by Zhelabov) wanted to introduce a constitution that would safeguard democratic freedoms. Plekhanov, who was one of the last to cling to "apolitical" Populism, rejected Tikhomirov's program as "Blanquist" but criticized Zhelabov's program for coming close to abandoning socialism. He thought that a solution to this dilemma had been found by the German Social Democratic party, which was engaging in legal political activities without giving up its socialist character.

The significance of Plekhanov's conversion to social democracy will become even clearer if we recall the opinion current among Russian revolutionaries about the German Social Democrats. L. Deutsch, cofounder with Plekhanov of the "Emancipation of Labor" group, defined this as follows:

In the entire civilized world the term 'social democracy' was then associated with a certain peace ful and parliamentary party and its activities, which were characterized by an almost total avoidance of determined, revolutionary methods of struggle.<sup>9</sup>

For that very reason Deutsch and Vera Zasulich did not wish to adopt the name. Plekhanov, for his part, liked it just because it implied moderation; he hoped to work out a political program that would also be acceptable to the liberals, one that while "not scaring anyone with an as yet distant red spectre" would attract "all except the declared enemies of democracy."<sup>10</sup> In the end a compromise was agreed upon: Plekhanov's followers set up a Marxist organization with the neutral name of "Emancipation of Labor" (1883) but at the same time took pains to stress their sympathy for the German Social Democrats.

For Plekhanov social democracy represented a chance to salvage what he called the "practical" aspect of classical Populism. In the Preface to his first Marxist pamphlet, *Socialism and Political Struggle*, he wrote:

The endeavor to work *among the people* and for the people, the conviction that the emancipation of the workers should be accomplished by the workers themselves—this practical tendency of the old Populism is something I shall always hold dear.<sup>11</sup>

The program outlined in *Socialism and Political Struggle* (1883) and in the book *Our Differences* (1885) consisted, to put it briefly, of an emphatic commitment to political struggle and a resolute rejection of "Blanquism." The dictatorship of a revolutionary class (i.e. the proletariat), Plekhanov wrote in an article criticizing "Blanquist" tendencies among members of the "People's Will," has nothing in common with the dictatorship of a group of revolutionaries; "No executive, administrative, or any other committee is entitled to represent the working class in *history*."<sup>12</sup> The great mission of the working class, he continued, is to complete the Westernization of Russia begun by Peter the Great; a seizure of power by revolutionary socialists would only hinder this, would indeed be a disaster that in the end could only be a great step backwards. Authentic socialism can only be established when economic development and proletarian class consciousness have attained a certain high level. Political authorities trying to organize from above socialist production in a backward country would be forced "to resort to the ideals of a patriarchal and authoritarian communism; the only change would be that the Peruvian 'sons of the Sun' and

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9 Quoted in V. Vaganian, G. V. Plekhanov. *Opyt kharakteristiki sotsial'opoliticheskikh vozrenii* (M, 1924), pp. 94-95.

10 G. V. Plekhanov, *Sochineniia* (2d ed.; M-Petrograd, 1920-27), vol. 2, p. 83.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 166.

their officials would be replaced by a socialist caste.”<sup>13</sup> There is no doubt, Plekhanov added,

that under such tutelage the people not only would fail to be educated for socialism but would either lose all its capacity for further progress or retain this capacity at the cost of the reemergence of the same economic inequality that the revolutionary government had set out to abolish.<sup>14</sup>

The logical conclusion of this argument was that Russians must choose the “long and difficult capitalist way.”<sup>15</sup> A sufficiently long time must elapse between the political revolution (i.e. the overthrow of tsarism) and the future socialist revolution to enable the capitalist forces of production to become fully established and the Russian proletariat to receive political training in a law-abiding parliamentary state. The interval might well be shorter than in the West, because in Russia (owing to Western influence) the socialist movement became organized very early, while capitalism was still in its infancy. Thanks to their early adoption of Marxism, Russian socialists could accelerate the development of proletarian class-consciousness among the Russian workers. On the other hand, the capitalist stage should not be too brief—it was possible to shorten a “natural” process, but every attempt to shorten it too much or to replace it by an “artificial” process entailed the danger of an undesirable “chemical change.”<sup>16</sup>

It is interesting to note that Plekhanov never abandoned the views outlined above: he was not exaggerating when he wrote a quarter of a century later that on tactical issues his standpoint had not changed in any important particular, and that in the controversies between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks he remained firmly committed to the ideas worked out by the “Emancipation of Labor” group.<sup>17</sup> To the end of his life he fought against two opposing tendencies that he considered to be fraught with the greatest danger for the Russian working-class movement: one was the trade-union mentality of the workers, which was later to be taken to extremes in the “economism” of the right-wing Social Democrats (in Plekhanov’s eyes this was yet another version of the old “apolitical” Populism); the other was “Blanquism,” which exaggerated the “subjective factor” in history and showed a dangerous tendency to “skip” natural

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13 *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 81.

14 *Ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*, p. 325.

16 G. V. Plekhanov, *Izbrannye filosofskie proizvedeniia* (M. 1956-58), vol. 4, p. 140. Plekhanov quoted Chemyshesvsky’s argument that though it is possible to shorten the process of drying cigars, the cigars thus treated lose their flavor.

17 Plekhanov, *Sochineniia*, vol. 19, p. 283.



phases of development. In later years Plekhanov accused the Bolsheviks of being heirs to this latter tendency.

In the Populists' revolutionary wing Plekhanov's program was thought to amount in practice to a betrayal of socialism. The mood among the survivors of the "People's Will" was summed up in the article "What Should We Expect from Revolution"<sup>18</sup> by Lev Tikhomirov, the party's leading theoretician, who was to become later a staunch supporter of tsarism. It must be a strange sort of socialist indeed, Tikhomirov argued, who proclaims the inevitability and progressive nature of capitalism, although he knows it involves the suffering of millions, and who accepts this suffering for the sake of some distant goal. To be consistent, socialists of this kind should turn themselves into capitalists, because only capitalists are really able to push forward the development of capitalism. Plekhanov's theory, he insisted, was psychologically unacceptable to a true revolutionary; its real source was the Russian habit of gaping at the West and following the example of Western countries, although their development had been completely different from Russia's.

Plekhanov himself was, of course, aware of the tragic dilemma in which he found himself as a socialist arguing for the capitalist development of his country. This was one of the main reasons for his passionate attacks on "subjectivism" and his emphasis on the conscious acceptance of necessity. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that "necessity" is the central category in Plekhanov's model of Marxism. In his writings we can discern two lines of reasoning based on different theoretical assumptions: sometimes he argued that capitalist development along European lines was the most desirable alternative (implying that there were other, less desirable alternatives, as for instance a "Peruvian" authoritarian communism); at other times he flatly rejected any possibility of choice, claiming that his political program was based on an understanding of the "objective laws of development," that the validity of its prognosis could be demonstrated with "mathematical exactness," and that its goals would be realized as surely as tomorrow's sunrise. In his early Marxist works—*Socialism and Political Struggle* and *Our Differences*—the first line of argument was more in evidence, whereas later the second type prevailed (especially in his philosophical works *A Contribution to the Development of the Monistic Conception of History* [1894] and *On the Role of the Individual in History* [1898]). Against Populist "subjective sociology" Plekhanov set his rigid "objectivism," eliminating and indeed ridiculing all attempts even to think in terms of "what should be." Scientific socialists, he insisted, are striving for

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18 *Vestnik Narodnoi Voli* (Geneva), 1884, no. 2.

socialism not because it is desirable, but because it is the next stage in the “magnificent and irresistible forward- march of History”; “Social Democracy swims with the tide of History,” and the causes of historical development “have nothing to do with human will or consciousness.”<sup>19</sup>

This shift of emphasis—from what is desirable to what is inevitable—is not difficult to explain. At the roots of Plekhanov’s conversion to Marxism there was an act of choice determined by his system of values, a system according to which “natural” processes were considered superior to “artificial” ones. In order to overcome the objections of the revolutionary socialists, Plekhanov tried, naturally enough, to persuade both himself and them that his choice was the only scientific one and that, strictly speaking, he was merely following the path mapped out by history itself, one that no amount of “subjective” protest could change. In view of his conviction that capitalism necessarily involved the suffering of the masses, he had to put a strong emphasis on the inevitability of the process; absolute necessity (and a necessity, moreover, that could be accepted as “rational”) was, after all, the only justification for the acceptance of human suffering.

Plekhanov refused to defend this view on moral grounds. His strongest and decisive argument was “scientific,” invoking the authority of Marx. But the trouble was at the end of his life Marx explicitly abandoned the view of capitalism as the necessary phase of each country’s economic development. Plekhanov knew of this from Marx’s letter to Vera Zasulich of March 8, 1881, in which Marx explicitly endorsed the populist view that Russia could achieve “social regeneration” (i.e., a successful transition to socialism) on the basis of the peasant commune. However, this important letter, kept in the archives of the Emancipation of Labor group, was published only in 1924. Why was it not shown to anybody outside the group? In 1881 Plekhanov and Zasulich were still populists; they did not publish Marx’s letter because they thought that he intended to elaborate his views on the chances of populist socialism in Russia in a pamphlet specially devoted to this subject. But why did they refrain from publishing it after Marx’s death? Unfortunately, deliberate concealment is the most probable hypothesis. In fact, this hypothesis has been confirmed by a Russian Menshevik, E. Yur’evskii, in an article published in the emigre *Sotsyalisticheskii vestnik* in which he asserted that Marx’s diagnosis contradicted all ideas which Plekhanov, in the process of overcoming populism, worked out on the basis of *Capital*. Marx’s letter to Zasulich mercilessly refuted all his conclusions, all his theoretical constructions. The thesis that the advanced

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19 Plekhanov, *Izbrannye*, vol. 1, p. 3g2, vol. 4, pp. 86, 113-14.

countries show the backward ones the image of their own future was deprived by this letter of its universal applicability. Russia was put by it, as it were, outside the scope of the process of Westernization. It removed the foundation of the certainty with which Plekhanov answered the question: where are we going? Therefore, when Zasluch received this letter, Plekhanov instructed her not to talk about it. In 1885, after the publication of his sharp attacks on the populism, he went even further: he convinced Zasluch (who always followed him) that it would be better to forget Marx's letter altogether, because it supported the populist illusions and made struggle against them more difficult. I learned this from Plekhanov's wife, Rosaliia Markovna<sup>20</sup>.

In his earlier views Marx did not exclude the possibility of a socialist revolution in Russia but made its chances dependent upon the previous victory of the Socialist revolution in the West. In his letter to Zasluch, however, this important caveat is absent, and it was not a mere oversight. An additional testimony to this is presented by three drafts of Marx's letter which were found in his archive and which gave an elaborate argument for his general conclusion.<sup>21</sup> If the Russian Populists could have read these twenty pages of Marx they would no doubt have seen in them an invaluable, authoritative justification of their hopes.

The reasoning of Marx bears much resemblance to Chernyshevskii's "Criticism of Philosophical Prejudices against the Communal Ownership of the Land" – an article which had been carefully read by Marx and which, obviously, had exerted some influence on him. Communism, argues Marx, is the revival in a higher form of the "archaic property relationship," represented by the Russian peasant commune and, therefore, it might be possible for Russia – provided that the external conditions were favourable – to pass directly from rural communes to modern, large-scale communist production. Primitive communes are extremely hardy, and it is very probable that their decay was not invariably in the natural course of evolution, as bourgeois scholars claimed, but sometimes the result of pressure from outside. The Russian peasant commune represents the highest type of archaic collectivism, based not upon ties of blood but upon neighbourly relations, and this fact increases the chances of its progressive evolution. Russia is now in an extremely advantageous situation because Russian primitive communism has survived until the time when the economic, technical, and intellectual preconditions of modern communism have appeared in the West. Russia is neither an isolated country nor, like India, a country under

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20 See E. Yur'evskii, "Myšli o Plekhanove." *Sotsyalisticheskii Vestnik*, No 4 (New York–Paris, 1957).

21 See K. Marx, F. Engels, *Works*, Russian ed., vol. XXVIII, Moscow 1935, pp. 677-697.

foreign rule; she is connected with the international market and she can avail herself of modern technology and culture, assimilating the fruits of Western capitalism but rejecting its *modus operandi*. In such an exceptional situation there is no necessity of, and no need for, capitalist development. The advocates of Russian capitalism who proclaim the necessity of passing through all the successive phases of development should not forget that capitalist industrialization in Russia also skips some of its “natural phases,” by assimilating the ready-made results of industrial development in the West, such as modern technology, railways, and banking (the same argument had been used in Chernyshevskii’s article). What Russian liberals call ‘the natural disintegration of the peasant commune’ is in fact the result of a deliberate policy of the State which exerts a heavy financial pressure on the commune in order to subsidize Russian capitalism at the cost of the Russian peasantry. (The same interpretation had been advanced by the Populists.) If the great revenues extracted by the Government from the enfranchised peasants, and used for the stimulation of Russian capitalism, had been utilized for the development of agriculture nobody would have talked about a “natural disintegration” of the commune, everybody would have recognized in it an important element of Russia’s superiority over the capitalist West.

Even from the purely economic point of view only the development of the commune can lead Russia’s agriculture out of its blind alley; other means, such as, for instance, the English system of capitalist landholding, would surely prove unsuccessful. The English system is completely incapable of fulfilling the conditions on which the development of Russia’s agriculture depends.

The final conclusion was simple and unequivocal. “The Russian peasant commune is not menaced by an abstract theory or by an alleged ‘historical necessity.’ Its real enemy is the Russian autocracy which artificially supports Russian capitalism. What really matters is not a theoretical problem to be solved but a concrete enemy to be destroyed.”

## Aleksandr Ulianov

The same, essentially, was the standpoint of the Russian revolutionaries who tried to combine Marxism with faithfulness to the heroic traditions of the “People’s Will.”<sup>22</sup>

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22 Cf. S. V. Utechin, “The ‘Preparatory’ Trend in the Russian Revolutionary Movement in the 1880s”, *Soviet Affairs* (London), 1962, no. 3. See also Y. A. Polevoy, *Zarozhdenie marksizma v Rossii* (M, 1959).

An interesting and significant example of such a transitional personality was Lenin's older brother, ALEKSANDR ULIANOV (1866-87), who should not be overlooked even in a brief review of the Populist reception of Marxism. Ulianov was of course only a Populist in the broadest sense of the word. He considered himself to be a continuator of the traditions of the "People's Will," but in his *Program of the Terrorist Faction of the "People's Will" Party*<sup>23</sup> he dropped the accepted name "socialist Populists" and simply referred to his followers as socialists. There was nothing backward-looking about his views; the main revolutionary force mentioned in his *Program* was the urban working class, not the peasantry, and socialism was explained as the "inevitable result of capitalist production and the capitalist class structure." This does not mean, he wrote, that there might not be "another, more direct transition to socialism if special favorable conditions exist in the traditions of the people and the character of the intelligentsia and government." The law of the transition from capitalism to socialism "expresses the historical necessity governing each country's progress to socialism if this process is left to develop spontaneously, without any conscious intervention on the part of a particular social group."<sup>24</sup>

The peculiar nature of Ulianov's attempt to combine Populism with Marxism is better understood if we remember that he had translated an early paper by Marx entitled "A Contribution Toward the Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Law" (this was published in Switzerland with an interesting preface by Lavrov). Criticism of religion, the main content of Marx's paper, was of secondary importance for Ulianov; he was chiefly interested in Marx's view that it was possible to compress a country's historical development by passing through some phases of this process on the ideological plane. The young Marx had suggested that Germany's political development was ahead of its historical development, because Germany had experienced in *thought* everything that France had lived through in reality. Ulianov quite rightly saw in this an important argument for the thesis that countries that were historically backward (but ideologically developed) could skip or telescope some phases of their "natural" development. B. Koltsov, a member of the St. Petersburg group of the resuscitated "People's Will," commented on this as follows:

We often talked about this paper by Marx, and Ulianov always argued that the idea that Germany had experienced in thought everything other countries had experienced in practice did not contradict the later views of Marx and could also be

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23 Reprinted in N. K. Karataev, ed., *Narodnichaikaia ekonomichaikaia literatura* (M., 1958), pp. 631-36.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 631.

applied to Russia [...]. Later I happened to hear from other Russian Social Democrats that they too had interpreted Marxism in this way at one time.<sup>25</sup>

The further ideological development of Ulianov was cut short by his death – he was executed for his leading role in an attempt on the life of Alexander III (the so-called “affair of the first of March 1887”). “His brother’s fate without a doubt influenced Vladimir Ilyich profoundly,” wrote Lenin’s wife, N. Krupskaya. The future leader of the Bolshevik Revolution was also deeply affected by the cowardice of local liberals in Simbirsk, who cooled toward the family after his brother’s arrest. According to Krupskaya, “this youthful experience undoubtedly left its imprint on Lenin’s attitude toward the liberals.”<sup>26</sup> It is interesting to note that suspicion and dislike of liberals from the very beginning sharply distinguished Lenin from Plekhanov.

## **“Legal Populism”: Vassily Vorontsov and Nikolai Danielson**

At the beginning of the 1880s the need for political methods of struggle was accepted by all sections within the Russian revolutionary movement. This does not mean that the old Populist principle of the primacy of “social” over “political” aims had been entirely abandoned. Revolutionary Populism had become politically oriented, but it was not so in the social reformist trend that had long existed within the movement and for which the 1880s and 1890s were a period of intense activity. Russian scholars have been accustomed to call this trend “liberal Populism,” although this label is not particularly suitable from either the political or the economic point of view. The term “legal” or non-revolutionary Populism would appear to be more appropriate. Representatives of this trend were “apolitical” in a much more literal sense than the revolutionaries; they did not advocate a liberal parliamentary system and were uniformly hostile to economic liberalism. In fact they were “liberals” only in the very broad and specifically Russian sense of opposing revolution and hoping for social reforms from above. Even in the early 1870s a characteristic representative of this trend, G. Z. Eliseev, declared that Russians ought to be grateful for not having a parliamentary government; thanks to this the state was still in a position to introduce reforms benefiting the masses, and to defend them against kulaks, “commune-baiters,” and a voracious plutocracy.

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25 Quoted in Polevoy, *Zarozhdenie marksizma v Rossii*, p. 315.

26 N. K. Krupskaya, *Memories of Lenin* (London 1930), pp. 4-5.

At the beginning the boundaries between legal and revolutionary Populism were ill-defined. Mikhailovsky, for instance, was basically a legal Populist, although he sympathized and collaborated with the revolutionaries and in his theoretical works formulated the general ideals of the movement to which both revolutionary and non-revolutionary Populists could subscribe. The Populist economist VASILY BERVI-FLEROVSKY (1829-1918), author of *The Situation of the Working Class in Russia* (1869), was closely associated with revolutionary circles but appealed to the good will of the authorities and was not convinced of the need for a “political revolution” in Russia. He even appealed to the landowners, offering them advice on how to fraternize with and work for the benefit of the people without relinquishing their social position.<sup>27</sup> These appeals stemmed from his conviction that bypassing capitalism lay in the interests of the Russian nation as a whole and was, indeed, the only way to avoid a national disaster.

Flerovsky’s peculiar version of socialism – with agriculture based on commonly and communally owned land, the industry handed over to workers’ artels – was thus associated with national motivation: it was propagated not only in the name of social justice but also as a means of lifting the Russian nation from its humiliation (Russia’s defeat in the Crimean War) and poverty, as a way to catch up with, and outdo, the European nations in wealth and power. As Flerovsky put it:

When I ponder over our political and social situation; when I watch our nation drag in the tail of European civilization; when a comparison with Persia comes to my mind – the country which, like ours, was once great and it perished because, like us, it was lagging behind the Antique civilization – then it clearly appears to me that accomplishment of a grand idea, one which had not been taken up by anyone else, is the only solution for us.<sup>28</sup>

The idea, according to Flerovsky, would consist in constructing a social system that would be based upon national solidarity and cooperation, one that would preclude any of the class struggles that were tearing Western Europe asunder. Elimination of destitution and social antagonisms would make Russia greatly prevalent over the West. This would enable the Russian nation to play a “great and glorious role” in history, “take control of the civilization and make the mankind follow her.”<sup>29</sup>

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27 V. Bervi-Flerovsky, *Izbrannye ekonomicheskie proizvedeniia*, Moscow 1958, vol. 1, pp. 612–3.

28 V. Bervi-Flerovsky, *Polozheniie rabochego klassa v Rossii*, St. Petersburg 1869, final chapter. Quoted after *Filozofia spoleczna narodnictwa rosyjskiego*, vol. 2, p. 228.

29 Ibid.

This characteristic “catch up with Europe” motif reappeared in the “legal Populism” ideology of the eighties. As opposed to Flerovsky, exponents of this particular trend clearly realized the need for industrialization; they essentially were ideologues of non-capitalist industrialization which would be initiated and directed by the state, and would safeguard the interests of small producers.

The leading and most characteristic representative of this trend was V. P. VORONTSOV (1847–1918), who signed his work with the initials V. V.<sup>30</sup> His book *The Fate of Capitalism in Russia* (1882) was the first ambitious attempt to analyze the specific features of Russian capitalism; at the same time, it was an original statement of the theoretical assumptions of economic development along non-capitalist lines.

The Populist thinkers of the 1870s had been deeply imbued with the pessimistic conviction that time was working against them, that the allegedly “objective” course of events – the automatic nature of economic development – was pushing their country along the capitalist path. Mikhailovsky, for instance, called into question not the existence of that “objective” course as such, but only its inevitability; he opposed it in the name of his “subjective” moral postulates, but admitted that the chances of a successful realization of these postulates were diminishing year by year. Vorontsov’s book was to provide arguments in favor of the more optimistic view that circumstances in Russia were not altogether favorable to the bourgeoisie. This optimism, however, was only partial: Vorontsov argued that capitalism could not be the dominant form of production in Russia, but he did not rule it out as a future form of exploitation of the masses.

Vorontsov based his belief in the ultimate failure of industrialization along capitalist lines on his analysis of the conditions in which Russian capitalism had to function:

The peculiar historical circumstance affecting our large-scale industry is that it must expand at a time when other countries have already attained a high level of development. Two things follow from this: first, our industry can make use of all the forms created in the West and does not have to crawl at a snail’s pace from stage to stage; second, it must compete with the more experienced, highly industrialized countries, and competition with such rivals might utterly extinguish the weak sparks of our scarcely awakening capitalism.

In his general conclusion Vorontsov added to this the idea that Russia’s backwardness could be regarded as a kind of historical privilege:

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30 An interesting discussion of Vorontsov’s economic views and of “Legal Populists” versus “legal Marxists” is to be found in A. P. Mendel, *Dilemmas of Progress in Tsarist Russia. Legal Marxism and Legal Populism*, Cambridge, Mass. 1961.



The countries which are latecomers to the avenue of history have a great privilege in comparison with their foregoers, a privilege consisting in the fact that the accumulated historical experience of other countries enables them to work out a relatively true image of their next step and to strive for what the others have already achieved not instinctively but consciously, not groping in the dark but knowing what should be avoided on the way.<sup>31</sup>

The idea that backwardness could be a kind of privilege had been put forward earlier by Herzen (inspired by Chaadaev) and also by Chernyshevsky, who expressed it in the aphorism “History is like a grandmother; she is particularly fond of the youngest grandchildren.”<sup>32</sup> In their manifesto *To the Younger Generation* (1861), one of the earliest documents of revolutionary Populism, the authors (Shelgunov and Mikhailov) expressed the same thought: “We are latecomers as a nation and this is our salvation.” Vorontsov thus had a certain tradition behind him. What distinguished him from his predecessors (with the partial exception of Chernyshevsky) was the shift of emphasis to the purely economic aspect of the problem – the idea that the “privilege of backwardness” could be used not only to build a more just social system, but also to accelerate the process of industrialization.

The disadvantages of competing with more developed countries were seen by Vorontsov as another obstacle in the way of the *capitalist* development of Russia. Capitalist enterprises in Russia, he argued, had no external markets, and their home market was shrinking owing to the falling purchasing power of the population caused by capitalist expropriation. On the basis of a ready-made modern technology, large-scale capitalist enterprise in Russia could develop intensively even in the absence of markets by increasing productivity, but it could not develop *extensively* – i.e. give employment to the growing number of workers. It could create small islands of modern production that would be able to satisfy the wants of the upper classes, but it could not become the dominant mode of production; it could exploit the masses and bring ruin to many independent small producers, but it would be unable to give them employment and thus train them in superior “socialized” methods of production. In Western Europe, capitalism was historically necessary and progressive as a form of the “socialization of labor”; in Russia, and in backward countries in general, it could only be a form of exploitation, “an abortive effort,” the “bastard child of

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31 V. V. Vorontsov, *Sud'by kapitalizma v Rossii* (St. Petersburg 1882), pp. 13-14. Essential fragments are reprinted in Karataev, ed., *Narodnisheskaia ekonomicheskaiia literatura*.

32 N. S. Chernyshevsky, *Izbrannye filosofskie sochineniia* (L., 1950-51), vol. 2 (“Philosophical Prejudices against the Communal Ownership of the Land”).

history.” Having identified industrialization as such with *capitalist* industrialization, the Russian government made every effort to support native capitalism by artificial injections and generous subsidies, by “treating it with kid gloves”; the result of all these efforts was more like “playing at capitalism” – a parody of the real thing. Russian capitalists themselves felt the need to explain their lack of success, and they found in the village commune an appropriate scapegoat.

Russian agriculture, too, was cited by Vorontsov as proof of the failure of Russian capitalism. He even claimed that with the exception of England all European countries were retreating from capitalist methods of agricultural production. (To understand this strange statement, one must realize that for Vorontsov capitalism in agriculture consisted in the expropriation of the smallholders and not in highly developed commodity production for a capitalist market, even on a small scale.) Vorontsov ascribed the drop in agricultural yields and the continuing disintegration of the peasant commune to the government’s absurd fiscal policies, which even included flogging the peasants in order to force them to sell their livestock and seed corn – in other words to destroy their forces of production. Despite this, the peasants were fighting to preserve their independence and were even succeeding, though at the cost of maximum restriction of their own consumption; the owners of large estates, moreover, were tempted by high rents to lease their land rather than to cultivate it with hired labor and were thus playing their part in handing agriculture over to the peasants.

What Vorontsov proposed as an alternative to capitalism was industrialization initiated and managed by the state. He suggested that the government should nationalize large-scale industry and arrange for the gradual transfer of smaller enterprises to workers’ *artels*, which could be controlled indirectly; artisans and homeworkers should be encouraged to organize themselves into cooperatives, which would receive state aid in the purchase of raw materials and the marketing of their products. Similar help should be extended to the peasant communes. It would be wrong to conclude from this that Vorontsov wanted to preserve rural crafts in perpetuity – all he wanted was to ensure a smooth and painless transition to “socialized forms of production.” He was only partially a disciple of Mikhailovsky – he did not espouse the ideal of undivided, non-socialized labor, and indeed often quoted Marx, from whom he learned to regard socialized production as a historical necessity and an indispensable condition of economic development. Economic development, in his view, passed through three stages: (1) preindustrial “popular” production, (2) socialization of labor as part of the process of industrialization, and (3) socialized “popular” production (in view of the censorship Vorontsov had to

avoid the word “socialism”). Non-capitalist industrialization under the auspices of the state appeared to represent the most efficient way of reaching this final, highest stage of economic development. Therefore Vorontsov thought he was entitled to conclude that Russia might still teach the West something valuable:

Let us hope that it will be Russia’s role to serve them [Western workers] as an example in their attempts to reorganize the social system; let us hope that it will be Russia’s destiny to bring about equality and fraternity, though she is not destined to fight for liberty.<sup>33</sup>

This hope that tsarist Russia might move toward socialism without first settling the question of political freedom sprang from Vorontsov’s belief that the state required industrialization but could not achieve it by capitalist methods: “Following the capitalist path,” he wrote, “we shall never create an advanced large-scale industry”; this was because “the later the process of industrialization is commenced, the more difficult it is to carry it out along capitalist lines.”<sup>34</sup> The state was the only institution able to invest capital not for the sake of profit but for the public benefit; only planned industrialization directed by the government could ensure Russia’s economic independence and prevent her exploitation by the more developed capitalist countries; only state-sponsored economic development would enable Russia to compete with her Western rivals – to oust Britain from the Asian markets and take America’s place in com exports.

Similar conclusions were drawn by N. DANIELSON (pen name Nikolai-on), the Russian translator of Marx’s *Capital*, who in his long years of correspondence with Marx and Engels (starting in 1868) provided them with first-hand information about economic developments in Russia. Danielson was a Populist who, not without justification, considered himself to be a Marxist. His main work – *Outline of Our Social Economy after the Enfranchisement of the Peasants* (1893) – was written at the suggestion of Marx himself. Danielson made every effort to emphasize the differences between himself and the economic publicists who “defended the people’s cause from a narrow peasant point of view.”<sup>35</sup> He deliberately avoided quoting Vorontsov (although in fact he had borrowed a good deal from him), and lost no opportunity to refer to the authority of Marx and Engels, even quoting from his private correspondence with them. Nevertheless, there can be no possible doubt that Danielson belonged to the legal Populists. On basic issues he was in agreement with Vorontsov, the only difference between them being one of emphasis. Danielson, for instance,

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33 V. V(orontsov), *Sud’by kapitalizma*, p. 124.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

35 Quoted in *Istoriia russkoi ekonomicheskoi mysli*, ed. A. Y. Pashkov and N. A. Tsagolov (M, 1960), vol. 2, part 2, p. 329.

did not insist that the capitalist industrialization of Russia was impossible; like Vorontsov, however, he made much of the argument about the lack of foreign markets and drew attention to the catastrophic situation in agriculture as part of his campaign to persuade the government that capitalist development was contrary to the true interests of the Russian state. Like Vorontsov, he was a spokesman for the small producers and defended cottage industry and the village commune in the belief that they provided an adequate base for future socialized production. In a word, he shared Vorontsov's conviction that state-sponsored industrialization would make it possible to combine increased productivity with increased mass consumption.

The problem facing us could have been summed up in the following terms: What should we do to bring our industry up to the level of Western industry, in order to prevent Russia from becoming a vassal of more advanced countries, and at the same time raise the living standards of the people as a whole? What we did, instead, was to identify large-scale modern industry with its capitalist form, thus reducing the problem to the following dilemma: To what should we sacrifice our cottage industries – to our own capitalist industry or to English industry? When the issue was presented in this way – and this is how it was presented – our cottage industries were doomed and we began to propagate our own capitalist industry.<sup>36</sup>

What Danielson's readers did not know was that these doubts, which he tried to present as a false dilemma, were in fact shared by Engels. On September 22, 1892, Engels wrote to Danielson:

[...] The real issue for you seems to me this: that the Russians had to decide whether their own *grande industrie* was to destroy their domestic manufacture, or whether the import of English goods was to accomplish this. With protection, the Russians effected it, without protection, the English.<sup>37</sup>

By calling this a false dilemma, Danielson was in fact carrying on a concealed polemic with Engels. This was not an isolated instance of such disagreement, although considering himself to be a Marxist Danielson was by no means inclined to give up his own, long-established views of his country's economic development. He did everything possible to convince Engels of the correctness of his ideas, but when he failed to do so, he continued to stick resolutely to his point of view. Whenever it suited him, he would appeal to the authority of Marx and Engels, but when he disagreed with them he did not mention them by name in order not to lose his reputation as an orthodox Marxist.

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36 Nikolaion (Danielson), *Ocherki nashego poreformennogo obshchestvennogo khoziaistva* (St. Petersburg 1893), pp. 390-91. The relevant sections of the book are reprinted in Karataev, ed., *Narodnisheskaia ekonomicheskaiia literatura*.

37 K. Marx and F. Engels, *Correspondence, 1846-1895*, pp. 499-500.

Under the influence of Marxism, Danielson endeavored to stress his disapproval of “economic romanticism.” That was why he rejected projects entailing organized government help for village craftsmen and home-workers put forward by Vorontsov, Krivenko, and other Populist writers. Work must become “socialized,” he insisted; “patriarchal production” must be transformed into proper large-scale industry, and this is only possible through the structural transformation of the entire economic system. In fact Danielson himself was not free of the tendency to romanticize survivals of pre-capitalist “patriarchal production.” Fundamentally both he and Vorontsov were agreed on their general aim, which was a program of industrialization that would prevent the “expropriation of the small producers” and falling standards of living. The main difference between them was that whereas Vorontsov advocated cheap credit for artisans, lower taxes, and free advice for the peasants as ways of combating capitalism, Danielson was much more skeptical about such half measures and therefore emphasized the need for a global transformation of the system by the state.

Lastly, it must not be forgotten that both these Populist writers believed it was possible to implement their economic programs without any prior political reforms. This characteristic aspect of legal Populism aroused the indignation of the Russian Marxists. In a letter to Engels Plekhanov wrote:

Let us suppose that the peasant commune really is the sheet anchor that will save us. Who then will carry out the reforms postulated by Nikolai-on? The tsarist government? Better the plague than reforms undertaken by such reformers! Socialism introduced by Russian gendarmes – what a monstrous vision!<sup>38</sup>

It would not be fair to finish on this note. From the perspective of our own times we see in the theories of Vorontsov and Danielson not only a legitimate attempt to defend the peasants, whom so many socialists of that time too readily proclaimed to be doomed, but also the first attempt to pose and find solutions to problems that still face some of the Third World countries today. They may have underestimated the potentialities of capitalist development in Russia, and may have been too optimistic about the chances of reconciling non-capitalist industrialization with a steady increase in mass consumption; there is little doubt, either, that they misinterpreted facts and often gave a tendentious interpretation of statistical data, thus presenting a false picture of trends in the Russian economy. On the other hand, they were the first to realize that economic backwardness creates its own specific problems, and that underdeveloped countries not only should not but cannot model their development on that of the

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38 *Perepiska K. Marksa i F. Engelsa s russkimi politicheskimi deiatel'iami*, p. 334.

advanced countries of Western Europe. This had already been noticed by Rosa Luxemburg, who among the Marxists of the Second International excelled in her extremely keen understanding of the developmental peculiarity of backward countries in their relation with developed countries. In *The Accumulation of Capital*, a work she wrote on the eve of World War I, she found that the Russian “legal Populists” were right in that they placed an emphasis on the indispensability of external markets for capitalist production; the victory the Marxists were commonly believed to have achieved over them in the discussions of the 1890s was apparently “too thorough” and not quite deserved.<sup>39</sup> She made the point even stronger in a private letter, finding that Vorontsov and Danielson “were much closer to the truth and proved they could understand Marxism better than our ‘triumphant Church’ did.”<sup>40</sup>

Regarding “Luxemburgism” as a dangerous heresy was consequent upon Soviet theoreticians neither developing and nor even noticing these ideas. After World War II, at a time of fierce competition between two systems and fast progressing decolonization (which in terms of ideology usually meant a symbiosis of socialist ideas and national ambitions), the problem of “characteristics of underdevelopment” posed a central issue in the theories of economic modernization of the world. The place of Eurocentrism in the Western thought was becoming less prominent. The majority of theoreticians became aware of the fact that the economic underdevelopment creates own problems and that the economic development of the underdeveloped outskirts not only should not, but even must not take the form of the classic West-European model. It was remarked that even what judging by the program was a capitalist option, in the underdeveloped countries took the form of initiated development, supported and controlled by the state. Pre-revolutionary Russia provides an example, that is the politics of Minister of Finance, Sergei Witte, which was criticized by Legal Populists for creating capitalism in an artificial manner, by means of etatist measures.<sup>41</sup>

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39 R. Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital* [first publ. 1913], transl. (from the German) by Agnes Schwarzschild, ed. by W. Stark, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd; 1951, chapter 24.

40 R. Luxemburg, *Listy do Leona Jogichesa-Tyszki*, collected and edited by F. Tych, vol. 3, Warsaw 1971, p. 252 (from her letter to K. Zetkin of 22nd November 1911). For a further discussion on this point, see A. Walicki, *Rosja, Polska, marksizm. Studia z dziejów marksizmu i jego recepcji*, Warsaw 1983, pp. 156–165.

41 See R. Szporluk, *Communism and Nationalism. Karl Marx versus Friedrich List*, New York-Oxford 1988, pp. 208–213. Witte was an enthusiast of List’s theory, himself he translated *The National System of Political Economy* and advised his subordinates to

The priority given to noticing these problems and capturing these in writing was the task of Russian Populism as a whole. As I have tried to demonstrate, the representatives of all the currents of Populism formed their thoughts on the subject in the spirit of constructive confrontation with Marxism. Undoubtedly, in this understanding Populism constituted the first large-scale form of reception of Marxism in Russia. Vorontsov and Danielson went a step further, creating the first theoretical model (two variants) of alternative modernization, different from the classic Western model, adjusted to the specific situation of underdeveloped and periphery countries. This determines their place in the history of social thought, and not just in Russia, but worldwide.





## **Part IV**

# **Philosophical and Religious Thought in Reformed Russia**



# Chapter 17

## Prophetic Writers

Russian literature, perhaps more than any other in the 19th century, was given to philosophical reflection on the meaning of human existence and was imbued with a deep sense of moral responsibility for the fate of its own nation and mankind as a whole. In 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia, as indeed in Poland, great writers came to treat literature as a moral mission, a tool in the struggle to change the world.

The most characteristic writers in this respect are those two great literary prophets – Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. Both men experienced a spiritual crisis that marked a turning point in their lives and led them to become aggressive critics of modern civilization. Both assailed the conscience of their readers with violent pictures of corruption and at the same time pointed the way to moral and religious rebirth. Both expressed with profound insight the utter despair about God and the meaning of existence, and as an antidote put forward faith in Christ. In both men the return to religion was linked to the terrifying experience of approaching death. Finally, both writers were deeply influenced by their contact with the Russian peasants – the simple folk who seemed to them to represent a superior, truly Christian understanding.

For all these apparently far-reaching similarities, it would be difficult to name two novelists who were less alike. Any comparative analysis of their work – and this kind of confrontation has long been a critical tradition – immediately brings to light numerous deep-seated differences.

This chapter does not attempt to analyze the entire body of work of both Dostoevsky and Tolstoy from the point of view of its philosophical content,<sup>1</sup> for

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1 The literature on both writers is enormous. From the point of view of their philosophical, religious, and political views the following works in English are of special importance: K. V. Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work* (Princeton, N.J. 1967); N. A. Berdiaev, *Dostoevsky*, trans. Donald Attwatter (New York 1957); A. B. Gibbon, *The Religion of Dostoevsky* (London 1973); J. Carrol, *Break-out from the Crystal Palace: the Anarcho-Psychological Critique. Stirner, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky* (London 1974); V. Rozanov, *Dostoevsky and the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor* (a classic study translated from the 3d Russian ed. of 1906 by E. Roberts) (Ithaca, N.Y.

that would require a blend of ideological analysis and detailed literary criticism that would be beyond the scope of the present book. In the following pages we shall therefore confine ourselves to giving an account of the views that these writers came to hold in maturity, or that they were confirmed in after experiencing an ideological crisis – views that they advocated not only in their novels but also in various other writings.

## Fyodor Dostoevsky

### *The “Crystal Palace” and the “The Underground”*

Approaching Dostoevsky as a philosopher and religious thinker has at times been called into question. Many literary scholars point out that Dostoevsky the man cannot be identified with the characters of his novels. Mikhail Bakhtin argued that these novels are developed into a “polyphony” of reciprocally counterpoised or unpending equivalent voices, and thus cannot form the basis for reconstruction of their author’s worldview.<sup>2</sup> Such opinions are not thoroughly illegitimate: that Dostoevsky the creative literary artist is not identical with Dostoevsky the thinker, and that research on the latter aspect cannot be decisive for the outcome of the research on Dostoevsky the novelist, is not an overstatement. With all this in mind, Dostoevsky the thinker is a fact. Based on this author’s letters and pieces of journalism, the meaning he endeavored to imbue his literary works with is quite precisely determinable.

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1972); I. Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy’s View of History* (London 1967). The fundamental work on Tolstoy’s religious views is N. Weisbein, *L’Évolution religieuse de Tolstoj* (Paris, 1960). The best comprehensive monograph on Tolstoy is still B. M. Eikhenbaum, *Lev Tolstoj* (3 vols.; L, 1928-31). See also the works quoted in the notes and two important books by Soviet scholars recently translated into English: M. M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, trans. R. W. Rotsel (Ann Arbor, Mich. 1973); and L. P. Grossman, *Dostoevsky: a Biography*, trans. Mary Mackler (Indianapolis, Ind. 1975). Comparative analyses of Dostoevsky’s and Tolstoy’s views are given in F. A. Stepun, *Dostojewski und Tolstoj, Christentum und soziale Revolution* (Munich 1961), and M. Doerne, *Tolstoj und Dostojewskij, 2 Christliche Utopien* (Göttingen 1969).

The best introduction to Dostoevsky’s the philosophical, religious and political views is presently the book by K. Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky – zhizn i tvorchestvo*, Paris 1927 (English version: *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*, translated and introduced by Michael A. Minihan, Princeton, N.J. 1967. For a fundamental work on the religious views of Tolstoy, refer to N. Weisbein, *L’Évolution religieuse de Tolstoj*, Paris 1960.

2 See M. Bakhtin, *Problemi poetiki Dostoevskogo*, 2nd ed., Moscow 1963.

James Scanlan, the American expert in Russian philosophy, has convincingly proved that Dostoevsky's great novels written in the 1860s and 1870s expressed a very coherent philosophical conception: dialogical in form (as aptly remarked by Bakhtin) but, in fact, monological in content.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to the aristocratic Tolstoy, FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY (1821–81) was born into an “accidental family”<sup>4</sup> that was constantly haunted by the fear of losing the modest social position it had gained by enormous effort. His talent was nurtured not in a “gentry nest” but against the hectic background of a great city – amid humiliations, unappeased ambitions, the daily struggle for existence, and tragic social conflicts. The favorite characters of the young Dostoevsky were the “wronged and humiliated,” the drab and humdrum folk (see especially his literary debut, *Poor Folk* [1846]), and the romantic dreamers living in their own self-contained world of delusions (*White Nights* [1848]), or men devoured by unhealthy ambition and schizophrenic hallucinations see especially *The Double* [1846]). The setting of almost all of his novels is St. Petersburg, seen through the eyes of someone who has only just been torn away from patriarchal immediacy and senses the city as a strange, fantastic, and alien world.<sup>5</sup> That is why Dostoevsky's St. Petersburg is so much like Gogol's: a city of mists and white nights, a ghost town whose pulse beats to a faster tempo, a symbol of the forces that had swept in from the West and destroyed the peaceful life of “Holy Russia.”

As was mentioned earlier, the young Dostoevsky had belonged to the Petrashevsky Circle and was one of the members condemned to death by firing squad. The moments he spent waiting in Semenovskiy Square before the last-minute reprieve were a terrifying experience he was never able to forget. It is true that he had no reason to feel guilty, but there is no doubt that the shock of this experience played its part in inducing him to read with great attention every word of the New Testament – the only book he was allowed to have with him during his four years of penal servitude in Siberia.

After his period of hard labor in Omsk was over, Dostoevsky had to do another five years of penal military service in Semipalatinsk. When he was released from the army in 1859, he returned to his writing with ideas very different from those that had been current among the Petrashevtsy. In 1860 he and his elder brother Mikhail began publication of a literary journal, *Time* (*Vremia*), on which their chief collaborators were Apollon Grigoriev and

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3 J.P. Scanlan, *Dostoevsky the Thinker*, Ithaca/London 2002, p. 4.

4 See the reflections on the hereditary nobility and “accidental” families in the last chapter of *The Adolescent*.

5 See V. Y. Kirpotin, *Molodoi Dostoevsky*, Moscow 1947, pp. 341–2.

Nikolai Strakhov. In this journal Dostoevsky called for “a return to the soil,” opposition to the ideas of the radical intelligentsia, and a return to the “purely national” and at the same time truly Christian values of the Russian people.

How did this metamorphosis come about? In his *Notes from the House of the Dead* (1862), a fictionalized account of his experiences of hard labor, Dostoevsky strongly emphasizes the crucial influence of his contacts with the criminals who were his daily companions. These men of simple origins, who accepted their fate with resignation, seemed to him authentic representatives of the common people; they were men who, though criminals, still had not abandoned the strong and simple beliefs of the Russian peasantry. It was then that he became acutely aware, he tells us, of the difference – the profound gulf even – dividing the Russian people from the Westernized intelligentsia, and realized that the values of the common people were infinitely preferable.

Other factors of course also played their part in this intellectual evolution, which was a complex process, difficult to present in all its aspects (Dostoevsky admitted that he himself would have found difficulty in doing so).<sup>6</sup> But we should note that the decisive turning point came during his years of penal servitude in Siberia, and that it was at this time that the characteristic antithesis between intelligentsia and common people, or European and Russian values, became part of his world view.

Dostoevsky went abroad for the first time in 1862. The masterly essay cycle *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions* (1863) is a description of his travels in Western Europe. London, where an exhibition of world industry was being held in the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, made the deepest impression on him. He was surprised and shocked by the might of capitalist civilization, the extreme rationalization of life, the “colossal regimentation” which was not only external but also “internal, spiritual, emanating from the soul.” At the exhibition he was torn between admiration and fear; in his confusion he felt that he was witness to some kind of victory, triumph, that something “final” had been enacted [...] “some scene from the Bible, something about Babylon, some kind of prophesy from the Apocalypse.” Paxton’s Crystal Palace, that huge structure of glass and metal, became for him a symbol of the power of capitalist progress, although it was a pagan power, the “might of Baal” feeding on human sacrifices.<sup>7</sup>

In these essays Dostoevsky showed an unusually acute insight into the fact that it was the divisive force of bourgeois individualism that provided the motive power of Western civilization. Individualism had created a powerful reified material force, but at the same time it had isolated human beings, had brought

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6 See V. Y. Kirpotin, *F. M. Dostoevsky* (M, 1960), p. 448.

7 *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*, trans. Richard Lee Renfield (New York 1955), p. 90.

them into conflict with nature and their fellow men. Partly under the inspiration of Herzen, whom he met in London, Dostoevsky emphasized that bourgeois freedom was a purely negative quality, that it was essentially freedom for the “man who has a million,” that by “eradicating all inequalities” the power of money, which was the obverse of victorious bourgeois individualism, diminished the personality.<sup>8</sup> These ideas, which were first put forward in *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*, were later taken up again in the novel *The Adolescent* (1875).

Against the rational egoism of European capitalism Dostoevsky set the ideal of the authentic fraternal community preserved in Orthodoxy and Russian folk traditions. In a community of this kind the individual does not oppose the collective but submits to it totally without setting conditions or calculating the advantages involved; the collective, for its part, does not demand so great a sacrifice but grants the individual freedom and safety, guaranteed by fraternal love. A community of this kind must “happen of itself”;<sup>9</sup> it cannot be invented or made. Although Dostoevsky probably arrived at these ideas independently of the Slavophiles, they bear a striking similarity to Slavophile notions, including Khomiakov’s conception of the “free unity” of *sobornost’*.

A year after the *Winter Notes* Dostoevsky published his novel *Notes from the Underground* (1864), which portrays a man who has rejected all social bonds and is an embodiment of protest against any subordination of “what is most precious and most important to us, namely our personality and our individuality.” The narrator is “a man of the nineteenth century divorced from the people’s principles”; he sets his own Ego against the objective world and revolts against being nothing but a cog in the social mechanism, or “the keys of a piano on which alien laws of nature are playing any tune they like.” He interprets freedom as license and insists that to accept logic and common sense as guiding principles is “not life but the beginning of death.” Dostoevsky’s hero challenges the entire moral order: “Is the world to go to wrack and ruin or am I to have my cup of tea? Well, so far as I’m concerned, blow the world so long as I can have my cup of tea.”<sup>10</sup>

The interpretation of *Notes from the Underground* is complicated by the fact that the narrator at times voices the author’s own thoughts. In the description of the rationalized society of the future we again find the “crystal palace” of the *Winter Notes*:

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8 Ibid., pp. 104-5.

9 Ibid., p. 112.

10 “Notes from the Underground,” trans. David Magarshak, in *The Best Stories of Dostoevsky* (New York 1955), pp. 134, 136.

Then [...] new economic relations will be established, relations all ready for use and calculated with mathematical exactitude, so that all sorts of problems will vanish in a twinkling simply because ready-made solutions will be provided for all of them. It is then that the crystal palace will be built [...]. But man is stupid, phenomenally stupid; I mean, he may not be really stupid, but on the other hand he is so ungrateful that you won't find anything like him in the whole wide world. I would not be at all surprised, for instance, if suddenly and without the slightest possible reason a gentleman of ignoble or rather reactionary and sardonic countenance were to arise amid all that coming reign of universal common sense and, gripping his sides firmly with his hands, were to say to us all, "Well, gentlemen, what about giving all this common sense a great kick and letting it shiver in the dust before our feet simply to send all these logarithms to the devil so that we can again live according to our silly will?"<sup>11</sup>

The partial confusion between author and narrator has given rise to a number of erroneous interpretations; even today books are published stating that Dostoevsky "reaffirms the absolute value and integrity of the single, separate individual,"<sup>12</sup> Nothing is further from the truth – it is clear that Dostoevsky approves not of the "underground man's" individualism but only of his attack on the rationalization of social bonds common to both Western capitalism and socialism (for Dostoevsky the representative of Western socialist ideas in Russia was Chernyshevsky, whose reputation was then at its height). In his *Notes from the Underground* Dostoevsky wanted to express the almost Freudian idea that in the "dark cellars" of the human consciousness irrational demonic forces lie dormant that tend to be sublimated in a society held together by non-rational spiritual bonds, but that are likely to rise in revolt against a civilization based only on "rational egoism." Since men are not rational beings, they cannot be at home in a rationalized society; however, in a society deprived of authentic bonds of solidarity the irrational, anarchistic protest of the "underground man" is quite justified. In his original text Dostoevsky used this argument to prove the "need for faith in Christ," but to his indignation the censor crossed out the passage concerned. Nevertheless, the author's intention is quite clear; the narrator himself comments thus on his own position:

All right, do it. Show me something more attractive. Give me another ideal. Show me something better and I will follow you [...]. Well perhaps I'm afraid of this palace just because it is made of crystal and is forever indestructible and just because I shall not be able to stick my tongue out at it. [...] I know as well as twice-

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11 Ibid., p. 130.

12 R. L. Jackson, *Dostoevsky's Underground Man in Russian Literature* (The Hague 1958), p. 14.



two that it is not the dark cellar that is better, but something else, something else altogether, something I long for but cannot find! To hell with the dark cellar.<sup>13</sup>

It is worth noting that Dostoevsky's attitude to the irrationalistic ultra-individualism of the "underground man" is exactly analogous to Khomiakov's attitude toward the irrationalistic individualism of Max Stirner. The latter's work *The Ego and His Own*, Khomiakov wrote, was a *valid* protest against a rationalistic civilization:

It is the outcry of a soul that may perhaps be immoral, but only because it has been deprived of all moral support; a soul that reaffirms ceaselessly though unconsciously its longing to be able to subordinate itself to a principle it would wish to realize and believe in, and that rejects with indignation and aversion the daily practices of the Western "systematizers," who have no faith themselves but demand faith in others, who create arbitrary bonds and expect others to accept them meekly.<sup>14</sup>

### *The Devious Paths of the Man-God*

The clash between individualistic "license" and the "Christian truth" receives more profound treatment in Dostoevsky's great novels of the 1860s and 1870s. By this time he had come to the conclusion that both Western capitalism and socialist ideas were a consequence of man's falling away from God. European civilization had rejected the way of Christ, the God-Man, and had instead chosen the idolization of man, the way of the Man-God. This idea, which runs through

*Demons* (1871-72), *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879-80), and *The Diary of a Writer* (1873-81), was probably suggested to Dostoevsky by Feuerbach, to whose writings he was introduced in his youth as a member of the Petrashevsky Circle. "The divine being is nothing else than the human being," Feuerbach wrote. "All the attributes of the divine nature are, therefore, attributes of the human nature [...]. Man is the real God."<sup>15</sup>

Feuerbach's anthropotheism was criticized by Max Stirner, who argued that the philosopher had not really stopped being a "theologian": the liberation proclaimed by him was essentially a substitution of a "God within us" (or "Man" as the abstract essence of humanity) for a "God outside us." The religion of "Man" was therefore only a new way of enslaving the individual by subjugating him to the tyranny of the "universal." The way to true freedom of the individual was barred by the God-Man; it was not enough, therefore, to kill

13 "Notes from the Underground," pp. 141, 143.

14 A. S. Khomiakov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (M, 1914), vol. 1, p. 150.

15 L. Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot, introduced by Karl Barth (New York 1957), pp. 14, 230.

God – it was also necessary to kill “Man.”<sup>16</sup> In order to liberate himself the individual must commit a crime,<sup>17</sup> must recognize himself as the supreme value and shed his miserable “holy terror” of sinning against moral laws imposed in the name of an abstract humanity.

In *Crime and Punishment* (1866) Raskolnikov argues along exactly the same lines. Ostensibly he kills his victim in order to steal her money and save his mother and sister from disgrace; in fact his crime is an experiment in pure murder, an attempt to find out if he is “a louse like everyone else” or a free man, a Napoleon with the right to transgress against moral principles and hold men’s lives in his hand. He wants to find out if he has the *right* to kill: “I began to question myself whether I had the right to gain power. Whether I can step over [moral] barriers or not. Whether I dare stoop to pick up [power] or not. Whether I am a trembling creature or whether I have the *right* [...]”<sup>18</sup>

The theory by which he justifies his act is the Russian equivalent of the philosophy of Stirner, who wrote: “My authority to commit murder derives from within myself; I have the right to kill if I do not forbid it myself, if I am not bound by the view that murder is an ‘injustice,’ something ‘impure’.”<sup>19</sup>

Raskolnikov’s experiment ends in failure. He cannot ignore his humanity or overstep the barrier that would allow him to leave behind both good and evil: “I killed the principle, but I didn’t overstep. I stopped on this side”<sup>20</sup> He is oppressed by nightmares, cannot face other people, and is forced to confess his guilt to those he had once thought of as lice. In Dostoevsky’s intention the story of Raskolnikov’s experiment shows the fallacy of the argument that everything is permissible, that ethical norms can be ignored; in the last resort God exists as the necessary guarantor of moral law.

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16 Max Stirner, *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* [*The Ego and His Own*] (Berlin 1926), p. 182.

17 “The autonomous Ego,” Stirner wrote (ibid., p. 236), “cannot refrain from committing crimes, for crime is the essence of its existence. [...] Crime represents the significance and dignity of Man.” Compare this with Raskolnikov’s words “all great men or even men a little out of the common, that is capable of giving some new word, must from their very nature be criminals” (*Crime and Punishment*, trans. Constance Garnett [New York 1956], p. 235). A detailed analysis of Raskolnikov’s ideas and the corresponding ideas of Stirner is contained in my essay “Dostoevsky and the Idea of Freedom,” in A. Walicki, *Osobowość a historia. Studia z dziejów literatury i myśli rosyjskiej* (Warsaw 1959).

18 *Crime and Punishment*, p. 377.

19 Stirner, *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, p. 221.

20 *Crime and Punishment*, p. 248.

The second variant of absolute self-assertive license – the suicide experiment – is described in *Demons*. For Kirilov suicide is the only means of affirming his own freedom in a world devoid of God.

If there's no God [Kirilov reasons] then I'm God. If God exists, then the will is his and I can do nothing. If he doesn't exist then the will is mine and I must exercise my own will, my free will. [...] I can't imagine that there's not one person on our whole planet, who, having put an end to God and believing in his own free will, will dare to exercise that will on the most important point. [...] I have an obligation to shoot myself because the supreme gesture of the free will is to kill oneself.<sup>21</sup>

By killing himself Kirilov wants to kill his fear of death and thus to free mankind from God, to show that man himself is God; it seems to him that “this alone will redeem all men and allow them to be physically reborn in the next generation.”<sup>22</sup> In fact he merely achieves his own annihilation, and his death (by his own consent) is exploited by petty persons for their own shabby ends. Thus ends the second great experiment in the exercise of individualistic freedom.

In the sphere of social relations the final outcome of absolute license, Dostoevsky argues, can only be despotism. Freedom without God gives rise to a “lascivious” and “sadistic” lust for power and is thus transformed into its opposite. “I started out with the idea of unrestricted freedom,” says Shigalev in *Demons*, “and I have arrived at unrestricted despotism. I must add, however, that any solution of the social problem other than mine is impossible.”<sup>23</sup> “Shigalev’s system” is a gloomy vision of a society based on absolute obedience and absolute depersonalization. He offers as a final solution the division of mankind into two uneven categories.

One-tenth will be granted individual freedom and full rights over the remaining nine-tenths, who will lose their individuality and become something like a herd of cattle. [...] They will attain a state of primeval innocence, something akin to the original paradise on earth, although of course they will have to work.

The insistence on absolute equality does not even allow for inequality of talent:

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21 *The Possessed* (cited as *Demons* in this text), trans. Andrew R. MacAndrew (New York 1962), p. 635.

22 This idea can be found in the work of Ludwig Feuerbach. In his *Lectures on the Essence of Religion* (trans. Ralph Manheim [New York 1967], p. 274) he wrote about “the future immortal man, differentiated from man as he exists at present in the body and flesh.”

23 *Demons*, pp. 384-85.

They cut out Cicero's tongue, gouge out Copernicus's eyes; they throw stones at Shakespeare – that's Shigalev's system for you! The slaves must be equal; without tyranny there has never yet been freedom or equality, but in the herd there is equality and that's what Shigalev teaches.<sup>24</sup>

A modified and nobler version of Shigalev's system is presented in the "Legend of the Grand Inquisitor" in book five of *The Brothers Karamazov*. This is preceded by the rebellion of Ivan Karamazov – a rebellion against alleged divine or historical justice, a refusal to accept a harmony for which too high a price must be paid. Ivan rejects not God but the world he has created – because it is a world of injustice, because divine Providence does nothing to prevent the suffering of innocent children, and because no future "harmony" can make up for the tears of a tormented child.<sup>25</sup> His revolt suggests that men ought to take their fate into their own hands, reject the revealed truths of the Gospels, and build the Kingdom of God on earth – but without God. This, of course, was Dostoevsky's explanation of the origins of revolutionary socialism.

The "Legend of the Grand Inquisitor" was intended to be a parable of the just kingdom the socialists were trying to establish on earth. The Grand Inquisitor exchanges freedom for bread, and takes away freedom in order to bestow happiness on his "pitiful children." However, an indispensable condition of this happiness is total and herd-like depersonalization. Knowing that men are weak, the Inquisitor lifts from them the burden of freedom, conscience, and personal responsibility; he replaces freedom by authority, and consenting, free unity by a unity based on compulsion. The Church transformed into State unites "all in one unanimous and harmonious ant heap." When Christ descends to earth in order to be among his people once more, the Inquisitor tries to have him arrested and burned as a heretic. Christ listens in silence to his long monologue and then kisses him on the mouth as a sign of his forgiveness; the Inquisitor lets him go but begs him never to return to disturb the tranquil happiness men have achieved without him.

The "dialectic of individualism" by which individualistic freedom is transformed into universal unfreedom was explained by Dostoevsky's philosophy of history, which has obvious similarities with the Slavophile critique of Western Europe. Like the Slavophiles, Dostoevsky pointed to the

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24 Ibid., p. 399.

25 Ivan Karamazov's rebellion recalls Belinsky's revolt against Hegel – even to the extent of identity of phrasing. It is quite likely that Dostoevsky made use of fragments of Belinsky's letters to Botkin, which were published in 1876 in A. N. Pypin's life of Belinsky. See A. Walicki, *Osobowość a historia*, pp. 405-9; the same observation was made by V. Y. Kirpotin, *Dostoevsky i Belinsky* (M, 1960), pp. 228-39.

classical heritage as a source of the evil that had distorted the Christian faith in the West. It was from pagan Rome that Catholicism adopted the idea of the man-God (the emperor, the Apollo of Belvedere) and the concept of unity based on compulsion.<sup>26</sup> The individual's protest against the Catholic "unifying idea" led to social atomization and put power into the hands of the bourgeoisie, whose philosophy was egoism ("every man for himself and for himself alone") and the law of the jungle. A new negation – the protest against individualism and anarchy – gave birth to socialism, which Dostoevsky called a secularized form of the Catholic "unity through compulsion."

The notion that there was an organic relationship between Catholicism and socialism, emphasized in the "Legend of the Grand Inquisitor," was one of Dostoevsky's favorite and almost obsessive theories. It first occurs in *The Idiot*, in Prince Myshkin's well-known monologue:

For socialism too is an offspring of Catholicism and the essential Catholic idea. It too, like its brother atheism, springs from despair in opposition to Catholicism as a moral presence, to replace the lost moral power of religion, to quench the spiritual thirst of parched humanity, and to save it not through Christ but also through violence! This too is freedom through violence, this too is union through blood and the sword!<sup>27</sup>

Dostoevsky developed this notion in *The Diary of a Writer*, where he wrote: "The present-day French socialism itself [...] is nothing but the truest and most direct continuation of the Catholic idea, its fullest, most final realization, its fatal consequence which has been evolved through centuries."<sup>28</sup>

This analogy seems less curious if we remember that the Saint-Simonians in France held similar views on the connection between Catholicism and socialism (although for them this was a matter of approval) and imagined the future "organic period" as a "new theocracy" based on the Catholic principles of hierarchy and authority. In any case Dostoevsky's ideas on the evolution of Western civilization were not new in Russia. The view of Catholicism as the heir to ancient Rome derives from Slavophile theory; the formula "unity through compulsion" recalls Khomiakov's "unity without freedom," and the description of bourgeois social atomization can be compared to his "freedom without unity." The interpretation of the essence of socialism as a search for the lost "unifying principle," and the desire to impose this principle arbitrarily on an atomized society, also have their counterparts in Slavophile thought. Another variation of

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26 *The Diary of a Writer*, trans. Boris Brasol (New York 1954), p. 1,005. Similar thoughts are expressed by Ivan Karamazov.

27 *The Idiot*, trans. Henry and Olga Carlisle (New York 1969), pp. 561-62.

28 *Diary of a Writer*, p. 563.

this theme is to be found in some comments on Western civilization made by Grigoriev apropos of a letter by George Sand. This letter, Grigoriev wrote,

is a terrible exposure of an existence in which such notions as love and fraternity must be *invented*, in which the *universal* can only gain the submission of the particular, the individual, by compulsion and despotism [...] an exposure of an existence that, in a word, reveals two unavoidable extremes: the despotic absorption of personality by “papism,” whether Roman papism or (basically it is all the same) Fourierist and Saint-Simonian popery; and the immoderate protest of the individual, a protest expressed in the doctrine of Max Stirner as a consistent deification of the individual.<sup>29</sup>

In the 1870s Dostoevsky became closely associated with extreme right-wing circles. In 1872 he was asked to take over the editorship of the conservative periodical *Citizen* [*Grazhdanin*], and he soon became a close friend of Pobedonostsev. He would visit him every Saturday for long conversations and even asked his advice when he was writing *The Brothers Karamazov*. It is worth stressing, therefore, that *The Brothers Karamazov* (in contrast to *Demons*) cannot be seen simply as an attack on revolutionary socialism; Ivan Karamazov’s rebellion is shown by Dostoevsky with profound understanding, although the author himself was anxious to refute the motives that he portrayed with such insight. This can be explained partly by the fact that *Demons* was written under the influence of the Nechaev trial, whereas *The Brothers Karamazov* was written under the influence of the heroic struggle of the Populist terrorists, whose personal nobility and purity of motive Dostoevsky did not question. The essential difference, however, is that Ivan Karamazov’s struggle no doubt reflects a conflict Dostoevsky had once experienced himself. As a former member of the Petrashevsky Circle he too must have felt the temptations of militant atheism; his cry of “Hosanna,” as he himself put it, came “through a great flame of doubt.”<sup>30</sup>

Pobedonostsev was somewhat alarmed after reading the chapter on Ivan Karamazov’s rebellion and the “Legend of the Grand Inquisitor”; he wondered, not without cause, whether Dostoevsky would be able to give equally good arguments to the other side. The “counterpoise” Pobedonostsev required was the Orthodox monk, Father Zoshima, who turned out to be a pale and rather lifeless figure. Alyosha Karamazov’s angelic goodness is also far from convincing. As for the “Legend,” it is a highly ambiguous piece of writing from an ideological point of view; there could be no guarantee that its readers would see the threat to freedom and individuality as coming solely from Catholicism and socialism and

29 A. Grigoriev, *Sochineniia* (St. Petersburg 1876), pp. 175-76.

30 Dostoevsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (St. Petersburg 1883), vol. 1, p. 375.

not, for instance, from the Orthodox autocracy in whose services the Director General of the Holy Synod labored so faithfully.

*National Messianism and the Idea of “All-Humanity”*

To the Roman Catholic ideal of the church as state, Dostoevsky opposed the Orthodox ideal of the state as church. As Lunacharsky aptly pointed out, Dostoevsky needed this utopian concept partly because it enabled him not to “sever completely his inner connection with the socialist truth while cursing materialistic socialism.”<sup>31</sup> It is significant that Dostoevsky did not even repudiate the label “socialism”: in the last number of *The Diary of a Writer* he used Herzen’s term “Russian socialism” to describe the ideals he attributed to the Russian people – “the ideals of the state as church, of universal brotherhood, and the free unity of mankind.”

The leitmotif of Dostoevsky’s Orthodox utopia – and indeed of the Slavophile utopia – was the idea of a return to the people, to the “native soil.” The messianic note, the emphasis on the “universally human mission of the Russian people,” was much stronger in Dostoevsky than in classical Slavophilism. Unlike Danilevsky, who emphatically rejected the very idea of a universal mission, Dostoevsky believed that the conquest of Constantinople and the unification by Russia of all the Slavic peoples would herald a new epoch in world history – an epoch in which Orthodox Russia would pronounce “a new word” that would bring about the rebirth and salvation of mankind. It must be made clear, however, that this universalism did not mean approval for the ideal of “abstract humanity” rejected by the proponents of “a return to the soil.” For Dostoevsky the “all-human man” [*vshechelovek*] was to be the antithesis of the “man in general” [*obshchechelovek*]. By “all-humanity” he meant heterogeneity and an all-around, fulfilled personality – the opposite of the abstract ideal of an abstract Humanity, which he accused of reducing human complexity to a shabby common denominator or, more likely, of simply being a disguise for the desire to force everyone into the same mold.

In Dostoevsky’s novels messianism appears in two versions. One of them is expressed by Shatov in *Demons*:

A people forms the body of its god. A nation is a nation only so long as it has its particular god and excludes as irreconcilable all other gods; so long as it believes that with the help of its gods it will conquer and destroy all other gods [...]. But there is one truth and therefore only one people can possess it and, with it, the only

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31 *F. M. Dostoevsky russkoi kritike* (M, 1956), p. 442.

true god, though other people may have their own particular gods and even great ones. Now the only god-bearing nation is the Russian nation.<sup>32</sup>

For Dostoevsky, nation was synonymous with common people. Again and again in his novels and journalism we find scathing criticism of the uprooted intelligentsia, whose atheism was, he suggested, a function of their divorce from the “soil.”

“You are godless,” [Shatov says to Stavrogin] “because you’re the son of the idle rich, the last of the idle rich. You’ve lost the ability to distinguish between good and evil because you’ve lost touch with the people of your own country [...]. Listen Stavrogin, find God through labor. That is the essence of everything. Find God or you’ll vanish without a trace like a rotten fungus. Find God through labor.” “What sort of labor?” Stavrogin asks. “The work of a laborer, a peasant.”<sup>33</sup>

The extreme doctrine advanced by Dostoevsky through his mouthpiece Shatov is both nationalistic and anti-intellectual. As mentioned earlier, however, *Demons* was written under the immediate impact of the Nechaev trial and is therefore a very one-sided reflection of its author’s world view. A somewhat different messianism – one that instead of rejecting “alien gods” emphasizes Russia’s mission in reconciling Europe and Russia, the intelligentsia and the people; one that in fact propounds a universal synthesis – is to be found in the articles Dostoevsky wrote for the periodical *Time* even in the early 1860s. This version of messianism was later developed in *The Diary of a Writer*. In 1877 he wrote:

Oh, do you know, gentlemen, how dear this very Europe, this “land of sacred miracles,” how dear it is to us, Slavophile dreamers – according to you – haters of Europe! Do you know how dear these “miracles” are to us; how we love and revere with a stronger than brotherly feeling, those great nations that inhabit her, everything great and beautiful which they have created.<sup>34</sup>

Westernization had widened Russia’s horizons, Dostoevsky acknowledged, and this must be appreciated by all. The intelligentsia, too, had a valuable contribution to make:

We must bow before the people’s truth and recognize it as such, we must bow like prodigal children who, for two hundred years, have been absent from home, but who nevertheless have returned Russians [...]. [However, we must bow on one condition only, and this – *sine qua non*: that the people accept from us those numerous things which we have brought with us. [...]. This is our need to serve humanity, although it might be to the detriment of our own dearest and most essential interests, our

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32 *Demons*, p. 238.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 242.

34 *Diary of a Writer*, p. 782.



reconciliation with the civilization of Europe, the understanding and justification of their ideals, even though they did not even harmonize with ours.<sup>35</sup>

Dostoevsky, therefore (like Chaadaev before him), regarded divorce from the soil and “homeless wandering” not just as a misfortune, but also as a chance to create a new type of a “universal man” free from the burden of the past and from national prejudices – a man who would “bear the world’s sufferings.” He agreed with Herzen that “the thinking Russian is the most independent man in the world.” The cultivated elite in Russia, says Vershilov in *The Adolescent*, has “produced perhaps a thousand representatives (give or take a few) who are freer than any European, men whose fatherland is all mankind. No one can be freer and happier than a Russian wanderer belonging to the ‘chosen thousand’; I really mean that; it’s not just a joke. Besides, I would never have exchanged that mental anguish for any other kind of happiness.”<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, Dostoevsky called on the “chosen thousand” to give up their wanderings and return home. Only a “return to the soil” and submission to “the people’s truth” would enable them to find true peace and would heal their split personality. A symbolic expression of this is the scene in *The Adolescent* when Vershilov breaks the ancient icon of the old pilgrim Makar. Here we have the smashing of the folk (Orthodox Christian) heritage, the inner dualism (the icon breaks into two equal parts), and the hint of the return to the people through Sonia, a woman of the people. The marriage of Sonia and Vershilov is a symbol of future reconciliation between the lost intelligentsia and the people who, in spite of temptation (Sonia’s seduction by Vershilov), have kept faith with their moral ideas and have preserved in their religion the pure, undefiled image of Christ.

A lengthier treatment of the same theme, summing up two decades of reflection, is to be found in Dostoevsky’s famous “Address on Pushkin” made at the unveiling of the Pushkin Monument in Moscow (June 8, 1880). In this speech Dostoevsky enlarged on Apollon Grigoriev’s favorite image of Pushkin as a synthetic expression of the Russian spirit, a “prophetic” apparition who had shown the Russian nation its mission and its future.

In the character of Aleko, the hero of the poem “Gypsies,” and in Evgeny Onegin, Dostoevsky suggested, Pushkin had been the first to portray “the unhappy wanderer in his native land, the traditional Russian sufferer detached from the people [...]” For Dostoevsky the term “wanderer” was an apt description of the entire Russian intelligentsia – both the “superfluous men” of

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35 Ibid., p. 204

36 *The Adolescent*, trans. Andrew R. MacAndrew (New York 1971), p. 490.

the 40s and the Populists of the 70s. “The homeless vagrants,” he continued, “are wandering still, and it seems it will be long before they disappear”; at present they were seeking refuge in socialism, which did not exist in Aleko’s time, and through it hoped to attain universal happiness, for “a Russian sufferer to find peace needs universal happiness – exactly this: nothing less will satisfy him – of course, as long as the proposition is confined to theory.”<sup>37</sup>

Before the wanderer can find peace, however, he must conquer his own pride and humble himself before “the people’s truth.” “Humble thyself, proud man, and above all, break thy pride,” was the “Russian solution” Dostoevsky claimed to have found in Pushkin’s poetry. Aleko failed to follow this advice and was therefore asked to leave by the gypsies; Onegin despised Tatiana – a modest girl close to the “soil” – and by the time he learned to humble himself it was too late. Throughout Pushkin’s work, Dostoevsky declared, there were constant confrontations between the “Russian wanderers” and “the people’s truth” represented by “positively beautiful” heroes – men of the soil expressing the spiritual essence of the Russian nation. The purpose of these confrontations was to convince the reader of the need for a “return to the soil” and a fusion with the people.

Pushkin himself was proof that such a return was possible without a rejection of universal ideals. Dostoevsky drew attention to the poet’s “universal susceptibility,” his talent for identifying himself with a Spaniard (Don Juan), an Arab (“Imitations of the Koran”), an Englishman (“A Feast during the Plague”), or an ancient Roman (“Egyptian Nights”) while still remaining a national poet. This ability Pushkin owed to the “universality” of the Russian spirit: “to become a genuine and complete Russian means [...] to become brother of all men, an all-human man.”

In his speech Dostoevsky also spoke about the division into Slavophiles and Westernizers, which he regretted as a great, though historically inevitable, misunderstanding. The impulse behind Peter’s reform had been not mere utilitarianism but the desire to extend the frontiers of nationality to include a genuine “all-humanity.” Dreams of serving humanity had even been the impulse behind the political policies of the Russian state: “For what else has Russia been doing in her policies, during these two centuries, but serving Europe much more than herself? I do not believe that this took place because of the mere want of aptitude on the part of our statesmen.”<sup>38</sup>

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37 *The Diary of a Writer*, p. 968.

38 Here Dostoevsky was polemicizing with Danilevsky, who (in Russia and Europe) had ridiculed Russian statesmen for trying to curry favor with Europe to the detriment of their country’s interest.

Oh, the peoples of Europe,” [Dostoevsky exclaimed in a euphoric vein] “have no idea how dear they are to us! And later – in this I believe – we, well, not we but the Russians of the future, to the last man, will comprehend that to become a genuine Russian means to seek finally to reconcile all European controversies, to show the solution of European anguish in our all-human and all-unifying Russian soil, to embrace in it with brotherly love all our brothers, and finally, perhaps, to utter the ultimate word of great, universal harmony, of the fraternal accord of all nations abiding by the law of Christ’s Gospel!<sup>39</sup>

Before delivering his “Address,” Dostoevsky was seriously worried that it might be received coldly by his audience. His fears proved groundless. The speech was an unprecedented success: carried away by enthusiasm, the crowd called out “our holy man, our prophet,” and members of the audience pressed around Dostoevsky to kiss his hands. Even Turgenev, who had been caricatured in *Demons*, came up to embrace him. The solemn moment of universal reconciliation between Slavophiles and Westernizers, conservatives and revolutionaries, seemed already at hand. “When at the end I proclaimed the idea of universal reconciliation,” Dostoevsky wrote to his wife:

The audience fell into a frenzy; I can hardly tell you what a tumult, what a roar of approval broke out when I finished; people who did not know each other burst into tears, sobbed, fell into each other’s arms, and swore that they would become better, that they would no longer hate but love each other.<sup>40</sup>

The enthusiasm aroused by the “Address” turned out to be short-lived; men who had embraced each other under its immediate impact decided, after some reflection, that the differences dividing them had not diminished in the slightest. Only Ivan Aksakov continued to regard the “Address” with lasting and uncritical enthusiasm.

One member of the enthusiastic audience was the Populist writer Gleb Uspensky; in his report for the *Notes of the Fatherland* he wrote that the address had had a “staggering impact” that was fully deserved, despite talk about “some kind of *humility*,” to which the audience paid no attention. After the full text had appeared, Uspensky felt compelled to correct his report, to warn his readers that the impression made by the “Address” failed to reflect “its real content” and that its success was largely based on an erroneous interpretation.

Criticism from the conservative side came from Leontiev. He called Dostoevsky a heretic who wanted to replace the teaching of the church by a “rose-colored Christianity.” The Gospel, he pointed out, did not promise

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39 Dostoevsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 10, p. 458.

40 Dostoevsky, *Pis'ma*, ed. A. S. Dolinin (M, 1959), vol. 4, p. 144.

universal brotherhood, concord, or harmony, and the realization of such ideals would be the greatest misfortune for the church.

From his own point of view Leontiev was quite right in his criticism. An attentive reading of *The Brothers Karamazov* and the “Address on Pushkin” leaves no doubt that Dostoevsky’s essential concern was not with salvation in heaven but with salvation on earth. His emphasis on a world without injustice or violence, and on universal brotherhood, reflected a longing for “harmony” that was an echo of his youthful ideas and showed the gulf that divided him from such reactionary patrons as Pobedonostsev.<sup>41</sup> The term “harmony” itself, it should be remembered, was one of the entries in the *Pocket Dictionary* compiled by the Petrashevtsy.

“*The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*” and the Vision of New Christianity

It is Dostoevsky’s last great novel, *The Brothers Karamazov* (1878-1880) that constitutes the sum of his ideas. *The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*, a part of that work, has come to be regarded by many commentators as his artistic masterwork. Berdiaev, for instance, wrote:

The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor is the high point of Dostoevsky’s work and the crown of his dialectic. It is in it that his constructive views on religion must be sought; all the tangles are unraveled and the radical problem, that of human freedom, is solved.<sup>42</sup>

While working on *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky was closely connected with the right-wing. He had edited a conservative journal *The Citizen* [*Grazhdanin*] since 1872, soon afterward becoming a close friend of Pobedonostsev. He would visit him for long discussions every week, and he sought his advice while working on *The Brothers Karamazov*. Despite this fact, unlike *Demons*, the book was not an anti-revolutionary pamphlet; the problems and arguments of revolutionary socialists, depicted through the figure of Ivan Karamazov, are described with sympathy and understanding. This difference is often interpreted by taking into consideration the trial of Nechayev, by which *Demons* was inspired. *The Brothers Karamazov* was inspired by the heroic fight of populists-terrorists, whom Dostoevsky valued for their pureness of motive and nobility. Most crucial, however, was that the problems of Ivan Karamazov were the very problems of Dostoevsky. The temptations of iconoclastic atheism

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41 See M. Gus, *Idei i obrazy F. M. Dostoevskogo* (M, 1962), pp. 492-95.

42 N.A. Berdiaev, *Mirosozercanie Dostoevskogo*, p. 195. [English translation by Donald Attwater, *Dostoyevsky*, p. 188].

were not unfamiliar to the former supporter of Petrashevsky; his “hosanna,” as he himself underlined, “has passed through an enormous furnace of doubt.”

In the novel, *The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor* is preceded by Ivan Karamazov’s “rebellion,” a rebellion against theodicy and historiody - a refusal to accept a harmony for which too high a price is to be paid. Ivan does not reject God but the world he has created, as it is a world of injustice. Divine Providence does nothing to prevent the suffering of innocent children, and no future “harmony” can make up for the tears of a tormented child. This rebellion suggests that men ought to refuse to obey God and take their fate into their own hands, building a world deprived of suffering. Based on a dispute with rational theodicy, according to which God is not to be blamed for the existence of evil in the world, since it results from free will given to men, Ivan acknowledged the argument pertaining to the source of evil, refusing however to accept the evil itself. In practice, this meant that in order to combat or diminish evil, its source, freedom, needs to be destroyed. Dostoevsky believed that this explained the genesis of revolutionary socialism. That the justification of Ivan’s choice took the form of the legend of the Grand Inquisitor, in turn, was supposed to illustrate the favored conclusion of the writer: the inner similarity between socialism and Catholicism.

The Grand Inquisitor is guided by compassion, and thus “corrects” God’s work. He exchanges freedom for bread, thereby taking away freedom in order to give people happiness – happiness for weak, “pitiful children.” This happiness is conditional on total depersonalization, total “community.” The Inquisitor accuses God of insufficient love for people, combined with an exaggerated image of them. He himself knows that people are weak, and therefore relieves them of the burden of freedom, conscience and responsibility, the burden they are incapable of carrying. Conscience is substituted with inquisition, and freedom of choice is taken back from the people, while the power of the Inquisitor rests with the three temptations of Satan, rejected by Christ, namely: the miracle (that is the demonstration of supernatural power), mystery and authority. By the same token, the idea of the Christianization of the state, or to put it in other words, the transformation of the state into a Church uniting people by mutual love, is replaced by a state – an imperial state, seeking to unite all people “into one common and harmonious ant-hill.” And then Christ comes again to Earth. It is not a triumphal *parousia* as envisioned at the end of times; the Son of God wished to stay among people at least for a moment, unnoticed. However, he is recognized by people, and they gather around him. The Inquisitor appears and explains his arguments, subsequently ordering his arrest and sentencing him to be burned to death as a heretic. Christ listens to the monologue of the Inquisitor in silence, and then forgives him, kissing him on the

lips. The Inquisitor, in response, sets him free, asking him to never return or disturb the peace and happiness that the people have managed to achieve without him.

The meaning of *The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor* is that Christ won a moral victory, a victory of freedom and faith in men. In the world literature, the *Legend* constitutes one of the most fervent works defending freedom of conscience. Many researchers have drawn attention to the fact that both the arguments of Ivan Karamazov (against theodicy) and of the Grand Inquisitor (against Christ) remained unrefuted. Such was the intention of the author. Once and forever, he wanted to disprove rational theodicy<sup>43</sup> (in this respect sympathizing with Ivan Karamazov); he was in favor of Christ, while allowing the logical argument to rest with the Grand Inquisitor. Even though Christ's response to the Inquisitor's monologue is solely hushed silence, it is more convincing than any arguments. Berdaev commented on this, writing that the idea of freedom cannot be captured in words, the idea of compulsion, in turn, may be easily justified.<sup>44</sup>

In other works by Dostoevsky, reason also supported the ideas rejected by the author, and Christ's truth functions without logical arguments. The only argument in his favor being a negative one, *a contrario*, depicting the destructive consequences of the rejection of his truth. It seems that the influence of one of the oldest and deepest traditions of the Eastern Church (if not direct, then indirect), the tradition of apophatic theology, of negation, claiming that what is divine cannot be expressed in words or through rationale definitions, and that God may only be described in terms of what he is not, is at work here. Sergei Hessen observed that trace: "the philosophy of *The Brothers Karamazov* comes very close to negative theology"<sup>45</sup>[author's translation]. Consequently, this should be deemed as the most important proof that a close relationship existed between the religious mind of the author and the Eastern Christian tradition.

It is not only the silence of Christ that stands as a reaction to the reasoning of Ivan, leading through rebellion against the world to the system of the Grand Inquisitor. The figure of the Elder, Zosima, through the "triumphant refutation"

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43 According to some commentators, he was successful in so doing. Cf. A. Boyce-Gibson, *The Religion of Dostoevsky*, London 1973, p. 176.

44 N. A. Berdiaev, *Mirosozercanie Dostoevskogo*, p. 196.

45 S. Hessen, *Der Kampf der Utopie und der Autonomie des Guten in der Weltanschauung Dostoevskis und W. Solowjows*, Die Pädagogische Hochschule (Baden, 1929), no. 4. [*The Struggle Between Utopia and the Autonomy of the Good in the Worldview of F. M. Dostoevsky and V. Soloviev*]

of Ivan's blasphemy, constitutes a reply. In this case, however, Dostoevsky remained faithful to the anti-intellectual, apophatic tradition of the Eastern Church, failing to invoke logical proofs. He juxtaposed the negation of the world created by God through the "Euclidean mind" and the vision of "correction" of this world by the methods of the Grand Inquisitor not with counterarguments but with mystical experience and the practice of active love, as personified in the Elder, Zosima, and leading to the blissful acceptance of the world.

In order to acquaint himself with the spiritual world of Orthodoxy, Dostoevsky spent two days in the desert of Optina in June of 1878, meeting three times with the already-famous Father Ambrose. He was accompanied by Vladimir Soloviev, a close friend at the time, who shared an interest with him in the social realization of the idea of Godmanhood. In 1878, when he started working on *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky attended Soloviev's lectures on Godmanhood.<sup>46</sup> These lectures strengthened his critical opinion of the West and boosted hope that it was Russia's destiny to realize the ideal of "*sobornost*," as it was called by Slavophiles, or "free theocracy," as it was referred to by Soloviev; the ideal of a society as a Church, that is an assembly integrated by faith and mutual love. This issue is a topic of conversation between Ivan Karamazov, Father Paissy and Zosima in the novel. Ivan Karamazov develops an idea that it is not the Church which ought to transform into the state (as was the supposed case of the West, a fact which resulted in a formal separation of the Church and secular state). On the contrary, the state should transform into the Church, which is to say that the state ought to substitute legal formalism and sanctions with a jurisdiction exercised by the Church. Representing Orthodoxy, Father Paissy accepts the idea, setting it against Catholicism. Zosima, in turn, states:

It is true, [...] the Christian society now is not ready and is only resting on some seven righteous men, but as they are never lacking, it will continue still unshaken in expectation of its complete transformation from a society almost heathen in character into a single universal and all-powerful Church. So be it, so be it! Even though at the end of the ages, for it is ordained to come to pass!<sup>47</sup>

It is evident that Dostoevsky himself was interested in the idea of the state as a Church, allowing different figures in the novel to develop its various aspects. Zosima was the only character to illustrate the ideal of the author in a positive way. The difference between Zosima and the other interlocutors lies in Zosima emphasizing the moral improvement of an individual, the personal responsibility

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46 Ibid.

47 F.M. Dostoevsky, *Sobranije sočinenij*, vol. 9, pp. 85-86.

of each human being for himself and everyone else. By the same token, he renders the degeneration of the ideal of a state as a Church to the system of the Great Inquisitor impossible.

Dostoevsky's powerful protector, Pobedonostsev, expressed his own concern over the figure and the teachings of the Elder Zosima, specifically as an insufficient "answer" to the rebellion of Ivan Karamazov and *The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*.<sup>48</sup> On this issue, the Director General of the Holy Synod stands in the same trajectory of thought as the majority of readers of *The Brothers Karamazov*. In terms of the religious beliefs of Dostoevsky, the character of Zosima is shifty, unnatural, and nevertheless meaningful. Zosima is not a traditional Orthodox monk turning away from the world. On the contrary, he is set against such monks (represented by the mad Father Ferapont), he is also not to the liking of Father Ambrose and other monks of the desert of Optina.<sup>49</sup> While working on the biography and worldviews of Zosima, Dostoevsky employed the motifs from the life and work of his favorite clergyman, Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk, the author of *A Spiritual Treasure Gathered from the World*, which was representative of the 18<sup>th</sup> century "religion of the heart," sympathizing with pietism and evangelism.<sup>50</sup> Aside from this, the similarity between Tikhon and Zosima is negligible. Zosima represents a revived Christianity, bound up with the future, revitalized by the vision of future of carnal resurrection and common reintegration. Ecstatic, filled with love for the Earth-mother and everything that lives, Zosima's religiousness resembles, as Berdiaev noticed, that of Saint Francis of Assisi.<sup>51</sup> The ideas expressed by Dostoevsky through the life and teachings of Zosima turned out to not be so idle. Though in a selective manner, they were invoked by outstanding representatives of the Russian religious-philosophic renaissance, such as Vasilii Rozanov, who fought to rehabilitate the reproductive power of nature, and Vyacheslav Ivanov, who gave them a poetic form, and regarded Dostoevsky as a precursor of mystic realism.

At this point, we may return to *The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*. The idea of a structural similarity between authoritarian socialism and Catholicism was not solely the product of the anti-Catholic bias of Russian Slavophilism. It was also preached by French Saint-Simonians, who gave the idea a positive reading, and defined their socialism as a "new theocracy," as a reversion on a

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48 See letter from Dostoevsky to Pobedonostsev as of 13 September 1879 (*Pis'ma*, vol. 4, p. 109).

49 See K. Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky*, p. 484.

50 See S. Bolshakoff, *Russian Mystics*, "Introduction" by T. Merton, London 1977, pp.69-78.

51 N.A. Berdiaev, *Mirosozercanie Dostoevskogo*, p. 214.



higher level to the hierarchical “organicism” of the Catholic Middle Ages. On the other hand, strong tendencies within the Roman Catholic Church of an authoritarian-paternalistic nature often approximated the political concepts associated with socialism – let me remind you at least about the Jesuit state in Paraguay. The idea of presenting the socialist utopia as a state of the Grand Inquisitor was therefore less astonishing than it might seem at first glance.<sup>52</sup>

With the experience of a communist revolution in Russia, *The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor* was commonly regarded as a prophecy, which clearly foresaw the totalitarian consequences of socialist ideocracy, where an organized minority aspiring to inerrancy, exerts control over an incapacitated majority. Treating communism as a secularized religion, suggesting analogies between political parties and the Church, between party and religious indoctrination, purge and inquisition and so on, were all part of the many significant interpretations of totalitarianism.<sup>53</sup> The vision of Dostoevsky fit into these interpretations, supporting and confirming them with the intuition of the eminent writer-prophet. Therefore, it is not astonishing that they won eager, enthusiastic acceptance. This, however, did not necessitate an approval of the anti-Catholicism of Dostoevsky nor did it spark more avid interest in this problem.<sup>54</sup> The question of the relation between Catholicism and socialism, as presented by Dostoevsky, was usually regarded as a metaphor, which helped to elucidate the quasi-religious nature of socialism and the perils resulting therein. Many arguments may be advanced in favor of such a tendency in the perception of *The Legend*.

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52 See A.Walicki, *Osobowość a historia [Personality and History]*, pp. 417-419. A contrasting view, prevailing in the Soviet studies on literature was conveyed markedly by S. Borshchevsky, who claimed that the invention about the origin of socialism is Dostoevsky’s own property (see S. Borshchevsky, *Shchedrin i Dostoevski*, Moscow 1956, p.56).

53 *Bolshevism. An Introduction to Soviet Communism*, Notre Dame, IN 1952 by Waldemar Gurian is a classic example of interpretation of Russian Communism as a pseudo-religion, taking the form of totalitarian ideocracy. A summarization of this trend in interpretation is a concise book by A.J. Klinghoffer, *Red Apocalypse. The Religious Evolution of Soviet Communism*, Lanham 1996.

54 A detailed analysis of anti-Catholic threads in the works of Dostoevsky can be found in my book *Rosja, katolicyzm i sprawa polska [Russia, Catholicism and the Polish Question]*, Warsaw 2002, pp. 120-150. See also D. Dirscherl, SJ, *Dostoevsky and the Catholic Church*, Chicago 1986.

## Lev Tolstoy

### *The Phases of Moral Crisis*

At the end of the 1870s, Count LEV TOLSTOY (1828-1910) was at the height of his literary fame: *War and Peace* had appeared in 1869 and *Anna Karenina* in 1877. Now, when his creative genius was at its peak, he experienced a moral crisis that marked a turning point in his life. After a period of depression and thoughts of suicide, he became more and more obsessed by the idea that he must turn his back completely on the system of values accepted by the comfortable elite to which he belonged.

In the years 1878-79 Tolstoy wrote his famous *Confession*; he followed this with the *Critique of Dogmatic Theology* and the tracts *What I Believe* (1884), *What Are We to Do?* (1886), *On Life* (1887), and *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* (1893). In 1881 he sent an appeal to Alexander III asking him to commute the death sentences passed on the revolutionaries who had assassinated his father. In the same year he went on a pilgrimage to the Optina Cloister, where discussions with Father Ambrose, one of the famous elders there, confirmed him in his distrust of official Orthodoxy. Another experience that helped to change his outlook was the work he did for the Moscow census a year later, when he saw at first hand the conditions of the urban poor. For the sake of his family he did not hand over his estate to the peasants as he wished to do, but he cut down his personal expenditures, gave up his former aristocratic life-style, and undertook regular physical labor. Gradually he gathered around him a group of disciples, the most important being Vladimir Chertkov. Together they founded "The Intermediary" [*Pośrednik*], a publishing company that was to bring literature to the people. Through this company Tolstoy published several of his own works (e.g. *What Do Men Live By?*, *God Sees the Truth but Waits*). The venture was very successful and helped to popularize his ideas, especially among the religious sectarians. After a disastrous harvest in 1891, Tolstoy tried to rouse public opinion with a series of articles on hunger in the countryside and personally organized aid for the starving peasants. When the Dukhobor sect was being persecuted by the government a few years later, he spoke up in their defense and together with Chertkov helped to arrange their emigration to Canada. There was worldwide indignation when Tolstoy's criticism of official Orthodoxy led the Holy Synod to excommunicate him in 1901.

This is the accepted account of how Tolstoyan doctrine came into being and continued to function in popular tracts and philosophical-cum-religious pamphlets (which, in view of the censorship, were largely published abroad).

Many researchers have pointed out, however, that elements of Tolstoy's later philosophy can be found in works written before the "turning point."<sup>55</sup> In adolescence Tolstoy had been fascinated by Rousseau's criticism of civilization; when he was fifteen he wore a medallion with Rousseau's portrait around his neck.<sup>56</sup> In the story *Three Deaths*, written in 1858, we already find the characteristic Tolstoyan contrast between the fear of death felt by the "upper classes" and the peaceful resignation of a simple man of the people as he faces his end. Articles published in 1862 in the periodical *Yasnaya Polana* (when he was running a school for the village children on his estate) contain the earliest outline of the social philosophy he later elaborated in the 1880s. Condemnation of individualism (embodied for Tolstoy – as for Dostoevsky – in Napoleon) runs as a continuous motif through *War and Peace*. In the novel this individualism is contrasted again and again with the instinctive "truth" of the common people. Even Tolstoy's pessimism was not something that only emerged with his ideological crisis. From a letter we know that he was reading Schopenhauer in 1869; the works of this "greatest genius among men," he wrote to his friend Fet, filled him with "unceasing rapture" and a pleasure never known before.<sup>57</sup>

The importance of the crisis of the 1870s should not be underestimated, however, though in his *Confession* Tolstoy undoubtedly exaggerated the suddenness and violence of the changes in his outlook. His vivid tale of a repentant sinner was a piece of artistic license obviously intended to shock readers into abandoning their own evil ways. Nevertheless, the sincerity and authentic fervor of the *Confession* speak for themselves: before he wrote it, Tolstoy suffered from a severe bout of depression that in 1876 led him to contemplate suicide. During his recovery he turned to religion and finally broke with the generally accepted world view of his own milieu. In sum, one may say that whereas this crisis was only a stage in the gradual evolution of Tolstoy's ideas, it did mark a real turning point in his life.

In his *Confession* Tolstoy wrote that he had been baptized and brought up in the Orthodox faith, but had soon abandoned it, like most members of his class. He had killed men in the war; fought duels; squandered money extorted from the peasants on eating, drinking, and gambling; and indulged in debauchery. Although there was hardly a crime he had not committed, he was generally accepted as a moral man.

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55 See A. Semczuk, *Lev Tolstoy* (Warsaw 1963), pp. 221ff.

56 See N. N. Gusev, *Letopis' zhizni i tvorchestva L. N. Tolstogo* (M, 1958), p. 30. In 1901, Tolstoy told a certain professor in Paris that he had read "the whole of Rousseau, all 22 volumes, including the Dictionary of Music."

57 *Ibid.*, p. 363.

What, then, took the place of his lost faith? Like most educated men of his day, Tolstoy wrote, he believed in progress; but when he saw a man being guillotined in Paris, he understood that no theory could justify the taking of human life. He longed for fame, but in his heart of hearts he did not believe that there was anything of substantial value to be gained by becoming the most famous writer in the world. When his beloved brother died, how was he to explain and justify his death? There was no adequate answer. The inevitability of death made life a total absurdity, a cruel and stupid joke. The human condition could be compared to the lot of the traveler in an oriental fable. Pursued by a wild beast, he climbs down into a well, only to see at the bottom the gaping jaws of a dragon. Unable to go either up or down, the poor man clings to a bush growing in a crevice. As his strength begins to fail he sees two mice, one white and one black (symbolizing night and day), gnawing at the branch he is hanging from. Knowing that he must inevitably fall, the traveler still makes a supreme effort and licks the drops of sweet sap oozing from the leaves. "This is no fairy tale," Tolstoy comments, "but a genuine, indisputable, and universally comprehensible truth."<sup>58</sup>

If they had the courage to face the truth, men must surely realize that, from the point of view of the individual clinging to the idea of personal survival, human existence must be summed up in the words "vanity of vanities, all is vanity." This was a truth known to all the wise men in history – Socrates, Solomon, and the Buddha. The newest philosophy, represented by Schopenhauer, had also come to the conclusion that "happy is he who has never been born, death is better than life." The best solution to the terrible dilemma was suicide, and that was the way out chosen by strong and energetic men. Other palliatives were Epicureanism, unconsciousness, or – for men who were wise but weak (like Solomon or Schopenhauer) – the acceptance of life as it was, in full awareness of the fact that it was senseless and evil. This was the way out he himself had chosen, Tolstoy writes in the *Confession*: he knew that life was a stupid joke played on humanity, but nevertheless he went on living, washing, getting dressed, eating dinners, conversing, and even writing books.

At this point there is a sudden change in the argument, analogous to the switch made by Kant who, after demonstrating that theoretical reason leads to irreconcilable antinomies, opposes theoretical reason with practical reason, which resolves these contradictions.<sup>59</sup> Reason denies life, Tolstoy writes, but is itself the child of life. Life is all; the individual's reason denies that it has

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58 L. N. Tolstoy, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (M – L, 1928-58), vol. 23, p. 14.

59 Later Tolstoy himself noticed the analogy; he read Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* (in 1887) with "joyous delight" (see Gusev, *Letopis'*, p. 679).

meaning, but at the same time millions of human beings live their lives without doubting that their existence is meaningful.

“How can this be?” Tolstoy asks. “Are we two – Schopenhauer and I – the only two men wise enough to have insight into the meaning of life?”<sup>60</sup> Would you not say we were infatuated by pride in our own reason? According to the rational understanding of learned men life may be meaningless, but the vast masses find meaning in life on the basis of irrational understanding or faith. Faith is not revelation, or the supernatural, or a concern solely with man’s relationship to God – it is just this supra-rational insight into the meaning of human existence thanks to which man does not annihilate himself.

Having come to this conclusion, Tolstoy relates in the *Confession*, he set out to look for spiritual help from men of religious belief. At first he turned to men of his own circle, but he soon understood that their faith was not genuine but only one of their Epicurean pleasures. He therefore “turned his eyes to the huge masses of simple, ignorant, and poor people” – pilgrims, monks and peasants, orthodox Christians as well as Old Believers and sectarians. In their company he could see that they accepted sickness and misfortune with quiet resignation, and death without terror or despair. He came to love them and to understand that the meaning life had for them was the true one, so that he too accepted this meaning. He regained his faith in God and understood the universal wisdom handed on by tradition, which proclaims that the world is governed by a superior will, and that he who would understand its meaning must bow before this will.

A further stage in Tolstoy’s evolution began when he noticed the difference between the faith of the theologians and that of the common people. At first, under Khomiakov’s influence, he took part in all church ceremonies, even those whose meaning he failed to understand; he abased his intellect and submitted to tradition, for only thus, he believed, would he “become united in love” with past generations, with the whole of humanity. Soon, however, he could not fail to notice that theological dogmas served to divide people rather than to unite them, that they countenanced persecution and were exploited for particularist and secular ends.

After examining official theology, Tolstoy came to the conclusion that it was not interested in the meaning of life; obscure dogmas concealed no deeper meaning, but were merely a means of diverting people’s attention from the clear and simple truths of religious faith because these truths, which the common people understood instinctively, were often inconvenient to their rulers. Taking reason as his guide, therefore, Tolstoy set out to make a critique of theology.

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60 Tolstoy, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 23, p. 30.

What he demanded of belief was that there should be no incomprehensible, supra-rational truths apart from those whose acceptance arose out of the nature of reason itself, as a faculty realizing its own limitations.<sup>61</sup> He submitted the teachings of the church to rational examination in order to eliminate from them everything that was inconsistent with reason and had been imposed upon it artificially.

In this way reason – by-passed in order to allow the writer to embrace faith conceived as an irrational but life-enhancing insight now had its rights fully restored. Later still, Tolstoy came to the conclusion that there must be absolutely no dissonance between reason and religion if the latter was not to be a pseudo-faith.<sup>62</sup>

At first sight this argument appears to be self-contradictory: first reason capitulates before faith, and then it is set up as the arbiter in matters of faith; first all rational argument is condemned as life-denying (the way from Cartesian doubt to Schopenhauerian pessimism), and then, at the other extreme, we have an out-and-out rationalistic, “commonsense” criticism of the mysteries of faith.<sup>63</sup> In fact there is no inconsistency – only a state of tension between two poles of thought forming an interdependent dialectical whole. In order to follow Tolstoy’s argument we have to realize that he was writing about two different kinds of reason: the life-denying reason that is forced to submit to faith is the *individual reason* of man as a being subject to spatiotemporal limitations; reason in harmony with faith, on the other hand, is *universal reason*. It is a peculiar feature of Tolstoy’s philosophy that the supra-individual universal reason extolled by him has certain features in common with the critical Enlightenment intellect – that is, the brand of rationalism the religious critics of the Enlightenment (e.g. Lamennais) condemned as stemming from *individual* reason, incompatible with universal reason.

Another unusual aspect of Tolstoy’s thought is that he arrived at the idea of the futility of individual reason partly through his reading of Schopenhauer. He thus differed both from the Slavophiles, who drew their inspiration from the German romantics, and from Chaadaev, who was influenced by the French traditionalists. Under Schopenhauer’s influence, Tolstoy became convinced of the essential difference between true reality and the illusory world of phenomena. Schopenhauer argued that all suffering, fear of death, and the sense of the absurdity of life flow from the imprisonment of the will – the

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61 Ibid., p. 57.

62 See Tolstoy, *Chtu takoe religiia i v chem sushchnost’ eyo?* (1902).

63 Of French Enlightenment authors, Tolstoy appreciated not only Rousseau but also Voltaire.

metaphysical substance of the universe – within the body of the individual. The way to salvation, therefore, is to repudiate the self, to shed the burden of spatiotemporal individuality. “Salvation,” Schopenhauer wrote, “is something utterly alien to our personality; in order to achieve it, it is necessary to deny and annihilate this personality.”<sup>64</sup> This is the guiding idea of Schopenhauer’s ethics, which points the way to salvation through metaphysical impersonalism. To love one’s fellow man means to forget one’s own individuality, to abolish the barriers between the self and the other: “for him who actively loves his neighbor, the veil of Maya becomes transparent, the mirage of the *principium individuationis* disappears.”<sup>65</sup> Another way to salvation is through art, which has an intuitive understanding of all that is eternal, unchanging, and impersonal. Total liberation, however, is to be found only in the “euthanasia of the will,” the state of perfect indifference, the abandonment to Nirvana. This moral ideal can be achieved through ascetic resignation as exemplified by the Christian saint or the Indian holy man.

It will be seen from this that Schopenhauer’s role in Tolstoy’s spiritual crisis and its resolution was of considerable importance. He did not, it is true, take over Schopenhauer’s philosophy in its entirety (in particular he did not accept the conception of the will as the metaphysical essence of the universe): moreover, what he did take over he often modified or combined with other ideas completely alien to the German philosopher. Indeed, Tolstoy’s new outlook led him, as we shall see, to a radical questioning of the entire culture and way of life of the upper classes – something that had no counterpart in Schopenhauer’s philosophy or outlook on life. Nevertheless, it was to Schopenhauer that Tolstoy owed the formulation of the leading idea of his philosophy of life – the notion that there is an essential difference between true life and spatiotemporal existence. It was Schopenhauer, too, who confirmed him in his conviction that the time- and space-bound individual cannot escape discovering that his life has to be seen as totally absurd, and who showed him that the way to salvation lies, consequently, in overcoming “the principle of individuation.” Finally, Schopenhauer was partly responsible for turning Tolstoy’s attention toward Buddhism and the other great religions of the East, and for showing him how they were related to Christianity.

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64 A. Schopenhauer, *Sämtliche Werke* (Leipzig 1922), vol. 2, p. 482 (Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung).

65 *Ibid.*, pp. 440-41.

*Tolstoy's Philosophy of Life*

The best exposition of Tolstoy's metaphysics is to be found in his treatise *On Life* (1887).

"The true life of man," he wrote, "is the aspiration toward goodness, which is achieved by submitting one's individuality to the law of reason. Neither reason nor the degree of submission to reason is determined by time or space. True life has its course outside time and space."<sup>66</sup> Only life like this – life that recognizes no difference between one minute and fifty thousand years – can be said truly to exist.

It is time and space that lie at the roots of the "principle of individuation." It follows from this that to renounce the individual welfare is not an act of exceptional merit but a necessary law of life. In order to live a true life – not a life of animal instincts – it is necessary to be reborn and become a "reasonable consciousness," to transcend individuality by identifying one's own welfare with the welfare of others. Whoever achieves this finds that death no longer holds any terror and perceives the world as a reasonable whole, subject to a single law. Individual life is not true life – the Hindu yogi who spends years standing on one leg in order to achieve Nirvana is more truly alive than the brutish inhabitants of the so-called civilized countries.<sup>67</sup> What is normally called life is actually only a game with death (on this point the "latest pessimists," Schopenhauer and Hartmann, are in agreement with the Buddhists, Tolstoy declared). True life is not the world of phenomena but an invisible and impersonal "reasonable consciousness," a universal force not bounded by time or space. Individuality is evil, an illusion that cuts man off from true life, imprisons him in the world of phenomena and condemns him to suffering and death. The way to transcend individuality is through love – love not as an emotional impulse, but as total submission to the tranquil clarity of the "reasonable consciousness" that enjoins men to renounce their individual welfare.<sup>68</sup>

Though Tolstoy demanded the renunciation of "individual welfare" and not personality as such, he was also concerned to make the point that true personality should not be identified with the "brutish" nature of the spatiotemporal world. Personality as a sense of identity has, in fact, nothing to do with individuality: our bodies are constantly altering, and individual

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66 L. N. Tolstoy, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (St. Petersburg 1913; ed. P. I. Biriukov), vol. 17, p. 248.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 261.

68 *Ibid.*, p. 270.



consciousness is a series of changing psychological states, whereas a sense of identity is something permanent and unchanging. On the basis of this argument, Tolstoy attempted, in his treatise *On Life*, to prove that “man’s true self” is not subject to the power of death. These ideas were not, however, fully developed and seem to stem from certain hesitations rather than a principled standpoint. The chief content of the Tolstoyan philosophy of life was undoubtedly metaphysical impersonalism – entirely consistent, apart from the above-mentioned reservations, and extreme in its ethical implications.

In its overall postulates Tolstoy’s ethics, with its exhortations to love of one’s fellow man and ascetic resignation, does not differ from Schopenhauer’s. The similarity also extends to the view of the illusory nature of the world of space and time put forward to justify these postulates. In his practical conclusions, however, Tolstoy differs widely from his model. In Schopenhauer’s system the overcoming of the “principle of individuation” represents the climax of the unfolding of individuality. His “renunciation of the world” does not lead to an idealization of the consciousness at the pre-individuation stage, or a cult of simplicity or Rousseauesque condemnation of civilization. Above all, in his politics Schopenhauer was a conservative liberal who firmly defended the rights of the individual;<sup>69</sup> Tolstoy’s metaphysical impersonalism, on the other hand, led him to condemn individualism and to call for humility in the face of the “people’s truth,” for total immersion in the “masses” and nonviolent resistance to evil. The character who best exemplifies this “people’s truth” is Karataev in *War and Peace* – a simple peasant who is only a small part of the anonymous crowd and feels he has no separate existence. Pierre Bezukhov longs to experience Karataev’s “truth.” “To be a soldier, simply a soldier,” he muses before going to sleep. “To enter with all one’s being into this general life, to adopt the qualities that made them what they are. But how to throw off everything superfluous, demonic, this burden of the pseudoman?”

What is original in Tolstoyan philosophy is that the dream of throwing off the burden of the “principle of individuation” is more than just an aspect of the crisis of individualism that, after reaching its climax, passes into its dialectical opposite. Following Schopenhauer, Tolstoy looked for confirmation of his theories in the religions of the East, but his most important inspiration came from his observations of the Russian peasants – from his sympathetic understanding of their way of life, made easier by the patriarchal links that in his case still bound master and man. Tolstoy’s family belonged to the ancient

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69 In Turgenev’s world view, too, we find a combination of metaphysical impersonalism with a liberal defense of the rights of the individual. See A. Walicki, “Turgenev and Schopenhauer,” *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, 10 (1962).

Russian aristocracy, which was part of a cultural formation rooted in non-Westernized semi-Asiatic Russia but which through its elite actively participated in European intellectual life. No doubt this specific situation enabled him to assimilate sophisticated European culture and to experience its crisis “from within,” while at the same time confronting it with his profound understanding of the culture and social consciousness of the Russian peasantry, who were still at the pre-individuation stage. The result of this confrontation is what Soviet scholars (following Lenin) have called a “shift to the position of the patriarchal peasantry.” Tolstoy’s ideology became a reflection of the “Asiatic” elements in the social consciousness of the Russian peasantry. Tolstoy’s ideas, Lenin wrote, should therefore be treated “not as something individual, not as a caprice or a fad, but as the ideology of the conditions of life under which millions and millions actually found themselves for a certain period of time”; as an ideology of “an Oriental, an Asiatic order.”<sup>70</sup>

### *Tolstoy’s Views on Religion*

As a religious thinker Tolstoy represented an extreme rationalistic and ethical evangelism – a brand of Christian heterodoxy whose most characteristic representatives in the Slavic countries were the Bohemian Brethren (it was no coincidence that he had always admired Petr Chelčický) and the Polish Brethren. At the opposite pole was the tendency represented in Russia by the religious and philosophical ideas of Vladimir Soloviev. Both men proclaimed the need for a Christian renaissance and the religious regeneration of mankind, but their conception of religion in general, and of Christianity in particular, was so utterly different that all attempts to arrive at a mutual understanding were doomed to failure. Tolstoy was irritated by Soloviev’s mysticism, and Soloviev could not stomach Tolstoy’s moralizing. The two men were almost physically incapable of breathing the same air, writes Soloviev’s biographer.<sup>71</sup>

For Tolstoy the essence of Christianity was contained in Christ’s ethical teachings; Jesus himself, he thought, was only a man, though the greatest among such great moralists and teachers of mankind as Confucius, Lao-tzu, Buddha, and Socrates. Christ’s teachings were not mystical or mysterious, but simple, clear, and easily understood by all; their quintessence was to be found in the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>72</sup> From this Tolstoy took five commandments in which he

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70 V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works* (Eng.-lang. ed.; M, 1960-66), vol. 17, pp. 51-52.

71 See K. Mochulsky, *Vladimir Soloviev, Zhizn i uchynie* (Paris 1951), p. 248.

72 The Sermon on the Mount is the favorite text of all who profess an evangelical and ethical Christian heterodoxy. See L. Kołakowski, *Świadomość religijna i więź*

attempted to sum up Christ's message: "thou shalt not be angry, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not swear or judge thy neighbors, thou shalt not resist evil by evil, and thou shalt have no enemies."<sup>73</sup> To Tolstoy the fourth commandment was the most important. The words of the Gospel – "Ye have heard it said an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth; and I say unto you, resist not evil" (Matt. 5: 38-39) – were a key that opened all to him.<sup>74</sup> When his theory of passive resistance was attacked as a mere idle daydream, he answered that what was really a daydream – or rather a nightmare, like the ravings of a madman – was a world created in defiance of Christ's teachings and founded on violence. Christ's teaching, he wrote, is not eccentric but reasonable and practical; its meaning can best be expressed in the sentence: "Christ enjoins men to refrain from stupid actions."<sup>75</sup> The teachings of the Gospels demand neither martyrdom nor superhuman sacrifice, for they proclaim the ideal of a life in harmony with human nature, ensuring health and a tranquil death. It is "worldly teaching" that asks men to make sacrifices and calls on them to live in overcrowded cities, to hate and kill each other, to be so concerned with safeguarding their existence that they have no time for life itself. "Worldly teaching" turns life into hell, whereas Christ shows us how to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on earth – a kingdom of eternal peace in which swords will be beaten into plowshares and all men will be brothers.

As part of his tendency to reduce religion to a system of ethics, Tolstoy undertook a critical reappraisal of Christian dogma and ceremonial in the light

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*kościelna* [*Religious Consciousness and the Bond of the Church*] (Warsaw 1965), p. 289.

Kołodkowski's book throws an interesting light on the contrast between Tolstoy's and Soloviev's religious consciousness. "Since the earliest days, Christology has developed as part of a conflict of divergent trends, gravitating to either of two extremes: at the one pole are those who are only interested in Christ's teaching and mission on earth and who deny or play down his divinity (the Socinians, Nestorians, Arians, etc.), whereas at the other pole we have those who pay less heed to Christ's life on earth and even regard it merely as a symbol [...], but stress his divinity, even going so far as to identify the Son with the Father [...] (the Monophysites, etc.). This gravitation to one of two ideal models can be easily traced within the complicated diversity of various Christian doctrines: there is Christ the moral teacher, the Man, the model to be followed; and Christ the God, the mystical bridegroom of the soul, the Logos, the Divine Light, the emanation of the Absolute. These are two extreme versions of Christianity, both equally unacceptable to the Roman Catholic [and Orthodox – A. W.] Church." (Ibid., p. 288.)

73 See the tract "What Do I Believe?" in Tolstoy, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (1913 ed.), vol. 23.

74 Ibid., p. 311.

75 Ibid., p. 423.

of moralistic and rationalistic criteria. Dogmas that he rejected included the Holy Trinity, Revelation, the Immaculate Conception, and the Resurrection; this was not just because he thought them inconsistent with logic, but above all because they did not seem to him to contain the slightest hints of any “reasonable” rule of conduct. Toward the end of his life he undertook to combine all four Gospels in one continuous narrative, and in the course of this work he eliminated from the New Testament its entire cosmology and ontology, as well as all descriptions of miracles; to all intents and purposes he also eliminated the teaching on the word (John I) by stripping it of its mystical and ontological meaning and interpreting the *logos* as “ethical comprehension of life.” In his eagerness to eliminate anything smacking of the supra-natural he even rejected the teaching on Grace and the Holy Ghost, which he called an immoral doctrine that “struck at the roots of everything that is best in human nature.”<sup>76</sup>

It remains to be asked whether a religion stripped of so many vital elements can still be called Christianity. A careful examination of Tolstoy’s ideas would suggest that it cannot. In his tract *What Is Religion and How Is It to Be Defined?* (1902), Tolstoy argued that true religion embraces the basic principles common to all the great faiths, the beliefs that they all share and thanks to which humanity has not become extinct. In this eternal and universal religion, Christianity does not occupy a privileged place, although Tolstoy did regard Jesus as mankind’s greatest teacher, someone whose teachings were divine, even if he himself was not. In this last sense – and in this sense only – can we talk of Tolstoyan philosophy as being Christian. At the same time Tolstoy called the institutionalized Christianity of the official church the most degenerate of the world’s religions. Every religion, he argued, consists of two parts: its ethical doctrine, and the metaphysical doctrine elaborated to justify that ethical doctrine. A religion can be said to degenerate when it substitutes the external symbols of a cult for its ethical principles. All religions suffered from this type of degeneration, but Christianity most of all. The first signs of a split between “metaphysics” and “ethics” were the Epistles of St. Paul, which proclaimed a metaphysical and cabalistic theory alien to the teachings of Christ himself. The last stage in the degeneration of Christianity came with its adoption as the official creed under Constantine the Great. The emperor came to a singular agreement with his high priests by virtue of which he was able to live as he liked and indulge in murder, arson, pillage, and debauchery, while at the same time continuing to call himself a Christian and being assured of his place in heaven.<sup>77</sup>

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76 Ibid., p. 230 (“Issledovanie dogmaticheskogo bogosloviia”).

77 Ibid., p. 480 (“Tserkov’ i gosudarstvo”).

From now on Christianity was a religion that did not demand any kind of moral conduct of its followers and gave its stamp of approval to the immorality of the established order.

In his impassioned condemnation of the hypocrisy and falsehood of official Christianity, Tolstoy quite overlooked Christ's injunction to refrain from anger. Lenin called his criticism an expression of "the sentiments of the primitive peasant democratic masses among whom centuries of serfdom, of official tyranny and robbery, and of Church Jesuitism, deception and chicanery had piled up mountains of anger and hatred."<sup>78</sup>

In the last resort Tolstoy's criticism of religion can be seen as a total rejection of the Church as an institution and an attack on the very foundations of all "positive religions." The idea that "certain special men are necessary as mediators between man and God," as well as the belief in miracles or in the "magical power of certain formulas repeated through the centuries or noted down in books," was for Tolstoy only evidence of the degeneration of religion. The true universal faith of which he was to be the prophet was to be a religion without a priesthood, without dogmas, without sacraments, without liturgy – in fact without any trace of the supra-natural.

What was to be the place of God in this religion? Tolstoy's views undoubtedly had little in common with traditional theism. It is true that in his popular tracts he compared man's relationship with God to the relationship of a son to his father, or a farmhand to his master, but these comparisons must not be taken literally as evidence of an anthropomorphic conception of the Godhead. There would seem to be better grounds for classifying Tolstoy's philosophy of God as a specific version of theological immanentism. It is difficult to arrive at a more precise definition, since Tolstoy himself did not attempt anything of this nature. He was content to state "God exists as the principle [origin] of all things; a particle of this divine principle exists in man, and it may be diminished or increased according to one's way of life."<sup>79</sup> Tolstoy's reluctance to define the essence of God was not only a result of his concentration on ethical issues. Of equal importance is the fact that he was convinced of the futility of such a definition. Thus, despite the extreme rationalism of his *critique* of dogmatic theology, the author of the *Confession* cannot be classed among the representatives of religious rationalism. "God and the soul," he wrote, "are as well known to me as infinity – not through definition, but in quite a different

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78 Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 16, p. 324.

79 Tolstoy, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (1913 ed.), vol. 15, p. 317 ("Chto takoe religiia i v chern sushchnost eyo?").

way. Definitions only help to destroy this knowledge.”<sup>80</sup> Like Kant (whom he quoted), Tolstoy categorically rejected a “rational theology”; he was, it is true, a rationalistic critic of positive religion, but, like Kant, he was convinced of the impotence of theoretical reason as an instrument for proving the existence of God or analyzing the essence of His being.

### *Tolstoy’s Criticism of Civilization and Social Ideals*

As a social ideology Tolstoyan philosophy is unusual in that it combines radical criticism of the existing social system and the spiritual state of the privileged classes with an equally radical rejection of revolutionary doctrines and all attempts to resist evil by force.

Tolstoy’s criticism is entirely anti-historical; Lenin commented that “he reasons in the abstract, he recognizes only the standpoint of the ‘eternal’ principles of morality, the eternal truth of religion.”<sup>81</sup> This was a conscious and deliberate choice: he rejected the “historical view” – belief in historical necessity and rationality – because he considered it to be distorted by amoral relativism and blind optimism. This attitude naturally went hand in hand with a total rejection of the faith in progress so popular *among* his contemporaries. The idea of progress, according to Tolstoy, was acceptable if interpreted as an eternal law of individual perfectibility, but when “transferred to the sphere of history it becomes sterile and empty prattle serving to justify all kinds of nonsenses.” Moreover, the concept of historical progress only applied to countries within the sphere of influence of European civilization or, to be more precise, to a small proportion of the inhabitants of these countries. The *common* people had only been harmed by “progress”; everywhere the masses “had a lively hatred of progress and tried to counteract it by all possible means.”<sup>82</sup>

It must be stressed that the article containing these thoughts was published in 1862 (in the educational periodical *Iasnaiia Poliana*), that is, nearly twenty years before Tolstoy’s ideological “crisis.” The idealization of a natural economy based on relations before the division of labor, which is so typical of his philosophy, also goes back to the period before the turning point of the late 1870s. The last word on the subject is to be found in the tract *What Are We to Do?*, published in 1886. In it Tolstoy took up Mikhailovsky’s favorite theme – the criticism of organicist theories of society (especially those of Comte and Spencer) and their advocacy of the division of labor. Theories comparing society

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80 Tolstoy, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (1928-58 ed.), vol. 23, p. 132.

81 Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 17, p. 50.

82 Tolstoy, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (1928-58 ed.), vol. 8, pp. 334-35.

to an organism, Tolstoy wrote, are a piece of fiction invented for the benefit of the privileged, and the division of labor is a “shameless excuse for idlers.” It is interesting to note that, like Mikhailovsky, he thought the division of labor also harmed the privileged minority who had used “deceit and force” to avoid physical labor, because varied and changing work was essential for health and happiness: “It is in the nature of a bird to fly, peck, and calculate, and only when he can perform all these actions is he satisfied and happy, only then is he a bird. The same holds true of man: only then is he satisfied, only then does he feel himself to be a man, when he walks, busies himself, lifts, carries, uses his fingers, eyes, ears, tongue, and head.”<sup>83</sup> Tolstoy proposed that the division of labor according to individual capacities be replaced by the division of the working day (the “harness” principle), so that each day every individual would in turn work at all occupations serving to satisfy his material and spiritual needs. The similarity between this ideal and Mikhailovsky’s formula of progress will be readily perceived.<sup>84</sup>

When Tolstoy inveighed against progress and the division of labor, he was of course thinking of a capitalist economy, and his idealization of “undivided” labor was clearly part of his romantic view of the natural peasant economy. It is interesting to note that unlike such critics as Rousseau and Schiller, Tolstoy regarded the division of labor not as a dialectical contradiction of progress but simply as a “tool for the oppression of the working majority by the idle minority.”<sup>85</sup> This is, of course, an obvious sociological oversimplification: its strength lies in the forcefulness of its attack, and in the “nihilistic” boldness of its negation rather than in the subtlety of its philosophical analysis.

In his wholesale condemnation of civilization and culture Tolstoy did not fail to include science. The role of contemporary science, he wrote, is to satisfy the artificial needs of the rich and to bolster their power over the people. Science must be called totally immoral, for it has lost sight of the only truly important issue – understanding the nature of man’s vocation and the essence of virtue. The study of this problem requires neither division of labor nor any kind of specialization, and the science that applies itself to solving it is indistinguishable from religion interpreted as a system of ethics. Its high priests are such great

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83 Ibid., vol. 25, p. 390 (“Tak chto zhe nam delat’?”).

84 Mikhailovsky himself recognized the analogies between his ideas and those of Tolstoy (especially his educational articles) and discussed them in his essay “Desnitsa i shuitsa L’va Tolstogo” (1875). In the post-“crisis” period the parallels are even more obvious.

85 Cf. V. F. Asmus, “Mirovozzrenie Tolstogo,” in *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 69 (M, 1961), book I, pp. 43-51. Asmus’s study is, in my estimation, the best and most representative Soviet work on Tolstoy’s view of the world.

moralists and religious leaders as Confucius, Socrates, Marcus Aurelius, Jesus Christ, and Muhammad. Mankind needs no other science than this.

As might be expected, the embodiment for Tolstoy of everything that was evil in sophisticated civilization was the institution of the state. One significant aspect of the radical change in his world view was his adoption of a thoroughgoing Christian anarchism. As a system of oppression that set people against one another the institution of the state clearly transgressed against the Sermon on the Mount. Therefore it was blasphemy for Christianity to allow itself to be closely associated with the state; this would prove its undoing, for like “burning ice” the concept of a “Christian state” was a contradiction in terms.<sup>86</sup> In his zeal, Tolstoy now dismissed even such civic and military virtues as valor and patriotism, which he had praised in *Sevastopol Sketches, War and Peace*, and other works written before the “turning point.” Patriotism, he wrote in his tract *Christianity and Love of the Fatherland* (1894), is always an instrument of oppression: the patriotism of the rulers is only selfish concern for their own welfare, whereas the patriotism of the ruled implies the renunciation of human dignity, reason, and conscience, i.e. a mere slavish submission to those who are at the helm of power. The patriotism of subject nations is particularly dangerous, because their greater bitterness usually leads to greater violence.<sup>87</sup>

Tolstoy’s criticism ultimately led him to a total negation of the established order. The ideal he put forward in its place was a way of life that would abolish all force and all forms of social inequality. This was to be achieved through passive resistance – through condemnation of the existing system and the refusal to have any share in it. Tolstoy dismissed as illusory the liberals’ hopes of achieving piecemeal improvements by entering the government or other forms of collaboration; at the same time he opposed revolution on the grounds that it was not only un-Christian but also ineffective, since it led to an increase in the use of force and not to its elimination.

The Russo-Japanese War and the Revolution of 1905 aroused the aged writer to energetic activity. He protested against the war in the article “Bethink Yourselves” and condemned the massacre of the unarmed crowd that marched on the Winter Palace on Bloody Sunday; in his articles “A Great Sin” and “The Century’s End” he defended the peasants’ right to increase their holdings and called for the nationalization of the land; he attacked the government’s

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86 Tolstoy, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (1928-58 ed.), vol. 23, p. 479.

87 In practice Tolstoy did not follow his own advice literally and accepted the justice of national independence movements. See his Caucasian novel *Hadji Murat*, and the story “What For?” (1906), about the tragic fate of a Polish insurgent of 1863.



repressive policies but also called on the revolutionaries to give up their struggle (*An Appeal to All Russians – Government, Revolutionaries and People*, 1906). He certainly did not welcome the October Manifesto or the convocation of the First Duma, which he regarded as purely “etatist” measures and therefore powerless against evil, but he never ceased to speak up on behalf of the persecuted. In 1908 he wrote a burningly sincere manifesto – “I Cannot Be Silent” – protesting the bloody methods of repression used by the reactionary Stolypin government against the revolutionaries.

The moderate liberals and conservatives assessed Tolstoy from an opposite angle. After the October Revolution prevailed, many a Russian émigré accused the great author, not without reason, of destroying the belief in the rightness of his own cause amongst the opponents of the revolution, and thereby paving the road to the victory of the most extremist revolutionaries. Quite an analogous charge has been expressed with respect to Tolstoy in today’s post-communist Russia. Vladimir Kantor, an outstanding literary scholar, has not hesitated to claim that the Bolshevik revolution absorbed Tolstoy’s hatred toward the European civilization and implanted the purposes that were actually close to Tolstoy’s own ideals.<sup>88</sup>

There is also an archaic and utopian flavor about Tolstoy’s last tragic act of protest against a corrupt world – the circumstances he chose to accompany his death. Disagreements with his wife on the disposal of his estate<sup>89</sup> led him to attempt once more to realize his old dream of “giving up the world” and turning his back on the “luxury by which I have always been surrounded.” On October 28 (November 10), 1910, he fled home at night with one of his disciples, Dr. D. P. Makovitsky, and with the approval of his daughter Alexandra, in order to find a place where he might finish his life in solitude and silence. He was not allowed to succeed: all over the world the public was kept informed by their newspapers of every stage of his journey. A cold that turned into pneumonia forced him to make a prolonged stop at the tiny railway station of Astapovo, where he died on November 7 (20).

The news of Tolstoy’s death echoed throughout the world. But although he was mourned by governments and parliaments, the appeals of the great moralist and the impression made by his death were powerless to prevent the outbreak of the First World War.

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88 Kantor, *Russkii Yevropeets kak yavleniie kulkury*, Moscow 2001, pp. 428 – 9, 435.

89 In his will, Tolstoy handed his royalties over to his disciples instead of to his family.

### *The Role of Art*

Reflections on the nature of art formed an integral part of Tolstoyan thought and found their fullest expression in the essay *What Is Art?* (1898). Many years earlier, in his educational articles written for the periodical *Iasnaiia Poliana*, Tolstoy had called the art of the privileged classes the “empty entertainment of idlers” and had dismissed the entire cultural achievement of the “wealthy classes” (including the works of Pushkin and Beethoven, his own favorites) as “vain and meaningless” by comparison with art speaking with the voice of the people.

*What Is Art?* is an emphatic reaffirmation of these ideas. In the opening pages of the essay Tolstoy exhaustively analyzes the aesthetic credo of his day, which claimed that the aim of art is beauty, or, in other words, aesthetic pleasure divorced from moral values. To believe in “art for art’s sake,” he argues, is as totally absurd as to maintain that the aim of eating is to delight the palate. But while rejecting aestheticism, Tolstoy also rejects the ascetic revulsion against art to be found in Plato, the early Christians, orthodox Muslims, and Buddhists. Art has a place in his scheme of things: it is one of the tools helping to “unite people in a community of feeling” and therefore is an essential “aspect of social life.” However, not only paintings, statues, symphonies, sonnets, and novels are worthy of the name of art: “The entire span of life is furnished by works of art of all kinds, from lullabies, jests, teasing games, adornment of the home, and household goods, to church services and processions.”<sup>90</sup>

The nature of art is best expressed by folk art, which is closely bound up with religion and the daily rhythm of labor, with human existence as an integral whole in which there can be no isolated or autonomous spheres.

The function of art is to express feelings by means of external symbols and to “infect” other people with these feelings. The value of a work of art therefore depends on the conviction and moral worth of the feelings it is trying to express. The chief task of true art is to unite human beings; the art of the “wealthy classes,” by contrast, is exclusive and attempts only to convey the feelings of a thin privileged layer. These cannot be called truly human emotions, since they deepen the divisions between men instead of overcoming them.

Tolstoy distinguished three groups of such “divisive” feelings in art: the first fanned feelings of nationalism and chauvinism, pride, social or caste exclusivity, and contempt for weaker natures; the second pandered to the excessive sensuality typical of men leading idle and aimless lives (in literature these were expressed in works of pervasive eroticism and a naturalistic cult of man as an

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90 Tolstoy, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (1928-58 ed.), vol. 30, pp. 66-67.

animal); the last catered to feelings of surfeit and world-weary pessimism, all of which were alien to the common people. The growing popularity of works of art expressing these emotions was only a form of progressive degeneration, Tolstoy declared. The art of the elite was becoming more and more divorced from the people, more and more exclusive; its subject matter was becoming more restricted, until finally, when artists felt they had nothing more to say, it would disappear altogether. That was why artists chased after originality and novelty at all costs, though all they achieved was a formal sophistication typical of all art in its decline. This formalism made for even greater exclusivity, so that finally art became entirely incomprehensible to more than just a narrow circle of connoisseurs.

The last stage in this process of intellectual and artistic degeneration was the “decadent” art of the French Symbolists – Baudelaire, Verlaine, and Mallarmé – and the music of Wagner. Tolstoy pointed out, however, that the source of present degeneracy must be sought in the past, and that the difference between contemporary “decadents” and artists of the previous generation was only a quantitative one. The turning point in the history of Western European art had been the Renaissance – the period when the upper classes lost their religious belief and ceased to be guided by the same feelings that guided the common people. Thereafter the art of the elite split off from the art of the nation as a whole, and instead of one art there were two: the “high” art of the masters and the “low” art of the masses. In Russia, the Petrine Reforms brought about a similar turning point. Tolstoy followed his argument to its logical conclusion and included among the representatives of “high” art who were alien to the common people not only Raphael, Michelangelo, and Shakespeare but also his own former favorite, Pushkin.

In contrast to the “immoral” art of the ruling classes, Tolstoy’s ideal “art of the future” was to be truly free from internal as well as external constraints – no longer locked within the restrictive sphere of selfish and immoral feelings, and no longer dependent on “the moneybags and his riches.” “The art of the future,” he wrote, “will drive the moneylenders out of the temple.” It will be an art for all, just as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Bible stories and psalms, and the art of the Middle Ages belonged to everyone. Artistic creation will cease to be the domain of the professional and will be undertaken by all working people of talent. This will bring about a great flowering and invigoration of art, for the feelings of working people are infinitely richer and of greater value than the feelings of the rich.

Of art that wanted to live up to his standards Tolstoy demanded sincerity, easily understood and morally praiseworthy content, and clear, simple, and pithy form. Plekhanov has rightly pointed out that these were the qualities

Chernyshevsky called for in his dissertation on the *Aesthetic Relations between Art and Reality*.<sup>91</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that Tolstoy's brochure was welcomed enthusiastically by Vladimir Stasov, the leading heir to the Chernyshevsky tradition in artistic criticism and at the same time Tolstoy's chief adviser on aesthetics and the history of art.<sup>92</sup> There are even certain points in common between Tolstoy and Pisarev – Tolstoy's attack on the art of the "upper classes" was equally "nihilistic" and coincided on many points with Pisarev's crusade against "aesthetics."

These similarities stem partly from the fact that Tolstoy, like the radical democrats of the 60s, set out to propagate a realistic and "socially committed" art. Another explanation is the partial affinity between Tolstoy's world view and that of the "enlighteners." As was pointed out earlier, his "reason" had much in common with 18<sup>th</sup> century rationalism, especially with its unswerving devotion to the "search for ultimate sources" and its anti-historical rejection of authority and tradition. In this respect, therefore, it may be said that Tolstoy was related to the "enlighteners" of the 60s, although his religious insistence on the renunciation of self-interest and on nonviolent resistance to evil clearly ran counter to their "rational egoism."

## Dostoevsky and Tolstoy: A Comparison

Let us try to sum up. There is no doubt that what distinguishes Dostoevsky and Tolstoy from other 19<sup>th</sup> century writers is their passionate moralistic fervor. The label "moralist," however, is not an adequate description. Some of the greatest moralists – the Stoics and Skeptics, for instance – did not believe in the possibility of radical change and deliberately refrained from giving way to moral indignation. Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, on the other hand, reacted vigorously against "all disturbance or perversion of the civic or moral order" and called for a total religious and moral rebirth.<sup>93</sup> Their concern with ultimate human destiny bears all the hallmarks of authentic prophetic zeal.

Each of these two great Russian writers, however, was a prophet in his own way. Dostoevsky attempted to gain insight into the mystical meaning of history through the concept of Godmanhood, whereas Tolstoy rejected history

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91 See G. V. Plekhanov, "Eshche o tolstom," in *L. N. Tolstoy v russkoi kritike* (M, 1952), p. 438.

92 See L. N. Lomunov, "Tolstoy v bor'be protiv dekadentskogo iskusstva," pp. 80-81 in *L. N. Tolstoy, Sbornik statei in materialov* (M, 1951).

93 See J. Wach, *Sociology of Religion* (London 1947), p. 355.

altogether in the name of the eternal truths of the Christian Gospel. For Dostoevsky, Russian history offered the way to salvation through Christ; the ideal of reintegration with the people, of a “return to the soil,” was his specific version of reconciliation with history, with the historical traditions of Orthodoxy and the national traditions of the common people. For Tolstoy, on the other hand, true life was not bound by time: truth and the common people were outside history, and the historical process only gave rise to evil, which must be destroyed before the kingdom of the moral Absolute could be established on earth. Both writers desired “harmony” on earth, but whereas Dostoevsky dreamed of State becoming transformed into Church and condemned rationalism in the name of *mystical* and evangelical ideals, Tolstoy denied the need for any kind of institutionalized religion and stood for a *rationalistic* evangelical heterodoxy. Tolstoy’s metaphysical impersonalism and his consequent rejection of individual immortality was alien to the author of *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky was equally hostile to Tolstoy’s egalitarianism, which he thought of as a leveling that would extinguish both individuality and freedom. As a prophet Dostoevsky was closer to the national messianism of the Old Testament (Shatov’s version of messianism). If there is any Old Testament element in Tolstoyan philosophy, it is only because the author’s uninhibited and blunt railings against evil call to mind the zeal of the great Hebrew prophets.<sup>94</sup>

The differences between the two writers become even clearer when we examine them from the point of view of the links each of them had with specific trends in Russian thought. Dostoevsky was a romantic nationalist, a continuator of the Slavophile tradition, whereas Tolstoy – that uncompromising critic of all versions of nationalism and even patriotism – was more at home with rationalistic and Enlightenment modes of thought. In his social and political outlook Tolstoy was closer to the Populists and anarchists, although he reinterpreted their message in an antirevolutionary and evangelical spirit. These differences had their practical political consequences: Dostoevsky, condemned in his youth to hard labor in Siberia, in later life moved in reactionary circles, was friendly with Pobedonostsev, and had dreams of annexing Constantinople. Tolstoy, the aristocratic landowner, rejected his own class and for more than thirty years inveighed without cease against the moral evil of all state institutions and against exploitation and the use of force.

It would of course be doing Dostoevsky an injustice to identify him with the reactionary ideologists of the 1870s. In fact, many Populist leaders considered

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94 Ibid.

him (of course mistakenly) to be their ideological ally;<sup>95</sup> it was not by chance, Lunacharsky wrote, that Pobedonostsev and other “highly placed patrons never trusted him entirely and always expected him to provide an unpleasant surprise.”<sup>96</sup> The nervous, uprooted intellectual who was able to portray the moral and spiritual conflict of the Karamazov brothers with such superb intuition was in fact closer to the radical intelligentsia of his day than Tolstoy, the prophet of the eternal truth of the Gospels, who was half-aristocrat, half-peasant, and all patriarch. Tolstoy’s religious and ethical doctrines are a static system of finished truths, whereas all that is most valuable in Dostoevsky’s thought forms a dialectical complexity. It would be wrong to reduce Dostoevsky’s world view to nothing more than Orthodox utopianism and a matter of reactionary political leanings. Even today some of his ideas have an astonishing freshness, whereas in Tolstoy we sense a genuinely and not just superficially archaic mode of thought – a mode of thought that is forceful but at the same time anachronistic, that shocks by the boldness of its perceptive oversimplifications but also irritates by its “nihilistic” single-mindedness and Manichaeic dualism.

Dostoevsky’s ideas influenced thinkers of many different ideological complexions, whether conservative or progressive, religious or secular. His fame reached its height in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Together with Vladimir Soloviev (with whom he became friendly toward the end of his life and on whom he exerted considerable influence), he was responsible for the resurgence of interest in religion (the so-called “religious renaissance”) among many educated Russians in the early years of our century. Almost all Russian idealist philosophers and religious thinkers without exception whose ideas were formed at the beginning of the century and who continued their work abroad after the Russian Revolution – men as different as Berdiaev, Bulgakov, Frank, Merezhkovsky, Shestov, Lossky, and Hessen – were fascinated by Dostoevsky at one stage of their lives and absorbed his ideas into their world view. Among Western European thinkers it was the secular existentialists (especially Sartre and Camus) who showed most interest in his work. What attracted them was not his “Orthodoxy” but his dialectical view of individualism, his conception of the problem of “revolt” and the burden of freedom – in a word, the ideas he analyzed through the medium of his “self-assertive” heroes.

As a moralist and religious thinker Tolstoy enjoyed worldwide authority during his lifetime. His home in Yasnaya Polana was visited by pilgrims of all nations, and hundreds of letters flowed in from supporters and opponents

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95 A good deal of evidence on this was collected by A. S. Dolinin. See *F. M. Dostoevsky, Materialy i issledovaniia* (L, 1935), pp. 52-53.

96 *F. M. Dostoevsky v russkoi kritike*, p. 452.

throughout the world. His ideas – especially his pacifist teachings – enjoyed enormous publicity. Nevertheless, Tolstoyan philosophy and religious thought were not destined to be very influential doctrines. The force of his ideas depended entirely on his own charismatic personality; after his death his ideas were quickly forgotten, with one important exception – in Mahatma Gandhi Tolstoy did find at least one truly great continuator of his teaching





## Chapter 18

# Vladimir Soloviev and Metaphysical Idealism

Undeniably the most eminent 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian philosopher was Vladimir Soloviev - a friend and admirer of Dostoevsky and, simultaneously, a harsh critic of Tolstoyism. His role in the development of Russian philosophy has been compared - rightly - with the influence Pushkin wielded on the development of Russian poetry.<sup>1</sup> This comparison somewhat diminishes the role of Ivan Kireevsky, the originator of Slavophile religious philosophy, to whom Soloviev often referred in his early years. At the same time, it perfectly captures and underlines Soloviev's pioneering role in dissociating Russian philosophy from positivist minimalism and paving way for the blossoming of religious metaphysics in the first decades of the 20th century. For the Russian religious-philosophical renaissance thinkers, Soloviev's philosophy became a central point of reference - bearing resemblance to the point of reference that Pushkin's poetry held for the writers of the so-called Golden Age of Russian literature.

When set beside Russian idealist thinkers of Romanticism, Soloviev seemed to be a professional philosopher with ambitious inclinations toward creating a philosophical system. During the period of his academic career, which he abandoned in 1881, he created an original system of All-Unity, supposed to unite philosophy and religion, and the West and the East. In doing so, he managed to achieve a high level of professionalism, and to remain faithful to Russian intellectual traditions, reluctant to investigate "purely theoretical" problems. While the system was a product of the professionalization of philosophy, it opposed this process on behalf of "integral truth," which implied a limited connection between theoretical philosophy and religious as well as social practice.

The role of an academic philosopher was not to Soloviev's liking; just like Dostoevsky, he saw himself as a prophet searching for a way to revive his homeland and humanity as such. Having said that, it is not astonishing that many of his works were devoted to the "Russian idea" and the place of Russia in

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1 See A.I. Vviedensky, *Prizyv k samoglubleniiu. Pamiati W.S. Soloviowa*, Moscow 1900, p.5.

the history. To this extent, his considerations led him to discover anew the pro-Catholic universalism of Chaadaev, the point of divergence between the two was that the new variant was free from pessimism. Despite harsh criticism of all forms of national egoism and megalomania, for a very long time Soloviev believed in the Russian mission: a mission to unite churches and create one universal, liberal-theocratic empire, which would achieve the ideal of Christianized socio-political relations, thus embodying the ideal of GodManhood. The beginning of the 90s brought disappointment, nevertheless Soloviev clung to the idea of ecumenism, convinced that the Roman-Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church are two variants of the universal Church. On this issue, he differed fundamentally from anti-Catholicism of Slavophiles, a fact which had not prevented Soloviev from following Kireevsky in terms of articulating a catholic philosophy referring to Neo-Platonic mysticism and Schellingian “philosophy of revelation.”

## A Philosopher’s Life and Personality

Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900) was the son of Sergei Soloviev, a leading Westernizing historian and a professor at Moscow University. His grandfather, Michael Soloviev had been an Orthodox priest, educated in a seminary patterned upon Kiev Academy, i.e. with Latin as the language of instruction and what is more, under strong Catholic influences. Mother of the philosopher-to-be, Poliksena, was of a Polish, noble origin. Her family had settled in Ukraine and was related to a famous religious thinker, the “Ukrainian Socrates,” Hryhorii Skovorod.<sup>2</sup> Partially Jewish, the family attributed a positive meaning to this fact.<sup>3</sup> As the son of such a multiracial family, Soloviev was raised with the belief that Russia was a multiracial empire which would not allow for a Russian ethno-nationalism to develop.

Soloviev was brought up by his mother in an atmosphere of strict piety. His friend L. M. Lopatin relates that when he was fourteen Vladimir experienced a crisis of faith that turned him into a “total materialist [...] a typical nihilist of the

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2 *Vladimir Soloviev. Zhizn i tvorcheskaia evolutsia*, Moscow 1997, chapter I.

3 Cf. M.S. Bezobranova, “Vospominaniia o bratie Vladimirie Solovieve,” *Minuvshyie gody*, no. 5-6 1908, (see Vladimir Soloviev. *Pro et contra. Antologia*, St. Petersburg 2002, pp. 337-338). Cf. S.K. “O lichnost’ V. Solovieva,” *Istoricheskii viertnik*, December 1912 (*Vladimir Soloviev. Pro et contra*, pp. 116-117).

sixties.”<sup>4</sup> He now professed a somewhat chiliastic atheism linked to a burning faith in the total transformation of the world – a faith, it should be added, that never left him, not even after his conversion to Christianity in 1872. His Christianity was coupled with historiosophical optimism and a moral imperative to fight for development. This is how he put it in one of his letters of 1873:

A conscious conviction in the fact that the present condition of humanity is not as such as it should be, means for me that it must be changed, transformed. I do not recognize the existing evil as eternal, I do not believe in the devil.<sup>5</sup>

At the age of seventeen, Soloviev enrolled in the history and philosophy faculty of Moscow University, although under the influence of Pisarev he soon transferred to the science faculty instead. Still, he continued to read philosophical works (Spinoza, Schopenhauer, Fichte, and Hegel); and as a result of his reading and his own reflections and experiences, he gradually regained faith in God and in the profound philosophical significance of Christianity.

Having regained religious faith, Soloviev gave up his scientific studies and devoted himself entirely to philosophy under the guidance of the philosopher and theologian P. D. Yurkevich. He also attended lectures at the Moscow Theological Academy.

Soloviev’s master’s thesis, *The Crisis in Western Philosophy: Against the Positivists*, was published in 1874, and shortly afterward he began lecturing at St. Petersburg University. In the following year, however, he applied for permission to visit England in order to make use of the facilities of the British Museum library. In London, he devoted himself to studying the history of mysticism, especially the Neo-Platonic tradition and German mysticism and theosophy (Jacob Boehme, Franz Baader). A sudden impulse led him to undertake a journey to Egypt, which very nearly had a tragic outcome. Dressed in the clothes he normally wore in London, he set out one day on a walk through the desert in search of a tribe that was believed to have kept alive ancient kabalistic traditions. Seeing his long black coat and tall black hat, nomadic Bedouins took him for an evil spirit, and he barely escaped with his life.

The real reason for Soloviev’s journey to Egypt was a mystical vision he called *Sophia* – a personification of the passive aspect of God, of “eternal womanhood” – which appeared to him three times. The first appearance was in

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4 L. M. Lopatin, “Filosofskoe mirovozzrenie V. S. Solovieva,” in *Filosofskie kharakteristiki i rechi* (M, 1911), p. 123.

5 A letter from Soloviev to E.W. Selevina dated as of 1873 [in:] *Vladimir Soloviev. Pro et contra*, p.46. The problem of evil in Soloviev’s philosophy is often discussed in detail by Jan Krasicki in *God, Man, and Evil. Examination of Vladimir Soloviev's Philosophy* [*Bóg, człowiek i zło. Studium filozofii Włodzimierza Solowjowa*], Wrocław 2003.

his childhood, when he was suffering from unrequited love for a little girl of nine; the second was in the British Museum, when he was told to go to Egypt; and the third was in the desert, after the adventure with the Bedouins. Twenty years later, Soloviev, who also wrote poetry, described the three visions in his lighthearted autobiographical poem “Three Meetings.”

After his return to Russia (in the summer of 1876), Soloviev established close relations with Slavophile and Pan-Slavic circles (chiefly Ivan Aksakov) and also with Dostoevsky, on whom he made a very deep impression (there are good grounds for supposing that the novelist modeled Alosha Karamazov on Soloviev and also borrowed from him certain characteristics used in the portrait of Ivan Karamazov).<sup>6</sup> In 1878, Soloviev gave a series of extremely successful lectures on Godmanhood in St. Petersburg. Two years later he submitted his doctoral thesis, entitled *A Critique of Abstract Principles* (1880), and after receiving the title of *Dozent* resumed his lectures at the university and at higher courses for women. His academic career, however, was short-lived. After the assassination of Alexander II he gave a public lecture in which he condemned the revolutionaries but also appealed to the new emperor to spare their lives. As a result he was forbidden to lecture in public and shortly afterward was forced to resign from the university.

As Soloviev approached intellectual maturity he began to move away from the epigones of Slavophilism. The final break came in 1883, when he stopped publishing in Ivan Aksakov’s *Rus’* and instead – to the indignation of his right-wing friends – became a contributor to the liberal and Westernizing *European Messenger* [*Vestnik Evropy*]. This marked the close of the first phase in his intellectual evolution and the beginning of the second, which Prince Evgeny Trubetskoi (author of a two-volume work on Soloviev’s philosophy) has called his “utopian period.”<sup>7</sup>

The utopia to which Soloviev aspired was the unification of all the Christian churches, to be followed by the establishment of a theocratic Kingdom of Heaven on earth. It was on behalf of this ideal that he attacked all forms of

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6 See K. Mochulsky, *Vladimir Soloviev. Zhizn i uchenie* (Paris 1951), p. 80.

7 See E. N. Trubetskoi, *Mirososertsanie V. S. Solovieva* (M., 1913), vol. 1, pp. 87-88. Trubetskoi divides Soloviev’s intellectual evolution into three periods: (1) preparatory period, to 1882; (2) the “utopian” period, 1882 – ca. 1894 (in his biography Mochulsky suggests that this period ended in the early 1890s); and (3) the “positive” period, that is the years when Soloviev no longer believed in the possibility of realizing his utopian vision and concentrated on working out the theoretical foundations of his metaphysics and ethics. D. Stremoukhoff, in his *V. Soloviev et son oeuvre messianique* (Strasbourg 1935), distinguished a final apocalyptic phase in Soloviev’s evolution.

nationalism, rejected the Slavophile idealization of Orthodox Christianity, and condemned the persecution of national and religious minorities (his articles on this subject published in the *European Messenger* were later collected in two volumes under the title *The National Problem in Russia*). He also shared with the liberals a belief in bourgeois progress, which aroused the particular ire of his ultra-reactionary admirer Konstantin Leontiev. However, the vision of the future that Soloviev expounded in books published abroad in order to evade the censor (*The History and Future of Theocracy*, 1887; *L'Idée russe*, 1881; and *La Russie et l'Eglise Universelle*, 1889) was far from liberal: mankind's crowning fate on earth was to be spiritual unification under the pope and political unification under the Russian emperor. Soloviev attempted to gain the Croatian bishop Josip Strossmeyer for his cause, and through him Pope Leo XIII. Strossmeyer, engrossed in dreams of universal Slavic unity, greatly admired Soloviev; Pope Leo likewise agreed that the Russian philosopher's ideal was a beautiful one, but thought that only a miracle could make it come true.<sup>8</sup>

At the beginning of the 1890s, Soloviev himself began to lose faith in the possibility of establishing his ideal kingdom. With the Famine of 1891 in Russia, Soloviev came to realize that Russian society was immature, and therefore incapable of undertaking great historical tasks. An important role in the process of coming to this conclusion were reactions to the famine: especially the helplessness of the Church, government and non-governmental organizations. Soloviev now entered the third phase of his intellectual evolution, during which he returned to his earlier interest in pure philosophy.

A few years later – during his second visit to Egypt in the spring of 1898 – Soloviev experienced a series of dreadful visions that convinced him of evil's ontological reality.<sup>9</sup> This initiated the last, eschatological phase of his ideological evolution, focused increasingly on eschatological premonitions of disaster.

Soloviev had a subtle but complex personality that was not without a certain enigmatic quality.<sup>10</sup> His sensitive features gave him a rather otherworldly look, so that simple people often took him for a priest and knelt down in front of him. At the same time he was not without a sense of humor and in his poems often poked gentle fun at himself. His nature was childlike and trusting, and he tended to see everything in spiritual terms, as a “reflection of the invisible world”; although he preached acceptance of “worldliness” through its “transfusion by

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8 See Mochulsky, *Soloviev*, p. 185.

9 The meaning of these visions is enormously stressed by G. Przebinda in the monograph *Włodzimierz Słowjow wobec historii*, Cracow 1992, pp. 192-195.

10 Cf. The description of Soloviev's personality in chapter one of Trubetskoi's book.

godliness,” he could not come to terms with his prosaic everyday life. He fell in love easily, and his mysticism was undoubtedly a sublimation of erotic feelings, though it cannot be dismissed as mere displaced eroticism.

The love of his life was a married woman, Sophia Petrovna Khitrovo, who appeared to him to be a personification of the Divine Sophia.<sup>11</sup>

Soloviev led an untidy life, often sleeping during the day and working at night, and showing little concern for the future. It was well known that he found it impossible to send away beggars, and was likely to hand over all the money he had on him or even to give away his boots. Once, he was found shivering in the cold because he had given away all his warm clothes. Like Tolstoy, he was a visionary, but his visions were not the wrathful thundering of a patriarchal prophet but the sensitive dreams of an eccentric and romantic poet.

## Philosophy of Reintegration

The influence of the philosophical romanticism of the older Slavophiles is clearly apparent in Soloviev’s early works.<sup>12</sup> In particular, Soloviev based himself on the ideas of Kireevsky, especially his conception of the “integral wholeness” that was to counteract the destructive effects of rationalism.

In his master’s thesis Soloviev defined the crisis of Western European philosophy as a crisis of rationalism – of all abstract and purely theoretical knowledge. In the development of the human spirit, he argued, philosophy expresses a stage of individualistic reflection, and as such forms an intermediate link between primitive religious unity and the future restoration of spiritual unity through a universal synthesis of science, philosophy and religion. The pluralism of philosophical systems was a product of the dissolution of primitive unity, the result of alienation and the self-affirmation of the individual Ego. Western philosophy was born of the conflict of individual reason and faith: its successive stages were the rationalization of faith (scholasticism), the total rejection of faith, and finally the total negation of all immediate knowledge – a conception that threw doubt on the substantiality of the external world and identified being with thought (Hegel). Within this Slavophile framework, Soloviev advanced several notions of his own concerning nodal points in the dialectic of European thought and devoted considerable attention to a number of systems, including

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11 This was a mutual, though physically unfulfilled love, which had its beginning in 1877 and lasted – taking different forms – till the end of Soloviev’s life.

12 A detailed comparison of Soloviev’s views with Slavophile philosophy can be found in A. Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy*, Chapter 15.

those of Schopenhauer and Eduard von Hartmann. The section devoted to Hegel and post-Hegelian philosophy is of particular interest: in it, Slavophile criticism of Hegelianism blends with Dostoevsky's warnings on the destructive effects of the deification of man.

For Soloviev, the ideas of Hartmann provided the most extreme example of the crisis of Western philosophy, although paradoxically they also foreshadowed the day when philosophy would fuse with religion, thus bringing about the restoration of spiritual unity. Hartmann's "philosophy of the unconscious" appeared to Soloviev to be a rehabilitation of the metaphysics rejected by the positivists, a return to the religious concept of "universal unity." Ascribing to Hartmann his own ideas, Soloviev proclaimed that the annihilation of the egoistic self-affirmation of warring individuals would be followed not by Buddhist Nirvana but by the *apokatastasis ton panton*, the "kingdom of spirits bound together by the universality of the absolute spirit." Soloviev considered this notion to be the end product of the entire evolution of Western philosophy (i.e. philosophy in general), amounting to a rediscovery of ancient truths preserved in the traditions of Eastern Christianity.

As Konstantin Mochulsky had indicated, this constituted an exact reconstruction of the concept of Western philosophy's crisis, as in Kireevsky's *On the Necessity and Possibility of New Principles in Philosophy*.<sup>13</sup> The major point of divergence lied in how Kireevsky and Soloviev construed the exhaustion of the concept of development - whereas Kireevsky invoked the Schellingian "philosophy of revelation," Soloviev referred to the doctrine of Hartmann. It needs to be pointed out, however, that Soloviev's enthusiasm for the metaphysical pessimism of Schopenhauer and Hartmann was short-lived and the Schellingian "philosophy of revelation" was soon to gain importance. Only a couple of years later, Soloviev called this philosophy a "new Christianity" and a springboard for his own thought.<sup>14</sup>

The first work in which Soloviev outlined a system of his own was *Philosophical Principles of Integral Knowledge* (1877). The title itself clearly harks back to the notion of "wholeness," which was the kernel of Kireevsky's philosophical work. In addition, however, Soloviev introduced a number of

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13 K. Mochulsky, *Vladimir Soloviev*, p. 254.

14 It was already E.N. Trubetskoi to stress the close relationship between Soloviev and late Schelling as well as German romantic thought. See E.N. Trubetskoi, *Mirososertsanie V. S. Solovieva*, vol. 1, pp. 65-67. During his PhD thesis defence, Soloviev himself pointed to the relationship of his views with the "positive philosophy" of Schelling (see *S.M. Soloviev, Zhizn i tvorcheskaia evolutsia*).

ideas not found in Slavophile doctrine – for instance the notion that mankind is “a real, though collective, organism,” the collective subject of history.

Every evolutionary process, Soloviev argued, passes through three phases: a phase of primitive undifferentiated unity; a phase of differentiation during which the individual parts become separated; and a new phase of reintegration in which unity is restored, but as a “free unity” that instead of nullifying differentiation welds the separate elements together by an organic inner bond. In the evolution of mankind (to which this scheme also applies), the first phase – that of substantial monism – was represented by the Eastern world (including 19<sup>th</sup> century Islam), and the second phase by Western European civilization. Both phases were necessary stages in the development cycle but in themselves were of unequal value; any kind of monism, Soloviev suggested, is superior to atomism, so that the Muslim East was superior to Western civilization.

During the period of primitive unity, the three spheres of human activity – the spheres of creativity, knowledge, and social practice – were entirely subordinated to religion. In the sphere of creativity, technology (the first or material grade) was fused with art (the second or formal grade) and mysticism (the highest or absolute grade) in an undifferentiated and mystical creativity – in other words, in what Soloviev called a *theurgy*. In the sphere of knowledge, positive science (the material grade) was fused with abstract philosophy (the formal grade) and theology (the absolute grade) in an undifferentiated whole that might be called *theosophy*. In the realm of social practice, the economic society of producers or *zemstvo* (the material grade) was fused with the state (the formal grade) and the church (the absolute grade), forming a homogeneous and *theocratic* whole. In the second evolutionary phase (represented by Western Europe), the different grades within each sphere strove for autonomy and mastery over one another. In the resulting struggle matter conquered spirit: the final outcome of Western civilization was economic socialism (the true scion of capitalism, as Soloviev called it) in the social sphere, positivism in the sphere of knowledge, and utilitarian realism in the sphere of creativity. This was not, however, the final stage in the evolution of mankind; according to the universally valid law of development, the first two phases must be followed by a third – the phase of free unity – in which the separate spheres or “grades” of human creativity, knowledge, and social practice would once more be united, though they would still retain their distinctive flavor. In the three spheres of life this renewed unity would express itself as a *free theurgy*, a *free theosophy*, and a *free theocracy*.

In this way [Soloviev concluded] all spheres and grades of human existence will become united in this third and final phase into an organic whole whose organs and members are based on trichotomy. The normal harmonious activity of all organs will give birth to a new



general sphere – the sphere of *integral life*. *At the beginning* its bearer among mankind can only be the Russian nation.<sup>15</sup>

To digress for a moment: it is interesting to examine the more detailed justification of the historical destiny of the Russian nation to be found in Soloviev's public lecture on "The Three Forces." In this lecture, Soloviev suggested that the actual bearers of the "three forces that have governed the evolution of mankind from the dawn of history" were "three historical worlds," or rather three distinct cultures, the Muslim East, Western civilization, and Slavdom. The first represented a fossilized and despotic unity in which all spheres of life were subordinated to religion, thus turning man into the lifeless instrument of an "inhuman God." The second set the "godless man" against the "inhuman God," and its last word was "universal egoism and anarchy, atomization in life, atomization in science, [and] atomization in art." These forces never occurred (and never could occur) in their pure form – they should rather be seen as specific trends whose total and final realization would mean the annihilation of mankind. To prevent this was the mission of the third force, which was capable of achieving a synthesis of "unity" and "multiplicity," of making God "human" and turning man toward God, of reconciling East and West. This force could only draw its strength from divine revelation, and its exponent could only be a nation able to mediate between the divine and the human. Such a mediator must be entirely devoid of exclusivity or one-sidedness; he must have unshaken faith in the divine, the ability to transcend his own particular interests, a contempt for the things of this world, and the ability not to fritter away his energy in many separate spheres of activity. These features, Soloviev concluded, "are certainly typical of the tribal character of the Slavs and especially of the national character of the Russian people."<sup>16</sup>

Let us now return to the *Philosophical Principles of Integral Knowledge*. After his introductory exposition, Soloviev proceeded to examine the idea of a "free theosophy" (or in other words "integral knowledge") in greater detail. He distinguished three types of philosophy – naturalism (empiricism), rationalism,

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15 W.S. Soloviev, *Sociniieniia v dvukh tomakh*, Ed. A.W. Gulyga and A.F. Losiev, vol. 2, Moscow 1988, pp. 175-176.

16 W.S. Soloviev, *Sochinieniia v dvukh tomakh*, Moscow 1989, vol. 1 - *Filosofskaia publicistika*, pp. 29-30.

Here there are clear echoes of Dostoevsky's messianism, especially his conception of the "all-human" mission of the Russian nation. The connection between Soloviev's ideas and those of Dostoevsky has been analyzed by Serge Hessen in his "Der Kampf der Utopie und der Autonomie des Guten in der Weltanschauung Dostoevskis und W. Solowjows" [in:] *Studia z filozofii kultury*. Introduction by A.Walicki, Warsaw 1968.

and mysticism. Empiricism and rationalism, he suggested, take different paths to arrive at the same result – the denial of the substantial reality of both the external world and the knower himself. The absurdity of such a conclusion illustrates the bankruptcy of all “scholastic” or purely theoretical philosophy. A superior type of cognition is mysticism, which draws on supernatural sources of knowledge and looks for “vital and integral” truths that involve not only the intellect but also “the will to goodness” and the “sense of beauty.” Mysticism itself, however, cannot be equated with “true philosophy,” since the latter postulates the inner, organic synthesis of all types of philosophical thought, analogous to the synthesis of science, philosophy, and theology in the superior free theosophical unity. Summing up his reflections on the sources, methods, and aims of integral knowledge, Soloviev wrote:

Free theosophy is knowledge whose subject is true being in its objective manifestations, whose goal is man’s inner integration with true being, and whose material are the facts of human experience in all its forms – above all mystical experience, followed by inner or psychic experience, and finally external or physical experience. Its basic form is intellectual insight or the intuitive perception of ideas, systematized with the help of purely logical or abstract thought; its active source, or causative principle, is inspiration, that is the influence of higher ideal beings upon the human spirit.<sup>17</sup>

Soloviev also intended to elaborate the three main elements of his free theosophy – organic logic, organic metaphysics, and organic ethics – but the *Philosophical Principles of Integral Knowledge* breaks off at the section on organic logic. By logic Soloviev meant the science of the first principle or *Urprinzip*, or, more accurately, the *logos* or first principle in its second phase of self-differentiation, corresponding to the second member of the Holy Trinity. Soloviev called this method “positive dialectics” and insisted that it differed fundamentally from Hegel’s rationalist dialectics. “Positive dialectics” allows every item to be defined through its trichotomous relation to the absolute first principle: (1) in its substantial unity with the first principle, i.e. in pure potentiality or positive nothingness (in God the Father); (2) in self-differentiation, i.e. in the act of self-realization (in the *logos*, or the Son); and (3) in free or mediated unity with the first principle (in the Holy Spirit). Differentiation among the separate logical categories (Soloviev intended to introduce 27 such categories) is only possible in the *logos* and is therefore relative, since the *logos* is by its very nature a relation. The three ways in which the first principle is related to everything else as well as to itself can be called the concealed *logos*, the revealed *logos*, and the embodied or concrete *logos*

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17 Soloviev, *Sochinieniia*, vol. 2 (1988), pp. 207-208.

(Christ). These notions provide a connecting link, as it were, between Soloviev's "logic" and the theme of "Godmanhood."

The work in which Soloviev summed up and systematized his ideas in the spheres of epistemology, ethics, and social philosophy was his doctoral dissertation, the *Critique of Abstract Principles*. In this work, he reverted to the conception of a "free theosophy" and "free theocracy," although he now substituted the term "All-Unity" for "integral wholeness." What Soloviev called "abstract principles" were various aspects of All-Unity, which, by separating from the whole and establishing their autonomy, lost their true character, conflicted with each other, and plunged humanity into a state of disunity and chaos. In this crisis it fell to philosophy to attempt to restore spiritual unity in the sphere of knowledge as well as in society. In support of this program of reintegration, Soloviev denied the autonomy of "theoretical philosophy" ("abstract knowledge") and the autonomy of ethics ("abstract moralism"). In other sections of the thesis he again made use of Slavophile ideas: the view that faith lies at the root of all knowledge was derived from Khomiakov's epistemology; and the ideal of a "free community" [*svobodnaia obshchinnost'*] founded on love and precluding "external authority" is again a clearly recognizable version of Slavophile *sobornost'*.

At a first glance, the *Critique of Abstract Principles* seems to be an expansion of what was described in *Philosophical Principles of Integral Knowledge*. A closer look at the two, however, allows us to observe significant differences. Soloviev's doctoral dissertation emphasized more vividly a relative autonomy of particular spheres of life and cautioned against mixing them up. For this reason, Soloviev substituted "All-Unity" [*vsiejedinstvo*] for the Slavophile term "integral wholeness." This term, and the metaphysical concept associated therewith, became the basis of Soloviev's system; it also expressed the features of his dialectical method of thought. Moreover, it was an attempt at uniting what is absolute and what is relative, what is whole and what is autonomous, an attempt at overcoming both atomization and holism. According to Soloviev, All-Unity was a unity of a dialectic form, on the one hand assuming inner autonomy of its parts, contradictory to the notion of absolute autonomy understood as a separation and isolation, but on the other hand allowing a relative autonomy of different spheres in a hierarchical structure of the world. This had practical implications, since it marked the difference between Soloviev and Slavophile ideologists. Soloviev did not idealize the lost "integrity of life." For him, separation of the *sacrum* from the *profanum*, economy and politics from faith in God and religious morality meant paving a way toward inner differentiated All-Unity, rather than a symptom of disintegration or decay.

The Soloviev philosophy of All-Unity was based on a theory on three phases in the evolutionary process, that is on development through self-imposed alienation which had its roots in the Neo-Platonic idea of self-enriching alienation, an idea which provided a foundation for the whole Neo-Platonic tradition of Christian mysticism, as well as Hegelianism and Marxism.<sup>18</sup> This idea gave a model, according to which in order to develop, one had to break up an original, primitive whole. Various potentialities of the spirit - be they divine or human - must find outer expression (that is alienation) in order to develop. Furthermore, they need to develop separately, autonomously so that they can be reintegrated at a higher level. The attitudes toward this idea were twofold - either underlining the sorry plight of alienation and longing for lost paradise, or focusing on the hope of reintegration and the glory of a paradise regained. It remains to be said that Soloviev, being a messianist looking into future, favored the second interpretation from the very beginning.

## Godmanhood and Sophia

The keystone of Soloviev's vision of deifying the world was the idea of "Godmanhood."<sup>19</sup> In 1878, Soloviev delivered a series of lectures on the topic in St. Petersburg, winning huge popularity. He described cosmo-genesis, human evolution and religious history of a mankind as a theandric process. From this perspective, the ultimate goal of cosmo-genesis consisted in common reintegration, a combination of the divine and the human in All-Unity. The whole of nature strived toward man, whereas the whole history of mankind strived toward Godmanhood. Consequently, the incarnation of God in Christ turned out to be a central point not only in the history of mankind, but also the entire cosmic process.

Considered from the angle of the philosophy of God, this vision could be regarded as a form of panentheism (Greek: *pan en theo* - all in God). The idea of Godmanhood enabled Soloviev to overcome the dualism of traditional Christian theology between the divine and the temporal without falling into pantheism. The concept of "God made Man" also does not assume a dualistic belief in the transcendence of God, or pantheistic belief in His immanence as an all-pervading principle. Nevertheless, God is both transcendent and immanent, and

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18 See L. Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, Oxford 1981, vol.1, chapter I.

19 The thesis that the idea of "Godmanhood" was central to the philosophy of Soloviev was supported by Janusz Dobieszewski in a monograph *Włodzimierz Sołowjow. Studium osobowości filozoficznej*, Warsaw 2003.

the mediating principle that allows the world to become transfused by the Divine spirit – the link between God and created matter – is man. These ideas, to a great extent derived from the Schellingian “positive philosophy,” had equivalents in the religious philosophy of Polish Romanticism, especially in the ideas of Cieszkowski, Krasiński and Trentowski. Just like Soloviev, they tried to reconcile transcendence with immanence, in order that “the world might not be godless, or God worldless” (Cieszkowski).<sup>20</sup> A common source of these ideas – also important in the case of Soloviev – was the romantic interpretation of Renaissance Neo-Platonism, which voiced that “divinity is extended in the world, the world is included in God.”<sup>21</sup> Hence, Soloviev’s idea of “Godmanhood” was not only related to the Chalcedonian dogma, but also to the Renaissance idea of the divine dignity of man, as a link between the infinite absolute and the world of finite beings.

The concept of theandric evolution in Soloviev’s work is closely tied to the idea of *Sophia*, or Divine Wisdom, about which it was written that “The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was [...]” (Proverbs 8: 22-23). Soloviev, who identified *Sophia* with the mysterious being who appeared to him in his mystical visions, read all he could about her in the enormous body of mystical and theosophical literature in which she figures. He studied the Jewish mystical writings of the Kabbalah (in which *Sophia* takes the form of a woman); the works of Jacob Boehme, where she is identified with “eternal virginity”; and the writings of Swedenborg, Saint-Martin, and Baader. He believed that *Sophia* was especially close to the mystical traditions of

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20 Cf. A. Cieszkowski, *Ojcie Nasz*, vol. 2, Poznań 1923, p.262.

Another philosopher of Polish Romanticism, B.F. Trentowski, developed in his works the idea of Godmanhood. In contrast with Soloviev, he put greater emphasis on the autonomy of a man.

The resemblance between Soloviev and Cieszkowski was noted by Berdiaev. While in exile, he read *Ojcie Nasz* (French translation) and assessed the book highly enough to include her description in his book *The Russian Idea*. There, he compared Cieszkowski and Soloviev and even suggested that in some respects Cieszkowski was superior to Soloviev. See N. A. Berdiaev, *Russkaya idea. Osnovnye problemy russkoi mysli XIX i nachala XX veka* (Paris, 1946), pp. 213-15. He called himself a “theosophist in the sense of the Christian theosophy of Franz Baader, “Cieszkowski or Vladimir Soloviev” (Ibid, p.243).

21 Cf. The definition of philosophical Romanticism in a book by P. Tillich, *Perspectives on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Protestant Theology*, London 1967, pp. 77. According to Tillich, the philosophical source of romanticism understood in such a way, was the early-Renaissance Neo-Platonism of Mikołaj Kuzańczyk.

Eastern Christianity, because she was portrayed on an old icon in Novgorod Cathedral. In later years, he attempted to prove that *Sophia* was identical with the concept of *Le Grand-Être* – the “ideal being” in the philosophy of Comte.

The concept of *Sophia* is not entirely explicit in Soloviev’s philosophy, especially since it underwent various modifications in his different works. In developing his theories, Soloviev made use of ideas taken from Plato and the Neo-Platonists, Leibniz (the monadistic conception of ideas), and Schelling. Broadly speaking, *Sophia* represents the World Soul, ideal Humanity, and “eternal womanhood.” In every organism, Soloviev argued, there are two types of unity – creative unity and created unity. In Christ (as the second substance of the Godhead) the active, creative unity is the Word or *logos*, and the created unity is *Sophia*. Representing the essential “oneness” of divine archetypal ideas (which Soloviev thought of as living forces), she is the world soul and at the same time the ideal humanity, whose role it is to mediate between God and the world. As the “word made flesh” or divine matter, she epitomizes the passive receptive principle and is therefore feminine.

In order to understand the role of *Sophia* in Soloviev’s system, it is necessary to combine the idea with the concept of uncreated energies of God, characteristic of the apophatic theology of the Eastern Church. In a manuscript entitled *Sofia* (1876), Soloviev unilaterally declared himself in favor of apophaticism: the essence of God, he claimed, is not subject to definition because it is not a being but rather a principle of a being, a “non-being” or “supra-being.”<sup>22</sup> It follows that God is completely inaccessible to humans. Taking into account, however, that the mere aim of theology (as in apophatic theology) was for humans to participate in divinity, this was not to be regarded as a limit. A problem arose, consequently, about how to reconcile the inaccessibility of God with accessibility – a problem solved by the concept of uncreated energies through which God reveals himself and dwells within humans.<sup>23</sup> *Sophia* for Soloviev denoted exactly such an energy of God (or even a synthesis of such energies): divinity in the world, unity of the world created, bond between the world and transcendental, inaccessible God. It was owing to *Sophia* that Soloviev was able to sanctify the matter, promote the idea of religious rehabilitation and “deify” nature.

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22 See Soloviev, *La Sophia et les autres écrits français*, Ed. F. Ruleau, Lausanne 1978.

23 Cf. V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, London 1957, pp. 67-72. According to Sergei Bulgakov, sophiology stemmed directly from the idea of St. Gregory Palamas on the theology of the Holy Spirit and the divine energies (cf. T. Spidlik, *Myśl rosyjska. Inna wizja człowieka*, Warsaw 2000, p. 398).

The world soul has its own will, and it was this fact that made possible the fall, the beginning of the cosmic drama. Having conceived of the desire to separate from God and affirm her existence outside God, *Sophia* lost her freedom, central position, and power over creation. The outcome of her falling away from God was the spatio-temporal world of objects, in which unity disintegrated and life came to be at the mercy of death. Before the ideal of All-Unity can be realized, this world must once again become united with God – the world soul must fuse with the *logos*. The process of reintegration is a slow one: the urge toward All-Unity first manifests itself in nature as a blind force (the law of gravity, the combination of elements in chemical processes, etc.), then as the principle of organization (organic life), and finally (after the appearance of the human race) as conscious and free activity. The successive phases of the process of creation (cosmogony) have their counterparts in the phases of the theogony, that is in men's ideas about God. The turning point (although the entire previous history of the world and of mankind had led up to it) was the coming of Christianity, when God became Man in the historical person of Jesus Christ, this being a perfect theophany after a series of incomplete preparatory theophanies. After this, the urge toward All-Unity proved stronger than the forces of death and disintegration. Nevertheless, the ideal of the perfect man embodied in Jesus – that is, the ideal of the Godman – can only be realized in the ideal society, the Kingdom of God on earth. This will mark the closing stage of the history of mankind on earth; the natural world will be redeemed for the second time, will become “transfused by the Divine,” and will be liberated from the power of death and united with God in free All-Unity.

In this theory, the instrument of final reintegration was to be mankind-united with God through Christ, the Christian Church. Christianity, however, suffered from internal divisions. In the West, the Church had fallen prey to the temptations of temporal power (Catholicism) or the sin of intellectual pride (Protestantism); in the East, Orthodoxy had preserved the pure truth of Christ, but had not tried to incorporate it in the external historical world of culture. This issue must not be ignored, for not only had Christianity promised a “new heaven” but also a “new Earth.” Socialist thinkers turned the attention of the whole civilized world to the fact that dealing with burning social issues is the primary and most pressing task of the present. Christianity has to respond to the challenge; it has to realize that concern for transcendent salvation cannot justify a lack of commitment to the transformation of the world.

This reasoning was close to the concepts framed by French utopian socialists who claimed that the soteriological process happens in two-phases: instead of focusing on individual salvation in heaven, emphasis was put on

social salvation on earth. At this point, it is worth recalling that it was on this basis that the Saint-Simonists formulated the need for “new theocracy.”

## The Ecumenical Ideal and the National Question in Russia

Having abandoned university, Soloviev started co-operating with Ivan Aksakov’s periodical *Rus’*. He also publicly supported and propagated Fyodor Dostoevsky’s opinions: in his three speeches commemorating Dostoevsky (1881-1883) he expanded on the author’s idea about the historical mission of the Russian nation, destined to realize universal brotherhood and all-human reconciliation. Unlike Dostoevsky, however, he believed that the first and most decisive step toward that end would be to restore the unity of Christendom by reconciling the Orthodox and the Roman Churches.

The same conclusion ended Soloviev’s series of essays entitled *The Great Controversy*, published in Aksakov’s *Rus’* (1881-1883). In the first essay of the series, containing a biting criticism of the “sins” of the official Orthodox Church, Soloviev was still repeating the Slavophile interpretation of Catholicism, which he renounced, however, in the following essays, to rehabilitate the Catholic principles of authority and spiritual discipline, while clearly distinguishing between Catholicism and “papism.” He mentioned it in a private letter to Aksakov:

I get the impression that you see *nothing but* papism, while I am looking above all at the great, saintly and eternal Rome, the fundamental and inseparable part of the universal Church. In that Rome I believe, to her I bow, her I love with all my heart, desiring with all my soul that she may be reborn for the unity and wholeness of the universal Church.<sup>24</sup>

The last essay in *The Great Controversy* series (entitled *The General Basis for the Churches’ Union*) justified the thesis that the primary task for a Christian policy must be the restoration of ecclesiastical unity. Each of the Apostolic Churches – Orthodox and Catholic – represented the universal Church, but it did so only in union with the other, never in separatist seclusion and mutual hostility. The union of Churches must not depend on stripping the Eastern Church of its separate identity – indeed, the two Churches, both Western and Eastern, represented complementary principles and were mutually indispensable to each other. The mystical unity of the two Churches had never been broken – unlike the Protestants, who cut themselves off from the apostolic tradition, the Orthodox and Catholics were rightful members of the universal Church. The

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24 Soloviev’s letter to Aksakov as of March 1883. See, V.S. Soloviev, *Sobraniie sochinenii*, vol. 11, Brussels 1966-1970, p. 351.



order of the day, however, was to restore a visible unity to the Church by acknowledging the primacy of the Bishop of Rome by the Orthodox. That would mark the beginning of a universal union of Christian creeds in which the Protestant “principle of freedom” would also play a serious and positive role.

No wonder Ivan Aksakov had hesitated a long time before he agreed to publish those arguments. Finally, the essay appeared in a curtailed form, with the editor’s comments side by side with the polemics it evoked. Naturally, that caused the author’s indignation and his relations with Aksakov became significantly tense.

At the beginning of 1884, another Slavophile periodical published Soloviev’s essay *On Nationality and the National Issues of Russia*.<sup>25</sup> It elaborated the thesis that Russia’s historical destiny was closely connected with the Russian capacity for “national self-denial” [*natsyonalnoe samootrechenye*]. Russia’s greatness, the thinker argued, depended on the fact that in the crucial moments of its history, the Russian people had always been able to rise above the pagan principle of nationality, renouncing itself for the sake of higher goals that it wished to serve. Historically, the first example of that phenomenon was “summoning the Varangians,” or voluntarily submitting to a foreign authority, thanks to which a powerful state was subsequently founded. The second act of national self-denial was Peter’s reforms – a voluntary renouncement of national “exclusiveness” in the cultural sphere, thanks to which the magnificent Russian culture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century created. The third heroic act of self-denial that was demanded of Russia by its historical mission was a voluntary renouncement of national exclusiveness in the religious sphere for the sake of reconciliation with Rome and realizing the great task of uniting the Churches. For the Russian people were not (as the philosopher explained in another essay, published later the same year) a mere ethnographic entity endowed with definable peculiarities and material interests – rather, they were “a nation feeling that God’s universal cause is above all peculiarities and interests, a nation ready to sacrifice itself to that cause, a theocratic nation by its calling and its duty.”<sup>26</sup>

This time, Aksakov lost his patience. He pronounced Soloviev a man totally estranged from his own nation, having no right to opine on its historical tasks.

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25 See V.S. Soloviev, *Sochineniya* (1989), pp. 279-293 (first published in *Izvestiya Sankt-Peterburgskovo slovyanskovo blagotvoritel'novo obshchestva*, February 1884).

26 *Ibid.*, pp. 326-327 (“Slavyansky vopros”).

The period when the author of *Lectures on Godmanhood* had been treated as the great hope of Slavophilism was thus over.<sup>27</sup>

Soloviev's turn toward a religious, pro-Catholic Westernism was followed by his coming closer to the circle of political liberals surrounding the periodical *Vestnik Yevropy*. Paradoxically, the fact was not without a certain logic: Soloviev did realize that *Vestnik's* editors did not accept his religious philosophy, but he treated them as allies in the fight for solving the national question in Russia, that being the condition of transforming the Russian empire into a universal monarchy. In his articles published in *Vestnik*, he attacked all forms of national egotism (which he firmly distinguished from patriotism), particularly ethnic-religious nationalism, persecution of religious minorities and the politics of Russification. Nor did he spare the epigones of Slavophilism, accusing them of transforming the romantic cult of the people as the bearer of universal truth into a brutal cult of power.

Soloviev ascribed special importance to the Jewish and the Polish questions. In his dissertation *Judaism and the Christian Problem* (1884),<sup>28</sup> he depicted the Jewish question against the background of the general crisis of European civilization, in close connection with the Polish question and the messianic destiny of Russia.

The two largest Slavic nations, the Russians and the Poles, were portrayed by Soloviev as reserve forces of Providence, who were meant to lead Europe out of its fallen state caused of universal secularization; the Jews, on the other hand – being the classical nation of the messianic hope – could help them build the common empire, thus realizing the healing ideal of “liberal theocracy.” Those three nations – the Jews, the Poles and the Russians – were theocratic nations, the only ones that had not abandoned the messianic hope that the truth of their faith would one day be realized in political and social institutions. The fact that, following Poland's partitions, the majority of Poles, along with the majority of orthodox Jews, found themselves within the borders of the Russian Empire, acquired in that perspective a grand providential significance, casting an unexpected light on the sense of Russian history.

The thinker justified Russia's theocratic mission by adopting the imperial idea of a Second Rome by the Russian Empire. The idea had been vivid in Russian autocracy, in the Orthodox Church and in the soul of the Russian people, spontaneously aspiring to surrender its life to the Divine truth. Modern

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27 In his reply (“Against National Self-Denial and the Pantheist Tendency” in the Essays of V.S. Soloviev), Aksakov pronounced Soloviev's opinions a radical version of Chaadaev's ideas.

28 See V.S. Soloviev, *Sochineniya* (1989), pp. 206-256.

Russia, however, had lost its dynamics of development – it now possessed no independent social force capable of actively creating history. Therefore, in order to fulfill its mission, it ought to join forces with the nations representing that which it lacked.

A special role in the state thus fell, according to Soloviev, to the Poles and the Jews. Their respective tasks were to be as follows:

The role of the Poles would be to continue their traditional mission of representing Catholicism among the Slavs. Polish hostility toward the Russians had – Soloviev argued – purely spiritual reasons. The main source of divisiveness could be cancelled by a union of Russia and Rome – particularly that the historic function of mediators in attaining the union would belong to the Poles. Moreover, the Polish nobility might take on the role of an independent, conservative social force, thereby both strengthening the state and feeding its own social aspirations. Giving moral satisfaction to the Poles would automatically cancel out the Russian revolutionary movement, as it was just a “mask of the Polish question” (on this issue, Soloviev agreed with Katkov).

Summarizing those issues, Soloviev struck a prophetic note. Poland, he wrote, “has not and will not perish”; serving faithfully Catholicism, it will become – by providential decree – a link connecting the Pope and the tsar – a “living bridge between the temples of the East and the West.”<sup>29</sup>

The Jews’ role in the building of the future theocracy followed, according to Soloviev, from the very gist of the Jewish Messianism which aspired to a material transformation of the social-political world and would not be satisfied with the idea of individual and purely spiritual rebirth. The Jews expected the Messiah to arrive as a potent monarch whose rule would inaugurate God’s Kingdom on earth. A mighty theocratic empire, combining the Judeo-Christian ethics and the tsarist power capable of putting it in practice, would become the fulfillment of those expectations.

Soloviev also held a precise view of the social role that the Jewish element should play in the theocratic system of the future. Namely, he believed that religious materialism had endowed the Jews with special economic talents – drawing the conclusion therefore that it would be most proper to rest the industry and commerce of the future theocratic kingdom in Jewish hands. The religious nature of Jewish materialism would save the economy from evolving into a domain of godless “practical materialism.” The characteristically Judaic “sanctification of matter” would act beneficially, guaranteeing – in Soloviev’s opinion – that, in Jewish hands, economic activity would stop being a ruthless

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29 Ibid., p. 253.

exploitation of nature, becoming instead, a harmonious relationship between the natural world and humanity.

Apparently, the Poles and the Jews were supposed to become the pillars of the future universal empire, embodying the fulfillment of Russia's historical mission. This, obviously, was the exact opposite of Aksakov's opinion that the Poles and the Jews were minorities organically hostile to the Russian Empire who, for that reason, could not hope for civic equality.<sup>30</sup>

Soloviev's opinions on the Polish and the Jewish problems were not just a vision of the future – they were also part of a general project of overcoming the social-political tensions connected with the current condition of the national question in Russia.

Soloviev most clearly realized that national and religious oppression was weakening the state and that abandoning it lay in the best conceived imperial interest. The solution he proposed relied on two premises: (1) the conviction that the Russian people were prepared to suffer sacrifice for the sake of a greater good, and (2) the assumption that the best way to resolve international conflict was to offer minorities a somewhat privileged position. In the case of the Poles and the Jews – the two minorities perceived as the most important and the most troublesome – the privilege was to be most significant, tantamount to leaving entire domains of social life in their hands. In modernized terms, we might observe that Soloviev's project proposed taking far-reaching "affirmative action" toward the two minorities.

Obviously, Soloviev did not stop at condemning the persecution of the Jews and Russification of the Poles. In *Europe's Messenger*, he protested against any form of national or religious oppression, any policy of "stifling and absorbing" – stifling freedom of conscience and freedom of speech. His articles on this subject, collected in the two-volume *National Question in Russia*, were a bold, principled criticism of both the ethnic-religious nationalism of Slavophile epigones and the state nationalism of Katkov who dreamed of transforming Russia into a unitary nation-state, following the French model.

In other words, the author of *The National Question in Russia* fought against both forms of modern nationalism: particularizing ethno-nationalism and modernizing political nationalism aiming at the cultural homogenization of the state. These he opposed with the idea of a multi-ethnic universal empire, Christian and liberal at the same time.

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30 See I.S. Aksakov, *Polnoye sobranie sochineni*, vol. 3, Moscow 1886: "Polski vopros i zapadno-russkoye d'elo. Yevreysky vopros," pp. 426-427.

## Theocratic Utopia of the Third Rome

Solving the national question was obviously not, for Soloviev, a goal in itself. It was part of a grand soteriological vision of Christianized social-political relations constituting an indispensable completion of the act of salvation. The union of the Russian and the Roman Churches was meant to be a prelude to the earthly realization of the Godmanhood ideal.

In 1885, Soloviev wrote to the Croatian Bishop Jossip Strossmayer, informing him that he had been laboring on a work on which “the fate of Russia, Slavdom and the entire world”<sup>31</sup> depended. A year later, in the form of a letter to Strossmayer, he sent him a memorial on the general foundations of the union of the Churches, accepting all the Catholic dogmas and arguing that separate opinions of the Orthodox on certain issues (such as the *filioque*, the dogma of immaculate conception and papal infallibility in matters of faith) were but “theological opinions” without dogmatic rank. Hence, he concluded that, in fact, no doctrinal differences divided the two parts of the universal Church – Catholic and Orthodox. Moreover, he claimed that schism existed only *de facto*, rather than *de iure*, and that the Orthodox Church’s acknowledgement of the Pope’s primacy would not be tantamount to joining the Latin Church, since the Pope’s separate function as the “patriarch of the West” would guarantee autonomy in the East.

In his next letter to Strossmayer, Soloviev clarified the concept, pointing to a specific division of roles between the Western and the Eastern parts of Christendom. The East represented democratic decentralization in the ecclesiastical sphere and centralization in the political sphere, while the West stood for the opposite. Therefore, the united Christian world ought to have its religious center in Rome and its political center – in the East. In this perspective, the geographic distance between Rome and Moscow took on a deeper providential meaning – the Western empire (Roman Empire of the German Nation) was situated too close to Rome which provoked endless conflict. “But the West centralized in the person of the Pope and the East centralized in the person of the Tsar would complete each other splendidly.”<sup>32</sup>

In his way, the theocratic idea was combined in Soloviev’s mind with that of the universal empire (of which he had read in Dante’s treatise *On Monarchy*),<sup>33</sup> taking the shape of a future covenant with the Russian tsar, acting as the

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31 V.S. Soloviev, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 11, p. 380.

32 Ibid., p. 387 (letter to Strossmayer as of October 10, 1886).

33 Cf. G. Florovsky, “Vladimir Soloviev and Dante: the Problem of Christian Empire,” in: *For Roman Jacobson. Essays on the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday*, the Hague 1956.

successor of Constantine the Great, the successor of Saint Peter. The vision bears an obvious similarity to that of Tutchev – the author of a complex historical-philosophical concept in which Russia was ascribed the role of the lawful heiress to the Eastern empire. Tutchev, too, had suggested a union of the empire and Papacy, albeit in a version opposite to Soloviev's: the former had sketched a vision of an "orthodox Papacy" under the wing of Constantine's empire, while the latter promoted the idea of a Catholic Russian empire realizing the ideal of a universal Christian monarchy under the spiritual guidance of the Apostolic See.<sup>34</sup>

Soloviev's main occupation in the years 1885-1886 was writing his magnum opus, *The History and the Future of Theocracy*. The book intended to prove that the separation of the Eastern and the Roman Churches was merely apparent. In the introduction to the work, the philosopher described his own task as follows:

To justify the faith of our fathers, raising it to a new level of rational consciousness; to show that that same old faith, once it is liberated from the chains of local isolation and national vanity, is entirely concordant with the eternal universal truth.<sup>35</sup>

In practice, it implied the thesis that Orthodoxy was not at all different from Catholicism in its essential content. Russian ecclesiastical authorities found the idea unacceptable. The first volume of *The History and the Future of Theocracy*, published in Zagreb in 1887, was not allowed in Russia, while the following two, prohibited by Russian clerical censorship, never saw publication.<sup>36</sup> No wonder that Soloviev's later texts on ecumenical theocracy were written in French and published in France.

The first of those was a brochure entitled *The Russian Idea [L'idee russe, 1888]* in which a national idea was defined as opposed to national egotism, for every nation must fulfill its God-decreed "organic function" in the life of mankind. "The Russian idea" is thus not what Russia thinks about herself in time – it is what God thinks about her in eternity. The positive content of the Russian idea is the realization of the theocratic ideal of the ecclesiastical, the tsarist and the prophetic authorities acting jointly. Without theocracy, the Russian Empire posed a threat to the world – while as a liberal theocracy, renouncing any exclusiveness or particularism, it will become a universal empire, securing world peace and inaugurating an era of Christianized politics.

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34 It is worth remembering that a similar vision was shared by Vladimir Pecherin.

35 V.S. Soloviev, *Sobraniie sochinenii*, vol. 4, p. 243.

36 Losiev even mentions their "annihilation." See, Losiev, Vladimir *Soloviev i evo vremya*, Moscow 1990, p. 70.

An adjunct to *The Russian Idea* was Soloviev's essay, *Saint Vladimir and the Christian State*, written for the 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the christening of Russia and published in the Catholic periodical *L'Univers* (August 1888). In the essay, Soloviev named the fundamental difference between the authentic Christianity of Vladimir's Rus' which permeated the entire social life of the state, and spiritually dead, contemporary Orthodoxy, enslaved by imperial papism. The folk Orthodoxy of the persecuted Old Believers remained, according to Soloviev, the last living vestige of faith. He therefore appealed to Russia to confirm its christening by rejecting the double enslavement by tightly connected forces: the enslavement of the Church by lay authorities and state absolutism.

The following year saw the publication of Soloviev's book, *Russia and the Universal Church* [*La Russie et l'Église Universelle*, Paris 1889]. While writing it, the philosopher had maintained close, almost working contact with the Russian Jesuit Centre founded in France by Ivan Gagarin, using the contents of Gagarin's Slavic Library and exchanging letters with Gagarin's closest collaborators – Father Ivan Martynov (who gave him Chaadaev's portrait) and Father Pavel Pierling.<sup>37</sup>

*Russia and the Universal Church* includes an extended introduction and three separate parts. The first discusses the situation of the Church in Russia and all over the territory of the Christian East; the second expands on the idea of an ecclesiastical monarchy established by Jesus Christ; the third – the most esoteric – treats the principle of the trinity in social life.

The introduction refers to the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the French Revolution, paying homage to its greatest achievement, namely, the Declaration of the Rights of Man. Those, however, were the rights of the individual the reverse of which, as it turned out, was economic enslavement. Now the time has come to realize the rights of the social man, i.e., the rights of human solidarity – both within the community and internationally. According to Soloviev, it would be achieved by the Christianization of politics, or the social realization of the Godmanhood ideal.

The further argument brings a detailed analysis of the causes of past failures in realizing that theocratic ideal. Constant rivalry between the emperors and the Popes favored disruptive ambitions, making impossible the realization of the ideal of a socially just Europe. The crisis deepened with the Reformation, and

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37 A letter from Soloviev to Martynov as of 19th of August 1887 proves that the philosopher was acquainted with the Gagarinian criticism of the Slavophile concept of ecumenical council and was willing to use it in his own analysis of anti-Catholic views of Samarin (*Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 11, pp. 395-396).

again with the process of secularization that utterly destroyed the very idea of a Christian society.

In these conditions, everything depended on an answer to the following question: does there exist, in the Christian world, an authority that might resume the great work of Constantine and Charlemagne? His own answer was affirmative: the historical force capable of furnishing the universal Church with political power was, in his opinion, the Russian Empire – on the condition, however, that Russia fulfills the great mission of uniting the churches.

The particular formula of that union was a solemn declaration of acknowledging “Peter’s primacy.” Having made it in his own name, Soloviev proclaimed the inauguration of the great mission of the Slavic nations – or “nations of the Word” – an imperial mission with a goal to “for the third and last time, provide the universal Church with a social body.”<sup>38</sup>

Continuing his argument, Soloviev entered into polemics with the original idea of “Moscow as the Third Rome.” He pronounced it to be isolationist, particularistic and eternalizing the Byzantine isolation of Russia. He also pointed out that the concept had later evolved into the idea of transforming the Muscovy Empire into a “great national monarchy” which implied annexing Ukraine and Belorussia. Nevertheless, in keeping with his general view of the relationship between a nation and mankind, he opined that nationalism was not sufficient legitimization for a large state, let alone an empire. Being a Christian nation that wanted to become a great nation and aspiring to unite the Slavs and gain decisive influence in world politics, the Russians ought to win for their state a universalistic legitimization.<sup>39</sup> They should therefore undertake the mission to unite the two universalistic Roman empires – Eastern and Western – and thereby definitively overcome the historical controversy between the East and West.

In this way, the idea of Russia as “the Third Rome,” its outdated Muscovite version abandoned, acquired new content and became the main topic of Soloviev’s concept of a new theocracy.

The second part of the book is a study on the Roman Catholic Church as an ecclesiastical monarchy. Christ, while remaining head of the Church in the

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38 V.S. Soloviev, *Sobraniiie sochinenii*, vol. 11, p. 173.

Stremoukhoff called that appeal to the Slavic nations a specific synthesis of Mickiewicz’s Messianism with that of Dostoevsky (D. Stremoukhoff, *Vladimir Soloviev and His Messianic Work*, Belmont MA 1980, p. 195).

39 Trubetskoi has pointed out that the universalistic concept of imperial Messianism assumed “if not the rule of the world, then at least the global dictatorship of Russia” (E.N. Trubetskoi, *Mirosozertsaniie V.S. Solovieva*, vol. 1, p. 486).



mystical order, had appointed the prince of the Apostles as the monarchical ruler of the Church in the social order. According to Soloviev, it followed from the principle of unity: one truth – one faith – one Church, under a single leader. The ecclesiastical monarchy thus established, had to be a universal monarchy, personifying the unity of mankind as a “universal social being, *l'être social universel*.”<sup>40</sup> It followed from the double-phased theandric process: according to the concept, once the Godman [*l'Homme-Dieu individuel*] had emerged from the chosen nation, the time had come for the other nations of the world to start building mankind's social body, i.e., to collectively incarnate the idea of Godmanhood [*l'Homme-Dieu collectif*].<sup>41</sup>

The universal ecclesiastical monarchy was taking the place of the ancient Roman Empire, substituting the striving for a purely political unity with a factual spiritual unity founded on love. Its capital, however, would remain in Rome, for such was the providential destiny of the “eternal city,” legible in its very name: the word *Roma*, read right to left, was, after all, *Amor*, as Virgil had observed. Having overthrown the false and godless absolutism of the Caesars, Jesus at once sanctified and universalized the Roman monarchy, furnishing it with a theocratic basis.

Soloviev naturally tried to prove that loyalty to Rome did not contradict true Orthodoxy. He quoted the Moscow Metropolitan Philaretus' opinion that the priority of St. Peter's successors was “clear and obvious.” He supported this claim with the authority of the eminent teacher of the Eastern Church, John Chrysostom. And, above all else, he summoned the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon as proof that, at its time, the Eastern Church had unreservedly approved of the Bishop of Rome's primacy. He thereby concluded that calling the principle of the Pope's supremacy a heresy was tantamount to accusing the entire universal Church of the fifth century of heresy.<sup>42</sup>

The third part of *La Russie* is, in fact, a separate philosophical-mystical treatise, focusing on the dogma of the Trinity and its complementary concept of *Sophia*. The Russian Jesuits who traced a Slavic mystical heresy therein, discouraged Soloviev from publishing the work and, when he did not heed their counsel, firmly refused to participate in the book's promotion. The heterodoxy of Soloviev's sophiology was also confirmed by the philosopher's nephew,

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40 V.S. Soloviev, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 11, p. 242 (cf. the French original version in: Soloviev, V.S., *La Sophia et les autres ecrits francais*, p. 209).

41 Ibid., cf. *La Sophia*, pp. 209-210. Note that, in the Russian translation, the term *Homme-Dieu* becomes *Bogochelovek* – in keeping with Dostoevsky, who made a fundamental distinction between “God-man” and “Man-God.”

42 Ibid., pp. 275-277.

Sergei Soloviev, who had interpreted the chapter on *Sophia of La Russie* as an announcement of a “new Revelation” which, albeit originating within the Church, would raise Christianity to a higher level.<sup>43</sup>

The French Catholics’ reaction to Soloviev’s ideas was weak and extremely frustrating. In a letter from 1892, the philosopher thus summarized his experience:

Here is, in two words, my final attitude to papism: I understand it and accept it *tel quel*, while it neither understands, nor accepts myself; I have built it into my spiritual world, while it will not build me into itself; I use it as an element and a tool of truth, while it will not make me its own tool and element.<sup>44</sup>

The words suggest that, once his wave of enthusiasm for a Roman-Russian neo-theocratism was over, Soloviev partially returned to his own sources, namely, the idea of a supra-denominational mystic Christianity that he had been cherishing all his life and that had originated in the times of Alexander I – the period of a flourishing religious Westernism. The idea was sown, as we know, by the mystical trend of Freemasonry called “Martinism”<sup>45</sup> and acquired its theocratic-imperialist shape owing to Alexander I himself, both when he constructed the Holy Alliance, and when he seriously considered converting to the Roman creed.

It must be emphasized that abandoning the theocratic utopia did not undermine the pro-Catholic orientation of Soloviev’s religiousness. He proved this in February of 1896 by accepting communion from the hands of a Catholic priest of the Eastern rite, Nikolai Tolstoy. Interpretation of that act is a matter for discussion. Some authors perceive it as an expression of Soloviev’s conviction about the theological importance of intercommunion.<sup>46</sup> Others see it as a practical illustration of Soloviev’s opinion that belonging to the Eastern Church did not exclude belonging to the Roman Church, since the two are

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43 See *S.M. Soloviev, Vladimir Soloviev*, pp. 253-265. In 1892, Soloviev himself (in a letter to V. Rozanov) called his own views a “religion of the Holy Spirit” (Ibid.).

44 See *ibid.*, p. 285.

45 Soloviev himself was aware of the fact that his religious ideas were generically connected with that period. A proof of it is the chapter he authored in A.F. Pisiemski’s book *The Masons* (1880) devoted to the Russian mystics of the early 19th century. The protagonists of this chapter (published without revealing its author’s name) are Freemasons-Martinists, among them an Orthodox priest discussing the Sophiological theosophy of Jacob Boehme and trying to give it an Orthodox interpretation (see, V.V. Kravchenko, *Mysticism v russkoy filosofskoy mysli XXI-nachala XX vekov*, Moscow 1997, pp. 118-120).

46 Cf. e.g. J. Klinger, *O istocie prawosławia. Wybór pism*, Warsaw 1983, pp. 291-292.

separated only externally, and not in their inner identity.<sup>47</sup> Others still, mainly Catholic clergy and the Orthodox hierarchy, stress the fact that the taking of communion had been preceded by a loud reading of the Tridentine Rite and was thus tantamount to conversion to Catholicism.<sup>48</sup> The opinion was shared by the philosopher's nephew, Sergei Soloviev, a symbolist poet who, under the influence of his uncle, became a Catholic priest of the Greek-Russian rite.<sup>49</sup>

The present book is not the proper place for resolving that controversy from the point of view of canon law. It is important, however, to emphasize that the act of 1896 did not disturb the continuity of the evolution of the philosopher's worldview. It was by no means an act of breaking with Orthodoxy and renouncing Orthodox heritage. The proper interpretation thus seems that of John Paul II who, in his teaching on Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, called them "the two lungs of the universal Church."<sup>50</sup> Soloviev hoped to legalize the notion of "Orthodox Catholicism," i.e. the fact that the Orthodox belonged to the indivisible universal Church.

## Theory of Love. A Digression on Nikolai Fedorov

Although Soloviev had become disillusioned as far as Russia's national mission and his Caesar-Papist utopia were concerned, this did not mean that all utopian motifs were automatically eliminated from his world view. On the contrary, during the early 1890s he gave much thought to a utopian vision with a

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47 Cf. G. Florovsky, "The Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement Prior to 1910," in: *Collected Works*, vol. II, Belmont MA 1974, p. 231.

48 According to M. d'Herbigny, it was Soloviev's personal credo borrowed from the ending of *La Russie et l'Eglise universelle*, rather than the Trident Credo (M. d'Herbigny, *Un Newman Russe. Vladimir Soloviev*, Paris 1911).

49 According to S.M. Soloviev, the act was thus interpreted by the philosopher himself, as well as by his family (*Zhizn i tvorcheskaia evolutsia*, pp. 310-340).

50 See the Apostolic Letter of John Paul II *Oriente Lumen* as of 2 May 1995. Soloviev is mentioned in the encyclical "Fides et Ratio" as of 14 September 1998 (paragraph 74), next to J.H. Newman, A. Rosmini, J. Maritain, E. Gilson and Edith Stein.

It was a student of Soloviev, a poet and thinker Vyacheslav Ivanov who came up with the metaphor of Catholicism and the Orthodoxy as "two lungs of the universal church." Like Soloviev, he acknowledged only one Christian religion, existing in two forms: eastern and western. By joining the Slavic Christian church on 17 March 1926 in St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City, he offered a proof for his stance (cf. A. Walicki, *Rosja, katolicyzm i sprawa polska*, pp. 272-282).

specifically erotic flavor. The fruits of his reflections were five articles published under the title *The Meaning of Love* (1892-94).

A strand of eroticism, closely bound up with the ideal of “eternal womanhood,” runs through Soloviev’s entire philosophy. His vision of All-Unity was based on the idea of a *syzygetic* union between the part and the whole, a kind of loving cooperation in which the urge toward reintegration and wholeness would overcome the disintegrating centrifugal force of egoism. This “pan-eroticism” in Soloviev’s world view was, however, accompanied by a dislike of physical relationships, which he regarded as a symptom of the fall: he made a distinction between “sexual” love (by which he meant an ideal love linking the two sexes) and mere physical intercourse. He also rejected the view that the goal of love was procreation – i.e. the continuation of the species – and argued that in nature there was no direct correspondence between fertility and the strength of sexual love. Love between men and women was to him one of the supreme values, and he refused to accept the Schopenhauerian view that it was a mirage used by nature to dazzle lovers into sacrificing themselves for the sake of future generations. The essence of love, Soloviev insisted, is the urge toward reintegration – toward realizing the ideal of the “genuine human being,” who represents the indivisible free unity of the male and female elements. Total man is made in the image of his Creator, and the most profound meaning of sexual love is that it allows man to be “transfused by God” and to escape from the grasp of death. The physical act of love, on the other hand, helps to maintain the power of death because it leads to an “evil infinity” – to the absurd proliferation of generations, each being only a means to the next. Physical relationships therefore degrade love and negate its true meaning. The powerful force that, as a result of *Sophia’s* fall, had been turned outward toward procreation ought to be directed inward and become an instrument of universal reintegration.

These ideas recall the German Romantics’ fascination with the concept of androgyny. Soloviev was especially close to Baader, who wrote that “love is a means by which a man and woman can find inner fulfillment (in soul and spirit) and thus realize the idea of the integral human being that is the image of man’s original divinity.”<sup>51</sup> The common source of both Soloviev and Baader’s conceptions was, of course, the Platonic myth of the first beings, who were punished for their presumptuousness by being cut into two halves.

It must be stressed, however, that Soloviev also drew his inspiration from another, purely Russian source: the conceptions of Nikolai Fedorov (1828-

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51 See E. Susini, *Franz von Baader et le romantisme mystique* (Paris 1942), vol. 3, pp. 569-72.

1903), the illegitimate son of Prince Pavel Gagarin, a librarian at the Rumiantsev Museum in Moscow, and author of the *Philosophy of Common Action* (published posthumously). Fedorov was an eccentric who was little known during his lifetime, and the importance accorded to him by some Russian émigré historians appears to be somewhat exaggerated.<sup>52</sup> It should be noted, however, that both Dostoevsky and Tolstoy were greatly impressed by his theories and that Soloviev attempted to develop them further in his philosophy.

At the beginning of 1878, Dostoevsky received from N. Peterson a summary of Fedorov's thought. Having read it, he used the ideas in his work on *The Brothers Karamazov*. Dostoevsky was fascinated with the idea of a victory over death as the only moral solution to the drama of history.<sup>53</sup> He agreed with Fedorov that the idea of progress is utterly immoral, arguing that the "death of fathers" or suffering and death of innocent children is too high a price to be paid for the future happiness of the mankind. Dostoevsky rejected such a way of justifying evil through the figure of Ivan Karamazov who vehemently challenged the legitimacy of theodicy. *The Brothers Karamazov* end with a Fedorov accent: the words of Alyosha Karamazov who conveys a happy vision of future common resurrection, understood literally.

Soloviev's reaction was equally positive: he became acquainted with Fedorov's ideas in 1878 and at once thought them "not far from the truth." Subsequent personal acquaintance deepened this impression. At the beginning of the 1880s, Soloviev acknowledged Fedorov as his teacher and called his conceptions "the first step forward made by the human spirit on the road to Christ."<sup>54</sup>

Fedorov's religious world view was a strange blend of evangelical simplicity with an idealization of the village, heavy criticism of western capitalism and Russian messianism (Russia seemed to be the country least corrupted by godless civilization) with naturalistic scientism, an almost magical belief in the power of science and technology and the Promethean spirit of collective activism. This activism was supposed to support the utopian fantasy of a "common task" in which all effort would be concentrated on resurrecting

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52 See the chapters devoted to Fedorov in Zenkovsky's and Lossky's histories of Russian philosophy. From the western viewpoint, as far as philosophical criteria are concerned, it is hard to deem Fedorov as a philosopher. In both his books on Russian philosophy (*Philosophy in Russia*, Notre Dame 1986 and *Russian Religious Philosophy*, Notre Dame 1988), F.C. Copleston mentions Fedorov only with respect to the influence his ideas had on Soloviev (patterning in this regard the first English edition of this book).

53 Cf. F.M. Dostoevsky, *Pis'ma*, vol. 4, pp.9-10.

54 V.S. Soloviev, *Pis'ma*, vol. 2, Petersburg 1909, p.345.

the dead and conquering death itself and not the idea of progress, which Fedorov condemned. The cult of science and technology in this utopia combined with the archaic cult of the ancestors (who shall be brought back to life through scientific methods) , whereas naturalism co-existed in an odd manner with the disapproval of procreation (sometimes taking the form of misogyny) and an opposition to the “will to birth,” that is the proliferation of generations of mortal men on behalf of the “will to resurrection,” that is the conquest of death and the substitution of the fraternal and filial for physical love. He thought this goal could be reached through mastery over nature and through the establishment of a social system founded on communal ownership and the exclusion of all factors dividing men and introducing elements of struggle into their mutual relations.

Fedorov’s doctrine constituted a combination of original reinterpretations of religious motifs with epistemological and historiosophical concepts, together with criticism of official Christianity and the classics of secular philosophy. Both objectivism and subjectivism shall be given up in the process of coming to knowledge, as it is the projective approach (subordinating knowledge to deliberate action) that is proper. When committing the original sin, man yielded to the Satan temptation of contemplative knowledge. Consequently, knowledge was separated from action and the Tree of the Knowledge was transformed into the Tree of the Cross. Knowledge became abstract, immoral, and incapable of transforming the world in a way that would give meaning to human life. The fall of humankind, however, is not irreversible. Christ had redeemed mankind from original sin, had enabled people to once again become an instrument in God’s hands; owing to the Tree of the Cross people may replace the barren Tree of Knowledge with the Tree of Life. This task of universal salvation, however, is solely the undertaking of mankind. Christ rendered salvation possible, yet it is up to the mankind to make what is possible real; it is a matter of a collective effort.

To Fedorov, it seemed that the people of the West squandered this possibility. Their philosophy led to dire consequences. Known for his dictum “Know thyself,” Socrates was the father of “philosophical deceit,” since with this maxim he formed a basis for philosophical egocentrism. Descartes took a further step on the road of this lie, searching for the criterion of truth in pure thought, and not collective deeds. Analogously deceptive was Kant’s system, in which a distinction was drawn between theoretical and practical reason. The crowning achievement of this journey was the philosophy of Nietzsche - the Antichrist, who recanted the “will to rise from the dead” and did not stop short at transforming this will into the will to destroy. Fedorov noticed a parallel process of degradation in the social evolution of the West, in which the egoism of isolated individuals and the idolatry of progress took its toll. Patriarchal

morality, able to change into the will of bringing the ancestors back to life, was preserved solely in Russia - both among peasants and autocracy (the tsar as the “father” of the people and a vicar of God on earth). It was for this reason that Fedorov hoped the project of common salvation would be launched in Russia.

Fedorov called his views “supra-moralism or general synthesis” and was convinced of their conformity to the essence of Christianity.

Supra-moralism is not only the highest Christian morality, it is Christianity itself; for it transforms dogmatics into ethics (that is, dogmas become commandments) – an ethics inseparable from knowledge and art, from science and aesthetics, all of which merge into ethics. Divine services become acts of atonement, that is to say, of resuscitation.<sup>55</sup>

He stated that we do not comprehend this because of the artificiality of life in the town, which he blamed for warping the nature of men. For nature, resurrection is a matter equally natural as birth and death. We need to understand that the struggle with death is central, more important than the struggle with poverty. A way to victory - both over death and poverty - is “the regulation of natural processes, that is, of blind force.” This regulation shall lead to the “moralization and rationalization of all of the worlds of the universe,”<sup>56</sup> at first, however, people have to overcome discord. Everyone, whether a believer or non-believer, shall unite in support of a huge historical task: realization of the project of resurrection, for which the consciousness strives. In order to succeed, one needs to cease being a slave of the blind forces of nature and to overcome belief in supernatural, transcendental salvation. “Supra-moralism” requires people to come of age: “demands paradise, the Kingdom of God, not other-worldly, but this-worldly.”

With thoughts that controversial, there was no unanimous response. An outstanding theologian, Georges Florovsky, supported Fedorov by pointing out that the Christian credo mentions the “resurrection of the body” and not the immortality of the soul.<sup>57</sup> Assessing Fedorov’s worldview as a whole, however, Florovsky was extremely harsh, describing it as a strange combination of religious-magic motifs with common-sense utilitarianism and refused to call it Christian.<sup>58</sup> Another Orthodox priest, Vasily Zenkovsky, polemicized with this opinion: he did not question the heterogeneity of the thought, but underlined its “Christian basis,” claiming that the main idea, i.e. victory over death, has a

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55 N.F. Fedorov, *Sochineniia*, Moscow 1994, p.146.

56 Ibid, p.159.

57 Cf. G. Florovsky, “The Immortality of Soul” [in:] Ibid, *Collected Works*, vol. 3, 1976, p.231.

58 G. Florovsky, *Puti russkovo bogosloviia*, p.330

Christian character through and through.<sup>59</sup> Nikolai Berdiaev, in turn, asked a question concerning the relation between Fedorov and the “Russian idea” and answered it as follows:

In Fedorov's teaching there is a very great deal which ought to be retained, as entering into the Russian Idea. I do not know a more characteristically Russian thinker. He is one who must appear strange to the West. He desires the brotherhood of man not only in space but also in time, and he believes in the possibility of changing the past. But the materialist methods of resuscitation which he proposes cannot be retained.<sup>60</sup>

The fact that Fedorov’s thought posed a unique synthesis of orthodox religiousness with Russian materialism and scientism, often taking the form of quasi-religious belief of radical intelligentsia in the wonder-power of the knowledge and “scientific” way to earthly redemption, backs up the statement about the Russian character of his thought. Fedorov’s ideas had its proponents in Soviet Russia. The idea of a collective, scientific effort enabling the “regulation” of the forces of nature and solidarity among people, made Fedorov attractive for the communists. Majakowski and Gorki were fascinated by Fedorov’s ideas on bringing the dead back to life.<sup>61</sup> Another form of reference to Fedorov’s ideas was so-called Russian cosmism, whose enthusiasts believed in a possibility of an “active evolution” steered by people. Among the propagators of this movement were Konstanty Ciolkowski [Konstantin Tsiolkovsky], a pioneer of the astronautic theory, and Vladimir Vernadsky, a pioneer of noosphere theory.<sup>62</sup>

Having said all that, let us come back to Fedorov’s ideas as portrayed in Soloviev’s works.

Soloviev took from Fedorov his criticism of the “will to birth” as well as the idea that victory over death was the only moral solution to the drama of history. He also accepted that redemption must be a collective act and that the only way to achieve immortality was for mankind to become united in a Kingdom of God on earth. It is obvious, however, that the author of *The Meaning of Love* must have been repelled by Fedorov’s naturalism and his seeming cult of science, and could have had little sympathy for the ancestor worship and egalitarian communism connected with it.<sup>63</sup> Soloviev’s condemnation of procreation,

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59 V.V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, vol. 2, p. 588.

60 N. A. Berdiaev, *Russkaia idieia*, p. 213.

61 The hope for such resuscitation was allegedly a reason behind the embalming of Lenin.

62 See G.M. Young, Jr., *Nikolai F. Fedorov: An Introduction*, Belmont MA 1979, pp. 180-199.

63 In his letters to Fedorov, Soloviev strongly stressed that the “project of resurrection” is to be understood only in a religious, and not literal or scientific dimension. He also



moreover, was linked to a specific pan-eroticism, just as his conception of a universal resurrection was part of the Neo-Platonic and romantic ideal of cosmic reintegration and Godmanhood. In a word, Soloviev took over certain ideas from Fedorov, but assimilated them into an infinitely more complex philosophical world view that undoubtedly had more in common with the ideas of Novalis and Baader than with the conceptions developed in the *Philosophy of Common Action*.

Soloviev played an important role in promoting Fedorov's ideas, despite the differences between the two of them. It was owing to him that some of these ideas became an inescapable part of the Russian religious-philosophical renaissance of the beginning of the 20th century. This pertains particularly to the idea of victory over death and criticism of the "proliferation of generations of mortal men." In the circle of symbolist poets, the idea that procreation is not to be regarded as the aim of love, found new ground for expression. As for philosophers, especially ex-Marxists, they made use of Fedorov's views to criticize the main assumptions of the "religion of progress," namely that the fathers are to be sacrificed for the future happiness of their descendants and that this phenomenon is to take place repeatedly, stretching into infinity.<sup>64</sup> Berdiaev invoked Fedorov when indicating that the idea of progress is basically immoral and Bulgakov applied Fedorov's rhetoric while referring to the socialist vision of future as a repelling and cynical "picture of descendants feasting on the graves of their ancestors."<sup>65</sup>

## Ethics and Philosophy of Law

Disillusionment with his theocratic utopianism led Soloviev to change his mind about the growing secularization of culture and various intellectual trends connected with it. He began to speak with approbation of Lesevich (whom he had previously denied any philosophical qualifications whatsoever),<sup>66</sup> discovered the contribution made by Comte to the Christian consciousness,

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added that it is not the resurrection of all individuals, including cannibals, that is meant. The project refers to the resurrection of the humanity as such as it shall be (V.S. Soloviev, *Pis'ma*, vol. 2, pp.345-347).

64 Cf. A.Walicki, "Russian Philosophers of the Silver Age as Critics of Marxism," in: J.P. Scanlon (ed.), *Russian Thought After Communism*. Armonk, N.Y. 1994, pp. 81-103.

65 See S.N. Bulgakov, "Christianstvo i sotsializm," 1917 [in:] *Ibid*, *Christianskii sotsializm*, Novosibirsk 1991, pp. 216-218.

66 Cf. K. Mochulsky, *Vladimir Soloviev*, p. 191.

proposed including the founder of positivism among the Christian saints,<sup>67</sup> and even expressed his agreement with the main theses of Chernyshevsky's dissertation on *The Aesthetic Relation Between Art and Reality*.

This gradual change in outlook meant that Soloviev became less critical of the growing emancipation of the spheres of knowledge, artistic creation, and social practice from the strictures of religion. While preparing a new edition of his *Critique of Abstract Principles*, he came to the conclusion that his ideas on ethics had changed to such an extent that he ought to revise them completely. This is how he came to write his major study in ethics, *A Justification of the Good* (1897).

The crucial innovation was the acknowledgment of ethics' autonomy, its independence from both religion and metaphysics. The limits of that autonomy are a matter of controversy: some experts on Soloviev's philosophy claim that he was headed for a complete autonomy of ethics, while others believe that the autonomism of Soloviev's ethics was, in fact, illusory, since its necessary premises were still the existence of God and the immortality of the soul.<sup>68</sup> The opinion that seems closest to the truth is that the author of *An Apology of Good* was attempting to emphasize the *relative* autonomy of the ethical sphere, or its independence from the metaphysical knowledge of God and the dogmas of positive religion.<sup>69</sup>

In the first part of *An Apology of Good* ("The Good in Human Nature"), the philosopher tried to found ethics on empirical data, deriving it from the emotions of shame, pity and pious adoration [*blogogoveniie*]. Shame (with its prototype, sexual shame) expresses man's attitude to that which is below himself – shame reminds man of being a spiritual creature with a calling higher than that of material nature. The mature form of shame is conscience which has the role of restoring the integrity of the individual's inner life. Pity (compassion) is a social emotion expressing man's attitude to that which is equal to himself – its role is to transform the community into an integral organism, realizing "the truth of co-existence, or the real solidarity of all creatures." Pious adoration [*pietas, reverentia*] expresses man's attitude to that which is above him – its role is to restore the integrity of human nature in union with the absolute center of the universe. The common presence of feelings of shame, pity and pious adoration proved – according to Soloviev – the possibility of a universally present and

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67 An article of Soloviev "Idieia cheloviechenstva u Avgusta Konta (1898)" [in:] Ibid, *Sochineniia* (1988), vol. 2, pp. 581.

68 The former was the opinion of K. Mochulsky and the latter – of Trubetskoi.

69 The opinion of S. Hessen, expressed in his treatise *The Clash of Utopia and Autonomy in the Worldview of F. Dostoevsky and V. Soloviev*.

autonomous ethical system, independent from metaphysics and positive religion. At the same time, however, Soloviev referred to Kant, strongly emphasizing that ethics must not be based on the data of psychology. The qualities of universality and necessity are brought into ethics by reason. Ethics originates only when reason has deduced from the natural data their inner ethical content, affirming it as an *obligation*, independent of its psychological grounding.

In the second part of *An Apology of Good* (“The Good from God”), the philosopher elaborated the thesis of the grounding of the good in the Absolute. In the final part (“The Good in Human History”), he focused on the question of morality in international relations and economics. While propagating the ethical transformation of political relations, he strongly criticized nationalism, being also opposed to cosmopolitanism and arguing that respect for nationality was part of the respect for a person. He treated economic activity as the “spiritualization of nature” and rejected its reduction to a struggle for survival. He perceived the essence of the state in the defense of the weak, or “organized pity,” and, consequently, burdened the state authorities with the task of making economic relations ethical. On this point, he developed polemics with Chicherin who defended the principle of *laissez-faire*, and with Tolstoy for whom statehood as such was but “organized robbery.”

Reflections on the philosophy of law are an important component of *An Apology of Good*.<sup>70</sup> In the same year that the book appeared in print, Soloviev published a separate work called *Law and Morality*, dedicated to the eminent Polish-born liberal lawyer Włodzimierz Spasowicz (his close friend). Both books referred to the philosophy of law presented in *A Criticism of Abstract Principles*, modifying it, however, rather significantly.

In *A Criticism of Abstract Principles*, Soloviev developed his liberal concept of a legal community as “a free union of individuals” founded on the principle of a rational contract. He stressed that law, unlike morality, supported only the negative virtue of justice [*justitia*], dealing only with the means (and not the ends) of human activity, while it did not obligate man to mutual help, let alone sacrifice for one another. Law in social life acted as a mediator between economic and moral spheres, “separating particular interests” by imposing equal limits of free activity on all individuals. This made it a link between economics – the reign of particularisms – and morality – the sphere of absolute universalism of content.<sup>71</sup>

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70 A thorough analysis of Soloviev’s philosophy of law is to be found in Chapter III of my book *Legal Philosophies of Russian Liberalism*, Oxford 1987.

71 Following Schopenhauer, Soloviev derived his empirical principle of morality from the universal fact of compassion which joined an individual with other men and – albeit to a

The ultimate legal union is the state, the ultimate moral unity is the Church. From that statement, Soloviev drew the conclusion that two dangers had to be avoided: a “false theocracy” bringing abolition of the state and law’s autonomy, and the modern doctrine of the total separation of the Church from the state which stripped freedom of its moral content. The double threat could be averted thanks to the concept of “liberal theocracy,” which, according to Soloviev, reconciled law with morality and freedom with love, respecting the autonomy of the legal sphere but, at the same time, making it part of the God-human All-Unity, rather than an absolute “abstract principle.”

Soloviev’s loss of faith in a prompt realization of “liberal theocracy” was followed by a significant shift of his views on law and morality, making necessary their new edition. The most vital changes, extensively justified both in *An Apology of Good* and in the brochure *Law and Morality*, can be summarized in two points:

Firstly, the law and state were now granted more independence from the Church than had been assumed in the concept of “liberal theocracy.” Soloviev now believed that morality must be completely released from religion, while the Church was radically separated from the state. At the same time, his violent reaction to moral subjectivism and to Tolstoy’s “amorphism” (in the sense of contempt for external forms) made him emphasize yet more strongly the moral significance of institutionalized forms of social coercion – both state and legal. This entailed a radical departure from utopian extremism: legal measures – the philosopher now claimed – could not create paradise on earth, but they should, nevertheless, effectively prevent turning human life into hell on earth.

Secondly, Soloviev defined law as an “enforced minimum of morality,” the minimum including not only executing negative justice, but also granting each member of a society the “right to a respectable existence,” i.e., the indispensable minimum of material means. In other words, the legal limits of guaranteed human rights have been expanded to encompass a minimum of positive freedom: the right to work, the right to proper working conditions and suitable payment, and even the right to relax and enjoy free time. The state has been endowed with the task of interfering in the economic sphere in the name of a morally justified redistribution of public income. Simultaneously, negative

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lesser extent – with all feeling creatures. He accepted Schopenhauer’s formula: “Neminem laede, imo omnes quantum potes, juva.” The initial part of that formula (“do not wrong anybody”) referred to the negative virtue of justice, while the final part (“help everybody as much as you can”) evoked the positive virtue of love.

The concept of law’s function being to “separate interests” was borrowed by Soloviev from a Petersburg professor of the general theory of laws, Nikolai Korkunov.

freedom has become more restricted than it was before. Thus, for instance, part of man's right to a "respectable existence" was, according to the philosopher, protection of the natural environment – hence his conclusion that the activity of enterprising individuals aimed at "conquering" nature and exploiting its riches ought to be subject to legally normalized social control.

The changes were tantamount to transforming the preceding free-market style liberalism into a new form, socialized and in keeping with the new trends of British liberal social philosophy.<sup>72</sup> The Russian liberals of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century accepted such a transformation of the liberal idea. Pavel Novgorodtsev, the founder of the so-called Moscow school of jurisprudence, was connected with the Constitutional Democrats party and pronounced Soloviev's "right to a respectable existence" to be the formula of progress in legal thinking, marking the transition from "old" to modern liberalism.<sup>73</sup>

Understandably, an evolution of this kind could not be accepted by the defender of "old liberalism," Boris Chicherin. Making legal coercion a tool of realizing positive moral goals was, in his eyes, a drastic expansion of state prerogatives, totally breaking with the liberal idea of negative freedom – Chicherin went so far as to call Soloviev's philosophy of law a concept suitable for a "new Torquemada."<sup>74</sup> Soloviev defended himself, pointing out that he had never preached the idea of enforcing *absolute* morality by legal coercion, hoping only for a legal guarantee of the moral *minimum*. In his vision, state authority would be restricted by laws guaranteeing freedom of conscience and prohibiting the death penalty – and would thus have nothing in common with the Inquisition.<sup>75</sup> It was an important controversy, bearing a likeness to our present discussions between the political liberals emphasizing subjective rights in the extra-economic sphere, and the economic liberals emphasizing the individual's right to pursue enterprise unrestrained by the state.

Despite such vital differences, there existed a crucial common denominator connecting Chicherin with Soloviev and the New Liberals represented by Novgorodtsev. Namely, a firm defense of the law's significance and prestige

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72 Shortly after Soloviev's death, the British transition from Old to New Liberalism was accomplished, bringing on the ideas that "freedom is not but a negative notion, but also a positive one" and that "the state is obliged to use its power in order to help people lead a respectable life." See H. Samuel, *Liberalism. An Attempt to State the Principles and Proposals of Contemporary Liberalism in England*. With an Introduction by H.H. Asquith. London 1902, pp. XI, 207.

73 See A. Walicki, *Legal Philosophies of Russian Liberalism*, pp. 206-212.

74 B.N. Chicherin, "O nachalakh etiki," *Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii*, vol. 39, 1897.

75 V.S. Soloviev, *Sobraniie sochinenii*, vol. 8. Pp. 675-677, 709-713.

against two contrary threats: anti-legalism – Slavophile, Populist and Tolstoyan, deprecating law in the name of morality – that was greatly popular in Russia, and, on the other hand, legal Positivism, which made the state the single source of the law, and thereby reduced the law to the role of authority’s tool. Both Chicherin and Soloviev contributed to the rebirth of the natural law that flourished in Russia at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, thanks to the theorists of “New Liberalism” – Petrażycki and Novgorodtsev.

The theme of a mutual relationship between law and morality was one of the leading threads of 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian social thought. More often than not, the problem was resolved by pronouncing morality infinitely superior to law, even to the point of claiming that individualistic legal culture had a destructive influence on social morality. Soloviev’s originality and great merit was his attempt to reverse this opinion. He tirelessly proved that the exemplary moral perfection of individuals could exist side by side with a profound decomposition of social morality, the sole guarantee of the latter being a solidly rooted and rigorously executed legal culture, since morality – facing the individual with limitless and absolute demands – was naturally subjectivist and elitist, while law was society-oriented and therefore all-important from the point of view of objective ethics.<sup>76</sup> Soloviev refused to accept the idealization of Russian contempt for “bourgeois honesty,” deploring the fact that it was easier in Russia to find a saint than a man who was simply honest.<sup>77</sup> He praised Roman law, repeating that Christ had come not in order to abolish law but to fulfill it.<sup>78</sup>

It is worth noting that Soloviev declared these opinions both during the period of his faith in Russia’s theocratic mission and in the period of his disillusionment with that faith.

## Theoretical Philosophy

The first public declaration of abandoning the theocratic ideal was expressed by Soloviev during his lecture “On the Decline of the Medieval World View,” given in October of 1891.<sup>79</sup> He suggested that non-believers, the representatives

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76 The idea was thoroughly developed by Leon Petrażycki in his *Teoriia prava I gosudarstva v svazi s teoriiiei npravstvennosti* (vol. 1-2, Petersburg 1907). Petrażycki went as far as to claim that, from the social point of view, law was more important than morality (see, A. Walicki, *Legal Philosophies of Russian Liberalism*, pp. 255-263).

77 V.S. Soloviev, *Sobraniiie sochinenii*, vol. 5, pp. 335-338.

78 *Ibid.*, vol. 6, pp. 463-464.

79 See V.S. Soloviev, *Sochineniia* (1988), vol. 2, pp. 339-350.

of secular progress of modern times, had done more for the progress of mankind than ardent Christians. As a consequence, after this lecture Konstantin Leontiev, until then holding Soloviev in high esteem, started regarding him as a tool of the Antichrist.

The rejection of the “medieval worldview” did not imply distance from “Christian politics.” On the contrary, Soloviev understood the “medieval worldview,” which had to be rejected, as an indifference toward “matters of this world,” negligence of concern for justice on the earth in the name of salvation in heaven. It follows that the rejection of theocratic-imperial utopia did not direct Soloviev toward a purely transcendental perception of salvation. What it did entail was a transition between a millenarian vision and religious sanction of the secular progress in liberal understanding.

Modern progress rested with an increase in the autonomy of particular fields of thought and activity, in setting philosophy free from theology, and cognitive activities from soteriological tasks. For Soloviev, this was a sign of legitimacy for treating philosophy as a field of theoretical research, divided in separate, specialized disciplines.

Soloviev developed this view of philosophy through his three epistemological articles published under the title *Theoretical Philosophy* (1897-99).<sup>80</sup> These open with the author’s declaration that it is the first duty of a theoretical philosopher to relinquish all interests apart from purely philosophical ones, and to forget about every other will, aside from the will to truth.

His reflections on epistemological issues led Soloviev to reject the “spiritualist dogmatism” that assumes the substantiality of the knower. The Cartesian “I think,” he argued, does not necessarily imply that “I am”; all that is immediately accessible are states of consciousness, apart from which the knowing subject is only an empty form. Polemicizing with his friend L. M. Lopatin, and with his own earlier views expressed in the *Lectures of Godmanhood*, Soloviev argued that the human mind is not a substance but only a “hypostasis.” The only substance in the true meaning of the word is the Absolute. Only after death is man finally substantiated in eternal ideality; substantiality, therefore, is the ultimate destiny and not an innate property of the human soul.

It is also interesting to examine Soloviev’s discussion of the “three types of credibility” on which speculative philosophy may rely. These are, first, subjective states of consciousness, or the psychic material of cognition; second, logical reasoning as such (divorced from content); and third, purposeful

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80 Ibid, vol. 1, pp.757-831.

cognition [*zamysel*], or the “vital act of decision” that directs consciousness toward the absolute truth and transforms immediate sense impressions into the material of the complex process of active cognition.<sup>81</sup> The concept of “purposeful cognition” to some extent recalls the phenomenological notion of “intention” and the “intentional act.” It is difficult to decide how far this correspondence extends, for Soloviev’s premature death prevented him from developing his epistemological theories.

## Apocalyptic Premonitions

In the last years of his life, Soloviev’s views appeared to undergo another change. His optimistic faith in liberal progress and his confidence that even secularization was essentially part of the ultimate process of salvation through Jesus began to give way to a mood of pessimism.

The first symptom of this change can be noticed in a lengthy letter (written at the end of May and beginning of June 1896) to Eugene Tavernier, an enthusiastic reviewer of *L’Idée russe*. It outlined the idea of an end of history, with the Antichrist tasting victory only to be vanquished later by a handful of true believers of Christ.<sup>82</sup> A moment later, in the spring of 1898, Soloviev experienced “a meeting with the Satan.” In 1899-1900, he wrote a philosophical dialogue “Three Conversations” and completed the *Tale of the Antichrist*.

Leaving out less important details, the *Tale of the Antichrist* can be summarized as follows. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe is invaded by a yellow race. Subsequently the nations of Europe throw off the Mongolian yoke and in the face of the common danger set up a powerful federation of democratic states. In the twenty-first century an unusual man appears – he is 33 years old; a spiritualist, ascetic, and philanthropist, he believes in God (although he loves only himself) and desires the happiness of mankind. Under his leadership, the nations of the world become united in one universal state; the longed-for age of eternal peace is at hand and social reforms put an end to poverty. The great benefactor of mankind governs in a Christian spirit and courts the favors of the Christians (of whom only an insignificant minority are left). He even convenes an Ecumenical Council in order to unite the Christian Churches. In actual fact, however, he does not believe in Jesus and puts himself in His place. Among the

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81 Cf. H.Dahm, *Vladimir Solov'ev und Max Scheler. Ein Betrag zur Geschichte der Phänomenologie im Versuch einer vergleichenden Interpretation*, München-Salzburg 1971.

82 See V. Soloviev, *La Sophia*, pp. 336-339.



Christians attending the Council only a handful (the followers of Pope Peter II, the Elder John representing the Orthodox Church, and the Protestant leader Professor Ernest Pauli) recognize the benefactor of mankind as the Antichrist. After bringing about his false unification of the Christians, the Antichrist proclaims himself to be God incarnate; the true Christians recognize the Pope as their leader and depart into the desert in order to wait for the appearance of Christ.<sup>83</sup> In the meantime there has been an uprising of the Jews, who originally believed that the Antichrist was the expected Messiah but turned in anger on the usurper when they realized their mistake. The Emperor-Antichrist marches with his army against the rebels, but thanks to supernatural intervention he perishes in a lake of fire. Jews and Christians make their way to Jerusalem, where they see Jesus descending to earth. All the dead are resurrected to reign with Christ for the millennium.

Soloviev himself (and many of his followers and students of his work) regarded the *Tale of the Antichrist* as a work of outstanding importance.<sup>84</sup> This is certainly saying too much; if we compare the *Tale* with the “Legend of the Grand Inquisitor,” similar in certain respects, Dostoevsky’s vision must be acknowledged as far more impressive. The *Tale* does make it clear, however, that Soloviev’s world view had undergone certain radical changes; it also shows his paradoxical nature in an unexpected light. Its originality consists in its portrayal of the Antichrist as a great philanthropist who puts into effect progressive humanitarian ideals and even attempts to give these ideals a Christian form. This, of course, is how Konstantin Leontiev, the consistent critic of “liberal and egalitarian progress” and “rose-colored Christianity,” imagined the kingdom of the Antichrist. The ultimate aim of Soloviev’s Antichrist appears to be almost a parody of the ideal of a “free theocracy.”<sup>85</sup> Are we to understand that toward the end of his life Soloviev came to agree with Leontiev, and perhaps even to feel that his own life’s work had prepared the way not for the Kingdom of God on earth but for the kingdom of the Antichrist? The lack of additional evidence makes it impossible to give a final answer to this question, but there are certainly good grounds for asking it.

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83 Soloviev depicted Professor Pauli as an initiator of the idea of uniting the Churches, a fact which showed appreciation of the ecumenical potential behind Protestantism. Cf. L. Mueller, *Solovjev und der Protestantismus*, Freiburg 1951.

84 Cf. K.Mochulsky, *Vladimir Soloviev*, p. 248.

85 Cf. An analysis of a self-parody aspect of “A Short Story of the Antichrist” in a study of an American scientist Judith Deutsch Kornblatt, “Soloviev on Salvation” [in:] *Russian Religious Thought*, edited by J.D. Kornblatt and R.F. Gustafson, Madison, Wisc. 1996.

## Theory of Art

The ideological evolution of the philosopher was least visible in his views on aesthetics, or to put it more precisely, general theory of art. Soloviev commented on aesthetic problems on numerous occasions throughout his life – both in strictly philosophical works and in literary criticism – but his views in this field did not reflect his intellectual evolution or undergo any essential changes. Their most systematic exposition is to be found in his *Beauty in Nature* (1889) and *The Overall Meaning of Art* (1890).

As a motto for his essay on beauty in nature Soloviev chose Dostoevsky's words "Beauty will save the world." Natural beauty, he declared, is a manifestation of the concrete operation of the Absolute in the material world; by "trans-illuminating" and spiritualizing matter, beauty helps to raise up the fallen World Soul and to introduce an element of the divine into reality.

The role of artistic beauty is analogous: art is an instrument of universal reintegration; creating a work of art means communing with a higher world and is therefore related to mysticism. The role of art is to become a theurgic force capable of transforming and "trans-illuminating" the human world.

Beauty is something objective and cannot be separated from truth or the good; everything beautiful ought to help to perfect reality. Soloviev rejected theories of art for art's sake, even quoting Chernyshevsky in support of the view that such theories were a symptom of "aesthetic separatism."<sup>86</sup> As part of his attempt to harness beauty in the service of truth and the good, he stressed the value of the socially committed realistic art. This justification of the "relative truth" of realism by reference to a mystical theory of art based on Platonic and Schellingian motifs is one of the most curious features of Soloviev's aesthetics.

Realism, however, was to Soloviev only a precursor of the truly religious art of the future. As a harbinger of this art of the future he pointed to Dostoevsky, whom he praised as a writer-prophet, an artist who "created life" and regarded his art as an instrument in the realization of the Kingdom of God on earth.

For Soloviev, the prophetic element in Dostoevsky's work was a magnificent expression of the essential profundity of art. Willingly or not, every great artist is to some extent a prophet. This is because a work of art (according to Soloviev's definition), is a representation of a given object that shows it from the point of view of its ultimate end, i.e. in the light of the future world.

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86 Soloviev devoted a separate article on aesthetic views of Chernyshevsky, namely: "Piervyi shag k polozhitielnoi estietikie" (1894), Cf. *Sobraniie sochinienii*, vol. 7, pp. 69-80.

These thoughts resembled the concept of prophetic arts, as illustrated in Mickiewicz's Paris lectures on Slavic literature,<sup>87</sup> a deliberate action of Soloviev, for not only was Mickiewicz his favorite poet, but also – and above all – an inspired prophet and a truly great man – a “superman in a rational sense of this term.”<sup>88</sup> Soloviev saw the spiritual evolution of the Polish poet (the last stage of which constituted the transformation of national messianism into religious messianism, i.e. such subordinating national aims to universal aims and challenging the “official Church” in the name of a common reforms of Christianity) as a prefiguration of his own biography.<sup>89</sup> The religious messianism of Mickiewicz of the 40s was for Soloviev, contrary to the opinion of positivist literary scholars, a spiritual height of the poet and a prophetic vision of religious progress, not a sign of intellectual crisis.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of December 1898, in commemoration of Mickiewicz's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, Soloviev gave a speech, in which he developed these views further.<sup>90</sup> He paid tribute both to Mickiewicz, and his religious mentor, Andrzej Towiański, pointing out that his views entailed “some truths of the utmost importance, having the right to Christian citizenship.”<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, Soloviev stressed the importance and topicality of the main ideas of Mickiewicz's messianism in the vision of a religious revival of mankind, which he outlined in his own philosophy of Godmanhood.

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87 Cf. W. Weintraub, *Poeta i prorok. Rzecz o profetyzmie Mickiewicza*, Warsaw 1982.

88 V.S. Soloviev, “Mickiewicz” [in:] *ibid*, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 9.

Soloviev's attitude toward the poetry of Mickiewicz is more transparent in his entry to the *The Tolstoy Home: Diaries of Tatiana Sukhotin-Tolstoy* by T.L. Sukhotina (dating back to about 1890): in an answer to the question about his favorite poem, he mentioned the “Prologue to Konrad Wallenrod” (*V. Soloviev: Pro et contra*, p. 257).

The Nietzschean term “superman” has been applied in the quote above deliberately. Soloviev was extremely critical of Nietzsche, but at the same time was deeply interested in his philosophy. In an article “The Idea of a Superman” (*Mir iskusstwa*, vol. 9/1899) he rated the idea among the three most popular ideas of modern times (next to economical materialism of Marx and abstract moralism of Tolstoy). He rejected the demonic character of Nietzschean “superman,” but claimed Nietzsche was right in one fundamental issue: that man should be overcome. This, for Soloviev was associated with the acme of “Godmanhood.”

The relation between Soloviev and Nietzsche is described from various perspectives in a German-Russian book written by multiple authors: *Vladimir Solov'ev und Friedrich Nietzsche. Eine deutsch-russische kulturell Jahrhundertbilanz*. Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main 2003.

89 This was underlined by K. Mochulsky (*Vladimir Soloviev*, p. 247).

90 See Soloviev, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 9, pp. 257-264.

91 *Ibid*, p.173.

The juxtaposition of the assessment of Mickiewicz and Soloviev's views on Alexander Pushkin is very informative. The philosopher deemed Pushkin as an unsurpassed master of poetry. Still, this was not equivalent to regarding him as "the greatest of poets." This was attributed to Mickiewicz: "Mickiewicz was greater than Pushkin in the depth of his religious feeling, the earnestness of his moral demands on personal and national life, the loftiness of his mystical conceptions and, above all, in his constant tendency to subordinate all personal and everyday things to that which he deemed absolutely imperative."<sup>92</sup>

This complied with the conviction that prophetic art is the greatest form of poetry, being inspired by the vision of the transformation of the world and actively engaged in implementing this vision.

## Soloviev's Place in Pre-Revolutionary Russian Thought

In September 1998, Nijmegen University in the Netherlands organized an international conference on Soloviev's heritage. For a conference devoted to a single philosopher, it was an imposing enterprise: more than 60 scholars from all over the world gave 40 presentations. The conference materials were published two years later – on the centenary of the philosopher's death – in a vast volume entitled *Vladimir Soloviev: Reconciler and Polemicist* (Leuven 2000).<sup>93</sup>

One of the aims of the conference, clearly stated by its co-organizer Professor Evert van der Zweerde, was to comprehensively prove that Soloviev deserved being included in the pantheon of the classics of world philosophy. I believe that, in the intellectual sense, the aim has been attained. International studies on Soloviev have proved advanced enough to create an image of the author of *Lectures on Godmanhood* as a fully professional philosopher undertaking important philosophical-religious problems – and therefore worthy of the interest from historians of philosophy who do not specialize in the intellectual history of Russia.

It is, of course, unpredictable in what measure that conclusion will be acknowledged by Western universities, international philosophical societies, as well as publishers and translators of philosophical classics. Thus far – let us be

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92 V.S. Soloviev, "Znachenie poezji v stikhotvorieniakh Pushkina," *Viestnik Yevropy*, [*The Herald of Europe*], vol. 10, 1899. Cf. *Pushkin v russkoi filosofskoi kritike*, Moscow 1990, pp. 43-44.

93 *Selected Papers of the International Vladimir Soloviev Conference held at the University of Nijmegen, Netherlands, in September 1998*, ed. Will van den Bercken, Manion de Courten, Evert van der Zweerde, Peeters, Leuven 2000.

frank – Soloviev the philosopher has not been generally recognized and accepted – you can graduate in philosophy knowing none of his texts or even his name (which is a result of the tendency to narrow down, rather than broaden, the scope of obligatory knowledge in the history of philosophy). Nevertheless, the process of promoting Soloviev to the status of a philosophical classic is already quite advanced. Suffice it to say that his collected works have been published in an eight-volume German edition, while the number of his texts translated into English has been growing yearly.<sup>94</sup>

However, from the point of view of this author, it is beyond doubt that the importance of Soloviev's thought cannot be measured by his contribution to world philosophy. Soloviev's heritage belongs not only to *sensu stricto* philosophy, but also to the broadly defined intellectual history of Russia. It is only in this perspective that it can be properly and comprehensively evaluated.

In his lifetime, Soloviev was not a recognized and influential figure in European philosophy. Nor was he a dominating figure in the history of Russian professional philosophy, having devoted only seven years to his academic career and not taking significant part in establishing institutional forms of philosophical activity which became the collective achievement of the Moscow Psychological Society of philosophers.<sup>95</sup> Nor did he have pupils in the academic sense. And yet, beyond all doubt, he was the central figure of Russian *thought* in the pre-revolutionary period. Central not for the influence he exerted – for no religious thinker could equal the classics of Russian radicalism – but for the unique richness and centrality of the ideas he discussed in his works. Soloviev's works constituted a great summary of Russian thought and have been aptly defined by Fyodor Stepun as an “All-Unity of Russian philosophy.”<sup>96</sup> The “All-Unity” included all that was typical and crucial to Russian intellectual history in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: deep grounding in the neo-Platonic tradition and the fascination with German mysticism and philosophy; Romantic Slavophilism and fervent

94 See V.S. Soloviev, *Deutsche Gesamtausgabe der Werke von Wladimir Solowjew*, ed. W. Szykarski, W. Lettenbauer and L. Muller, 8 volumes, München 1977-1979.

Two anthologies have been published lately (USA) in English: *Politics, Law, Morality. Essays by V.S. Soloviev*, translated by V. Wozniuk, introduction by G.S. Morson, Yale U.P., New Haven-London 2000; *The Heart of Reality. Essays on Beauty, Love and Ethics by V.S. Soloviev*, Univ. of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN, 2003.

95 V.F. Pustarnakov in his thorough, 900-page *History of University Philosophy in Russia*, devotes but a single page in the main text and a page and a half in the biography-glossary part to Soloviev. See, V.F. Pustarnakov, *Universitetskaya filosofiiia v Rossii. Idei. Piersonalii, Osnovniie tsenry*, Sankt Petersburg 2003, pp. 176-177, 599-600.

96 F. Steppuhn, *Wladimir Solowjew*, Leipzig 1910, p. 81 (cf. V.F. Boykov, *Soloviiinaya piesn' russkoy filosofii*, Introduction to *V. Soloviev: Pro et contra*. 8).

Westernism, both liberal and religious; faith in a “religion of progress” and profound criticism of progress-focused idolatry; national Messianism – coupled with the idea of Russia as the Third Rome, messianic universalism of the “Russian idea” and religious Messianism reaching soaring heights of those preached by Mickiewicz; new Orthodoxy and the temptation of Catholicism combined in an ecumenical vision; millenarian utopianism and a surprisingly modern liberal project of a rule-of-law state. The spirit of “All-Unity” that permeated Soloviev’s thought was capable of combining, in a higher synthesis, the traditions of Chernyshevsky and Dostoevsky, overcoming the radicals’ sectarianism in an organic, rather than merely polemic way. A vital aspect of that aspiration to “All-Unity” was Christian ecumenism – certainly underrated in the philosopher’s lifetime, but rightly recognized at present for having paved the way not only for the renaissance of the Orthodox Church, but also for the Second Vatican Council.<sup>97</sup>

Another noteworthy fact is a vivid interest in Soloviev in present-day Poland. Its testimony are the books by Grzegorz Przebinda, Jan Krasicki, Janusz Dobieszewski and Marek Kita, as well as the collected work *W kręgu idei Włodzimierza Sołowjowa* [*In the Circle of Vladimir Soloviev’s Ideas*] – fruit of the academic conference held in Krakow on the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> October 2000.<sup>98</sup>

The spiritual heritage of the Russian 19<sup>th</sup> century naturally belongs to the past and has no chance of resurrection. And yet, it should remain a topic of interest, not only in the historical, but also in the axiological plane – as a refuge for modern reflection on the meaning of history and eschatological issues. Isaiah Berlin emphasized its importance while presenting Herzen as a representative of that which is most valuable in the Russian radical tradition. Sergei Hessen, on the other hand, discovered the most valuable heritage of the religious line in Russian thought in the philosophy of Soloviev. I believe that both were proven right.

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97 See Jean Rupp, *Message ecclésial de Soloviev. Presage et illustration de Vatican II*, Paris-Brussels 1975. Soloviev’s ecumenical ideas were an important source of inspiration for the Catholic-Orthodox dialogues held by John Paul II. Cf. G. Przebinda, *Większa Europa. Papież wobec Rosji i Ukrainy*, Cracow 2001.

98 See G. Przebinda, *Włodzimierz Sołowjow wobec historii* (Cracow 1992) and *Od Czaadajewa do Bierdiajewa. Spór o Boga i człowieka w myśli rosyjskiej 1832-1922* (Cracow 1998); J. Krasicki, *Bóg, człowiek i zło. Studium filozofii Włodzimierza Sołowjowa* (Wrocław 2003); J. Dobieszewski, *Włodzimierz Sołowjow. Studium osobowości filozoficznej* (Warsaw 2003, including comprehensive bibliography); M. Kita, *Klucz do żywych przekonań. Chrystologia filozoficzna Włodzimierza Sołowjowa* (Cracow 2005); *W kręgu idei Włodzimierza Sołowjowa*, Ed. W. Rydzewski and M. Kita (Cracow 2002).

# Chapter 19

## Variants of Positivism

### Introduction

Unlike Polish positivism, which expressed the realistic aspirations of the younger generation (after the failure of the 1863 uprising) for social change through careful “organic” work, Russian positivism never became an influential ideology. Positivist ideas of course had a considerable impact on the general intellectual climate of the day, and some Russian positivists were not without talent, but none of them can be said to have played a really prominent role in the history of Russian ideas.

The first echoes of positivist ideas came to Russia as early as the latter half of the 1840s. Some of Comte’s theories (especially his conception of three phases of human development – the theological, metaphysical, and positive stages) found supporters in Russia among men connected with the Petrashevtsy, especially Valerian Maikov and the economist Vladimir Milutin (1826-55). Belinsky’s attitude, on the other hand, was one of considerable reserve; he considered Comte to be an interesting thinker, noteworthy as a “reaction to theological intervention in science,” but thought that he lacked genius and that it was ridiculous to suppose he might be “the founder of a new philosophy.” Comte, he wrote, attempted to demolish metaphysics not only as a science concerned with “transcendental absurdities,” but also as a science dealing with the nature of the human mind; this showed that the domain of philosophy was alien to his nature and that only mathematics and the natural sciences were within his grasp.<sup>1</sup>

The “enlighteners” of the 60s, too, found it difficult to accept Comte without reservation, especially because of their materialism and social radicalism. Comte’s philosophy, however, exerted a certain influence on Pisarev, who used positivist arguments in his polemics against the vitalist notion of a mysterious principle of life. He was even more impressed by Comte’s philosophy of history, to which he devoted a lengthy article (“The Historical Ideas of Auguste Comte,” 1865). For Pisarev, Comte’s notion of the three phases of human development

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1 See V. Belinsky, *Izbrannye filosofskie sochineniia* (M, 1948), vol. 2, pp. 326-29.

provided excellent confirmation of his two favorite theories: the dependence of historical progress on the evolution of knowledge, and the liberating mission of the natural sciences.

The attitude of the Populist thinkers to Comte was even more complicated. They were undoubtedly influenced by positivism, but to call them positivists is absolutely unwarranted.<sup>2</sup> Lavrov and Mikhailovsky wrote their works at a time when positivism in the social sciences was largely represented by the evolutionist theories of Herbert Spencer. Both Russian thinkers utterly rejected positivist evolutionism as an extreme version of “objectivism,” to which they opposed their own “subjective sociology”; they were repelled also by positivistic scientism, especially by its programmatic elimination of value judgments. At the same time, however, in their opposition to “objectivism” they found an ally in Comte himself, who recognized the validity of both the “objective” and the “subjective” methods. In his polemics with Spencer, therefore, Mikhailovsky was able to claim the support of Comte, whom he called a precursor of the “subjective-anthropocentric” age in the history of mankind. This in itself reveals clearly the essential difference between Mikhailovsky’s ideas and the positivism of his day. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century only a small group of sectarian, “orthodox” Comteans (e.g. P. Laffitte and J.F. Robinet) still defended Comte’s “subjective method”; Littré, the chief representative of the main school of post-Comtian positivism in France, rejected the “subjective method” together with the “religion of Humanity” and other romantic elements in Comte’s system.

Lavrov, who was less inclined to “sociological romanticism,” defined his attitude to positivism in the essay “The Problems of Positivism and Their Solution” (1868). There he discussed different variants of positivist thought (Comte, Littré, Mill, Spencer, and Lewes) and warned that they could not be underestimated. Paraphrasing Hegel’s comment on philosophy, he defined positivism as “our age captured in a syllogism.”<sup>3</sup> A lasting contribution made by positivism, Lavrov wrote, was that it had formulated the tasks facing the human intellect, namely that the relations between all phenomena should be investigated by strictly scientific methods without reference to the metaphysical “thing-in-itself,” and that the knowledge gained in this way should be used to interpret not only the nonhuman world but also society and history. Like Mikhailovsky, Lavrov emphasized the importance of the “subjective method”

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2 They are classified as positivists in B. Jakovenko, *Dejiny ruske filosofie* (Prague 1929), and N. O. Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy* (London 1952), V. V. Zenkovsky, in his *A History of Russian Philosophy* (trans. George L. Kline [2 vols., London 1953]), treats them as “half-positivists.”

3 P. L. Lavrov, *Filosofia i sotsiologija* (M., 1965), vol. 1, p. 584.



and attempted to show, by quoting Comte himself, that it was not incompatible with the basic premises of positivism. His conclusion, however, was that positivism was incapable of solving the problem it had itself posed because it lacked a unifying philosophical principle. This principle was man as a feeling and thinking being – a symbol of the true unity of mind and body. The historical role of positivism was only to pose problems – their solution would be tackled by an anthropological philosophy whose germs could be found in the ideas of Feuerbach, Proudhon, and Mill.

Lavrov's "anthropologism" formed a bridge between Chernyshevsky's "anthropological principle" and the "subjective anthropocentricity" of Populist sociology. Though it was capable of assimilating many elements of positivism, it was quite clearly a separate doctrine.

## **Dogmatic Positivism: Grigory Wyruboff**

The first consistent adherent of Comtian positivism in Russia was GRIGORY WYROUBOFF (1843-1913), who as a philosopher, however, was active mainly in France.

Wyruboff was still a pupil at the Alexander Lycee in St. Petersburg when he was introduced to Comte's teaching by one of the masters at the school, a Frenchman named Pommier, who was a disciple of Comte and a friend of Littré. After studying medicine and natural sciences at the University of St. Petersburg, Wyruboff went to Paris and contacted Comte's widow and his circle of disciples. He became intimate with Littré and joined him as one of the cofounders of the chief organ of French positivism, *La Philosophie Positive*. In 1903, after the death of P. Laffitte, he was appointed to the chair of history of science at the College de France. Although he settled permanently in France, Wyruboff retained his interest in Russia and Russian culture – he was in touch with Bakunin, Herzen, and Lavrov, and after Herzen's death undertook the first complete edition of his works.<sup>4</sup> During the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, Wyruboff came to the Caucasus as a Red Cross delegate and undertook the organization of field hospitals, for which he was decorated with the Order of St. Vladimir. All his philosophical and scientific works, however, were written in French (he specialized in chemistry and crystallography).

Wyruboff's philosophical standpoint is expressed most clearly in his article "Le certain et le probable, l'absolu et le relatif," published in the first volume of *La Philosophie Positive*. Its basic proposition is that scientific knowledge can

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4 See his reminiscences in "Revolutsionnye vospominaniia," *Vestnik Evropy* (1913), no. 1.

lay claim to absolute truth and that the opposition between the absolute and the relative is in itself relative. Anything real that can be translated into the language of scientific laws can be called absolute. Positivism rejects only theological and metaphysical absolutes, not the absolute as such; if it failed to recognize any absolute, it would not be an integral view of the world. Truth does not exist outside science, outside the sphere of human understanding; every truth is the result of experience verified by confrontation with previously established scientific laws. Both the absolute and the relative belong to the sphere of the comprehensible. Absolute truths are verifiable and incontrovertible statements, whereas relative truths are uncertain, controversial, and of low probability. As scientific knowledge accumulates, more and more relative truths will be transformed into absolute truths.<sup>5</sup>

The role of philosophy, Wyruboff stated, is to make generalizations on the basis of the facts accumulated by particular sciences. What is striking in this argument is not only the dismissal of the classic philosophical concern with ontological problems (especially apparent in the attacks on the “metaphysics” of the materialists),<sup>6</sup> but also the rejection of epistemology, which Wyruboff equated with psychology. For epistemology he proposed to substitute the methodology of the individual sciences; faith in science, he wrote, is the “fundamental axiom” that silences all doubt. He regarded the Cartesian method of philosophical doubt as an empty intellectual pastime and firmly rejected Mill’s criticism that Comte had been wrong to neglect logic and psychology. The problem of the criterion of truth, he insisted, was not a philosophical problem but belonged to the sphere of the natural sciences, which had long since established such a criterion; philosophy should therefore accept the scientific formula that the yardstick of truth was “the recurrence of a given phenomenon in identical conditions, expressed in a formula known as a law.”<sup>7</sup>

It is understandable that Wyruboff was deeply hostile to any signs of a renewal of interest in Kant. The German philosopher seemed to him to be the absolute antithesis of Comte; the founder of “positive philosophy” was concerned with the real world, whereas Kant, by concentrating on the investigation of the thinking subject, had rejected the chance to understand the objective laws governing reality. Neo-Kantianism, in Wyruboff’s view, was an

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5 G. Wyruboff, “Le Certain et le probable, l’absolu et le relatif,” *La Philosophie Positive*, vol. 1 (1867), pp. 171, 176-81.

6 See G. Wyruboff, “La Philosophie materialiste et la philosophie positive,” *La Philosophie Positive*, vol. 22 (1879).

7 Wyruboff, “Le Certain et le probable,” p. 181.

attempt to revive metaphysics – and was all the more dangerous because it was not aware of its own “metaphysical nature.”<sup>8</sup>

In contrast to Kant’s critical philosophy, Wyruboff’s positivism was a thoroughly dogmatic system. One of its chief tenets was that every true philosophy must be based on a certain “fundamental axiom” that cannot be subjected to critical reflection.<sup>9</sup> On certain issues Wyruboff differed from Comte, possibly without realizing it (for instance, he did not share his master’s phenomenalism); nevertheless, he insisted that Comtian positivism was the only authentic variant of positivist philosophy and the only entirely complete philosophical system of its day. “As a philosophy,” he declared, “positivism is totally complete, nothing can be added or taken away. Comte certainly made many mistakes, but as an astronomer, chemist, or biologist, not as a philosopher.”<sup>10</sup> His disciples, therefore, had only to apply his guidelines, particularly in disciplines to which the master had paid little attention.<sup>11</sup>

## Critical Positivism: Vladimir Lesevich

Quite another type of positivism was represented by VLADIMIR LESEVICH (1837-1905). In view of its epistemological bias and attempt to utilize the principles of Kantian critical philosophy, it might be called “critical positivism.”

Lesevich devoted his chief works to critical reflection on the origins and development of “scientific philosophy.”<sup>12</sup> Although he declared that Comtian positivism represented a turning point in the history of philosophy, he found it lacking in a number of respects. Comte had underestimated Kant, for instance, and had failed to recognize that he, too, was a precursor of positivism; in fact,

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8 See G. Wyruboff, “Remarques sur la philosophic critique en Allemagne,” *La Philosophic Positive*, vol. 22 (1879).

9 See Wyruboff, “Le Certain et le probable,” pp. 174-75.

10 Wyruboff, “Remarques,” p. 394.

11 Despite this declaration, Wyruboff rejected Comte’s political philosophy. He defended the sovereignty of the common people, for instance, which Comte dismissed as a metaphysical dogma, and advocated decentralization of the authorities, quoting Proudhon on this issue. See G. Wyruboff, “La Politique qualitative et la politique quantitative,” *La Philosophie Positive*, vol. 8 (1872).

Litré also made a political revision of Comtianism, but Wyruboff (probably under Herzen’s influence) went further in this respect, although in other respects he was more reluctant to make any innovations.

12 V. V. Lesevich, *Opyt kriticheskogo issledovaniya osnovonachal pozitivnoi filosofii* (St. Petersburg, 1878), and *Chto takoe nauchnaia filosofia?* (St. Petersburg, 1891).

Comte had altogether underestimated the importance of epistemology and refused to incorporate it as a separate section into his philosophy. The same was true of his attitude toward logic, which, despite Mill's criticism, he refused to recognize as an independent discipline that ought to have a place in his classification of the sciences. On the other hand, Comtian philosophy showed at least the germs of a critical epistemology – otherwise his system would have been nothing more than an encyclopedia of the sciences. Comte's followers, however, wasted this valuable asset, busied themselves with summing up scientific facts, and chose to regard Comte's classification of the sciences as the most important aspect of positivism. Emil Littré, in Lesevich's view, knew nothing of the history of philosophy outside France and was totally ignorant of epistemology.

Lesevich reserved his most stringent criticism for Wyruboff, whom he accused of an exaggerated "scientism" – a naive belief that all problems could be solved by science – that led him to "dephilosophize" and trivialize positivist philosophy. By reducing the distinction between absolute and relative knowledge to a difference of degree, Wyruboff had rejected the relevance of epistemological theory.<sup>13</sup> This was a great error, because positivism ought to concentrate on the theory of knowledge if it wanted to lay claim to being a philosophy. To get out of this impasse, positivists ought to return to authentic Comtian ideas, Lesevich suggested, and then sharpen their critical faculties by a study of Locke, Hume, and the English empirical tradition. To begin with, however, they ought to overcome their prejudice against Kant and reform positivism in the spirit of neo-Kantian epistemological criticism. Lesevich also warmly recommended the works of such German thinkers as C. Goring, E. Laas, F. A. Lange, and A. Riehl, who were urging a rapprochement between neo-Kantians and positivists. At the same time he stressed that there was a clear line of demarcation between the two systems and that positivists could not accept the possibility of *a priori* knowledge: they must learn from the neo-Kantians while remaining firmly rooted in realism. Positivism could not restrict itself to epistemological reflections, but must assimilate Kantian criticism in order to become "a critical philosophy of reality" and thus attain its highest stage of development.<sup>14</sup>

Lesevich expounded these ideas in the 1870s. A decade or so later his ideas underwent a certain evolution and shifted from Kantianism toward the empiriocriticism of the Austrian physicist and philosopher Ernest Mach. In his book *What Is a Scientific Philosophy?*, Lesevich devoted separate chapters to

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13 Lesevich, *Opyt*, pp. 185-86.

14 *Ibid.*, pp. 161-63.

the ideas of Mach, Avenarius, and especially Petzoldt, who, he stressed, had finally solved the question of the relations of philosophy to science. Philosophy, Lesevich now contended, was ceasing to be a separate science; even epistemology would soon cease to exist as a distinct specialized sphere of philosophical inquiry. The role of philosophy now was to create a system of universal knowledge based on the positive sciences, but one that scrutinized the data of those sciences on the highest level of abstraction, evaluating them from an integral point of view and uncovering their interconnections. A “scientific philosophy” of this kind would replace all previous “unscientific” philosophical trends.<sup>15</sup>

On the issue of “scientific philosophy,” therefore, Lesevich’s standpoint ultimately did not differ from the classical positivist position, which defined the role of philosophy as the generalization of the particular sciences. But although he no longer granted a separate place to the theory of knowledge – the last bastion of philosophy in the traditional meaning of the word – he never underestimated the importance of epistemological reflection. Throughout his entire career, in fact, Lesevich represented the so-called “second positivism,” which put the emphasis on epistemological criticism.<sup>16</sup> The victory of the “scientific philosophy” he advocated with untiring energy was to make science “philosophical” instead of just making philosophy “scientific.”

Lesevich was convinced that “scientific philosophy” could be of tremendous social significance: it would help to overcome routine and traditionalism, make clear the need for changes in different fields, and encourage scientists to concentrate their efforts on solving problems in the public interest. In his political sympathies he was close to the Populists. (He was banished to Siberia in 1879 for his connections with the Populist revolutionaries, and after his return lived under police surveillance in Poltava and Tver; he was not allowed to return to St. Petersburg until 1888.) He thought highly of Lavrov and Mikhailovsky, referred to them as “the most competent judges of positivism,” and agreed with their criticism of prevailing trends in positivist philosophy.<sup>17</sup> The influence of Lavrov and Mikhailovsky is apparent in Lesevich’s defense of the “subjective method.” The positivists, he argued, had dismissed the “subjective method” because “positive science” was weak on epistemological theory. The abstract sciences – that is, sciences investigating the general laws of a given sphere of phenomena – only made use of “objective” empirical methods, but the concrete

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15 Lesevich, *Chto takoe*, pp. 248-51.

16 Cf. L. Kołakowski, *The Alienation of Reason: A History of Positivist Thought*, trans. Norbert Guterman (Garden City, N.Y., 1968).

17 See Lesevich, *Opyt*, pp. 241-45.

(or applied) sciences were directed toward activity, and therefore had to solve problems of value-implementation. Lesevich was able to find numerous arguments in support of this line of reasoning in the works of the neo-Kantians.

Lesevich's efforts to bring about a rapprochement between positivism and neo-Kantianism found very little response in Russia. This was due in part to the mediocre professional level of the Russian neo-Kantians, but above all to the fact that in Russia the function of neo-Kantianism was not so much to undertake a critique of metaphysical systems as to pave the way for a revival of metaphysical idealism. The chief representative of Russian neo-Kantianism, ALEKSANDR VVEDENSKY (1856-1925), a professor at the University of St. Petersburg, was a convinced opponent of positivism. His philosophy, which he called "logicism," was based on a consistently idealistic and anti-empirical interpretation of Kantian philosophy. In Vvedensky's version, Kantianism was a kind of "middle way" philosophy that made it possible to avoid the harmful and outdated claims of metaphysical maximalism without falling into the trap of positivist "scientism," which he accused of undermining the meaning of life and leading to a dangerous moral nihilism. In order to counteract these dangers, Vvedensky defended the ideas of the personal existence of God, free will, and the immortality of the soul, stressing at the same time that these could be perceived not by the intellect but only by "conscious faith."<sup>18</sup> Realizing the dangerous ethical implications of subjective idealism, he insisted that one of the "postulates of practical reason" was belief in the "subjective" existence of other people. Like Lesevich, Vvedensky stressed the importance of epistemology, but his standpoint was far removed from positivism and he had no sympathy for the idea of a "scientific philosophy" as conceived by Lesevich.

## Positivism and Sociology

The field in which Russian positivism made its most valuable – and indeed international – contribution was sociology. The chief representatives of positivist sociology, however – Eugene de Roberty (1843-1915) and Maksim Kovalevsky (1851-1916) – belonged to entirely different schools of thought, in positivism as well as in sociology.

De Roberty, a friend of Wyruboff and a contributor to *La Philosophie Positive*, represented the French, Comtian tradition; he therefore regarded sociology, the latest and highest science in Comte's classification, from the

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18 See A. I. Vvedensky, *Filosoficheskie ocherki* (St. Petersburg, 1901), pp. 89, 108, 505-12.

point of view of philosophy. His own *Sociology* (published in Russia in 1880) was aptly called by him a “philosophy of sociology.”<sup>19</sup> As the book’s full title makes clear, the subject matter includes reflections on the fundamental role and methodological features of sociology, and on sociology’s place in relation to other sciences, especially biology and psychology.

In accounts of the history of sociology de Roberty is treated as one of the first and most outstanding representatives of sociologism, a point of view which maintains that regular social processes discovered in sociological research are irreducible and cannot be explained by reference to other disciplines, such as biology, psychology, or economics.<sup>20</sup> Social phenomena, de Roberty declared, are symptoms of a specific property of organized matter;<sup>21</sup> as such they are not comparable to any wider class of better-known phenomena, and must therefore be tackled by a new fundamental or abstract science (in the Comtian meaning of the word). The constant appearance (even among positivists) of “unitary theories” – that is, reductionist theories ignoring the qualitative differences between different groups of phenomena – was, in de Roberty’s view, part of the renewed metaphysical preoccupation with finding an all-explanatory “thing-in-itself.”<sup>22</sup>

De Roberty’s sociologism was directed mainly against the Spencerian view of social processes as analogous to biological ones, though it was also directed against the “psychologism” of J. S. Mill. De Roberty thought that Spencer, and indeed the entire English evolutionist school, suffered from the same weakness as the materialists – namely a kind of metaphysical “monism,” the tendency to formulate all-embracing hypotheses that tried to reduce the complexity and diversity of the living world to one common denominator. Psychologism, on the other hand, whose most extreme manifestation was neo-Kantianism, was guilty of drawing attention away from the external world of things and concentrating excessively on subjective phenomena. Both trends were guilty of “reductionism,” because neither understood the qualitative distinctiveness of sociology. However, de Roberty was inclined to regard “biologism” as a weightier theory than psychologism. Like Comte, he accepted biology as a fundamental discipline immediately preceding sociology in the hierarchy of the

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19 E. de Roberty, *Sotsiologiia. Osnovnaia zadacha eyo i metodologicheskie osobennosti, mesto v riadu nauk, razdelenie i sviaz’s biologiei i psikhologii* (St. Petersburg, 1880).

20 See P. Sorokin, *Contemporary Sociological Theories*, (New York and London, n.d.), pp. 438-63; J. Szczepański, *Socjologia. Rozwój problematyki i metod*, Warsaw 1961, pp. 296-298.

21 Roberty, *Sotsiologiia*, p. 77.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 199.

sciences; it might not be able to explain sociological phenomena, but it nevertheless provided the foundations without which sociology would lack substantiality. De Roberty also followed Comte in regarding psychology as nothing more than a branch of research into certain concrete phenomena belonging partly to the sphere of biology and partly to that of sociology. An isolated individual cannot be a reasoning or thinking being (on this issue he often cited de Bonald); men are essentially a product of social development, and therefore psychology ought to be based on sociology, and not vice versa.<sup>23</sup>

Although in his intellectual evolution de Roberty gradually moved away from Comte, he continued to regard him and Saint-Simon rather than Hume and Kant as the founders of the authentic positivist tradition. He called his own new conception (which he expounded in books published in French)<sup>24</sup> “hyper-positivism” or “neo-positivism.” This neo-positivism had nothing in common with the later neo-positivism (logical positivism) of the Vienna Circle, which continued the traditions of epistemological positivism. De Roberty, on the other hand, was a determined opponent of what he called the “gnoseological obsession” of contemporary philosophy, which he claimed to trace even in the work of Comte himself.<sup>25</sup> In his view gnoseological problems would be solved not by a philosophical theory of knowledge, but by sociology.

A characteristic motif in de Roberty’s thought was his determined opposition to philosophical agnosticism, which he called a survival of the belief in a metaphysical “nature of things.” Against Montesquieu’s theory of laws as necessary relationships deriving from the nature of things he put forward the proposition that the “nature of things” is derived from necessary relationships or laws. Since no other “nature of things” exists, and since relationships between things are capable of being understood, the problem of the uncertainty of knowledge, or agnosticism, is no longer meaningful. In the same way the dualism of *phenomenon* and *noumenon* is eliminated and the “unknowable” turns out to be merely something “not yet known.” This argument was linked to a rejection of the classical definition of truth, which in de Roberty’s view implied the existence of a metaphysical “thing-in-itself.” Truth, he suggested, is only the mutual congruity of ideas and concepts, and the only guarantee and

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23 Ibid., pp. 299-301.

24 Roberty’s other chief works include *Politiko-ekonomicheskie etudy* (St. Petersburg, 1869); *Proshedsheye filosofii* (Moscow, 1886); *L’Inconnaissable* (Paris, 1889); *L’Agnosticisme* (Paris, 1892); *Nouveau programme de sociologie* (Paris, 1904); *Sociologie d’action* (Paris, 1908); *Les Concepts de la raison et les lots de l’Univers* (Paris, 1912).

25 E. de Roberty, *Nouveau programme de sociologie*, pp. 187-88.



yardstick of this congruity is collective experience; therefore truth is the inevitable result – the most categorical and operative expression – of collective experience.<sup>26</sup> The difference between objective and subjective is essentially the difference between individual experience that has been entirely formed and dominated by collective experience, and individual experience that has been subjected to collective experience only to a minor extent (for except at the animal level there can be no experience that is not at least partly social).<sup>27</sup> Every branch of knowledge starts from subjectivism and gradually becomes more and more objective as it becomes formed within the matrix of social experience.

De Roberty based his conception of the social roots of knowledge on a hypothesis interpreting sociality as a specific and supreme form of energy – “supra-organic energy” – arising out of the interaction of many minds. Thanks to this interaction, there is a transition from mental phenomena such as impressions, imagination, emotions, and impulses (the subjective and particular – which are together referred to in French as *conscience* or individual consciousness) to abstract ideation, which gives rise to *connaissance* or supra-individual consciousness; in other words, a biological, receptive process becomes transformed into social, conceptual process.<sup>28</sup> Being constantly renewed and multiplied, social experience produces the phenomenon known by the name of various abstract ideas (time, space, causality, purpose, necessity) or – synthetically – by the name of “reason.” Basically, reason is the same thing as sociality – that is, supra-organic energy. Therefore theories of knowledge and consciousness ought to be the concern of sociologists rather than philosophers or psychologists, whereas sociology itself should become part of energetics – the general science of all forms of energy.<sup>29</sup>

It seems reasonable to suppose that a sociological theory of knowledge linked to energetics would postulate the primacy of social action over cognition. De Roberty, however, was definitely opposed to such a conception. His theory of the four factors (or moduses) in society ascribes a decisive role to scientific cognition and reveals his essentially idealistic intellectualism.<sup>30</sup> De Roberty described his theory as a corrective to Comte’s conception of the three phases of development, in which religious and philosophical knowledge (the theological

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26 Cf. E. de Roberty, *Les Concepts de la raison*, pp. 30-31.

27 E. de Roberty, *Nouveau programme de sociologie*, pp. 193-94.

28 E. de Roberty, *Les Concepts de la raison*, pp. 11-14.

29 Here Roberty based himself on Ostwald’s energeticism, although he postulated that the three types of energy (physical, chemical, and organic) should be supplemented by “supra-organic” energy. (*Ibid.*, pp. 117-19.)

30 Cf. E. de Roberty, *Nouveau programme de sociologie*, pp. 65-81.

and metaphysical stages) preceded scientific knowledge. Basically, however, he was arguing against activist sociological theories (including Marxism) that claim that social praxis engenders intellectual development. Among men living in organized societies based on reason, de Roberty insisted, action is always preceded by thought; the end product of thought may be action, but accepting the primacy of the practical point of view within the thinking consciousness does not mean accepting the thesis concerning the primacy of practical activity over consciousness. De Roberty thought that his own sociological theory resolved the false antinomy between “rationalism” and “activism” by proposing an activism that was logical and rational. It showed that there were two kinds of pragmatism: one that might be called extra or prescientific, the pragmatism of the animal world; and another that was based on science, this latter being proper to man.<sup>31</sup>

In his criticism of “activism,” de Roberty emphasized its connection with the cult of the common man; those who glorify practice, he declared, also want to glorify the *demos* regardless of the fact that in social practice a decisive role is played by knowledge and rational leadership.<sup>32</sup> In his own social ideal de Roberty tried to reconcile elitism (government by an intellectual elite) with egalitarianism (maximum educational opportunities). He argued that progress was the function of two laws: (1) the law of social advance, by which some men outstrip others (this explains the intellectual heterogeneity of the collective and the emergence of ruling elites); and (2) the law of the increasing diffusion of knowledge, which safeguards democratic rights.<sup>33</sup>

De Roberty’s ideas found little acceptance in Russia, among either philosophers or sociologists. Lesevich regarded him as being on a par with Wyrouboff – that is, a thinker who gave positivism a bad name by his lack of understanding of epistemological problems. Lavrov accused him of being too abstract and indifferent to the burning problems of the day. It can be argued, however, that de Roberty deserves a more favorable hearing. His philosophical sociology – or rather sociologizing philosophy – represents an interesting attempt at bridging the gap between Comtian positivism and other philosophical systems of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Despite his confessed dislike of “gnoseological obsessions,” de Roberty did not refuse to tackle fundamental epistemological problems. In many respects his conception of the social roots of knowledge recalls Emile Durkheim’s sociological philosophy.

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31 Cf. E. de Roberty, *Les Concepts de la raison*, p. 160.

32 Cf. E. de Roberty, *Nouveau programme*, p. 211.

33 Cf. E. de Roberty, *Les Concepts de la raison*, p. 24.

Maksim Kovalevsky represented a thoroughly different type of sociologist - a scholar of international fame, regarded as a leading Russian sociologist of pre-revolution period.<sup>34</sup> De Roberty dealt with the “philosophy of sociology” and did not attempt to apply theories in concrete sociological research (this must be considered a shortcoming, especially when we compare de Roberty to Durkheim). Kovalevsky, on the other hand, devoted himself to investigating the concrete historical evolution of society and did not even publish a systematic exposition of his own sociological theories. Like de Roberty, he was accused of a lack of interest in specifically Russian problems; but in his case the criticism was hardly justified.<sup>35</sup> Kovalevsky was not attached to the traditions of Russian sociology and in his works he never invoked their output.<sup>36</sup> It is beyond any doubt, however, that his views on social evolution, indicating the historical inevitability of “production for exchange,” and on representative government, made a contribution to the leading ideological controversies of his day and provided ammunition for the supporters of the thesis that Russia could not bypass the capitalist phase. Kovalevsky’s work on the peasant commune influenced the young Plekhanov and was instrumental in making him abandon Populism for Marxism.

Kovalevsky referred to himself as a “supporter of the philosophy of Comte and a disciple of Marx.”<sup>37</sup> He valued his friendly association with Marx and Engels and made use of their research into European economic history; Engels, for his part, thought highly of Kovalevsky’s work on the evolution of the family and private property, and used some of this material in his own books. It is scarcely possible, however, to talk of the influence of Marxism on Kovalevsky’s

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34 Like de Roberty, Kovalevsky, also spent many years abroad. He studied in Berlin, Paris (where he became friendly with Wyruboff), and London (where he was introduced to Marx and Engels). After completing his studies he taught at Moscow University, but he was deprived of his chair in 1887 for political “unorthodoxy.” He left Russia and did not return until 1905, when he founded the moderate liberal Party of Democratic Reform. During his years abroad he represented Russia at numerous international sociological congresses; in 1901 (together with de Roberty) he founded the Russian High School of Social Sciences in Paris, where Lenin later taught. In 1895 he was elected vice-president and in 1907 president of the International Institute of Sociology.

35 See B. G. Safronov, *M. M. Kovalevsky kak sotsiolog* (Moscow 1960), pp. 19-24.

36 See N.S. Timasheff, “The Sociological Theories of Maksim M. Kovalevsky” [in:] *An Introduction to the History of Sociology*, edited by Harry Elmer Barnes, Chicago-London 1948, p.442.

37 See A. P. Kazakov, *Teoriia progressa v russkoi sotsiologii kontsa XIX veka*, Leningrad 1969, p. 100.

views; for him the founder of scientific sociology was Comte, Marxism being only a special variant of positivist evolutionism.

Kovalevsky himself was a typical social evolutionist, convinced of the uniformity and universal applicability of the basic laws of social development. Sociology, he wrote, is “the science dealing with the organization and evolution of societies.” This was a modification of Comte’s classic formula defining sociology as the science of the “order and progress of society,” because, Kovalevsky argued, not every social organization deserves to be called “orderly,” and evolution is not always synonymous with progress. Nevertheless, he was convinced that the overall movement of evolution was progressive and that progress was one of the inexorable laws of history. He defined progress as the strengthening of the bonds of human solidarity – the constant expansion of the “environment of peaceful coexistence” [*zamirennaiia sreda*] from tribal unity through patriotism to cosmopolitanism, the solidarity of the whole human race. This general formula of progress took different forms, depending on its application to different spheres of social life. Comte’s law of the three phases of development sufficed, in Kovalevsky’s view, to express the nature of progress in the intellectual sphere. Political progress he defined as the expansion of individual autonomy and popular self-government, its culmination being parliamentary government; progress of this kind was relatively independent of the outward forms of statehood and could be reconciled with a monarchical system. In the economic sphere, progress consisted in the constant expansion of economic relations; Kovalevsky believed that the growth of international trade would bring about the economic integration of the whole world, eliminate the causes of war, and ultimately lead to a world federation of democratic states.

These views show clearly that what Kovalevsky stressed in his theory of social evolution was not struggle, but factors making for integration and thus favoring the growth of solidarity and peaceful coexistence. In this he differed not only from Marx but also from Spencer and the social Darwinists. On the other hand, he shows some affinity with the “academic” socialists [*Kathedersozialisten*] in Germany, whose influence is apparent in his work, and he was also clearly influenced by such Russian opponents of social Darwinism as Kropotkin, Lavrov, and Mikhailovsky.

What is the engine of progress? It is generally accepted view that Kovalevsky was a representative of the demographic school that believed the main driving force behind progress is population growth. This is not entirely correct: Kovalevsky did indeed attach great importance to the demographic factor, but only in the economic sphere. In general he was opposed to all attempts to explain social change by a single cause and preferred to account for evolution by the “simultaneous and parallel action and counteraction of many

factors.”<sup>38</sup> Such a standpoint, he maintained, sprang from the very nature of positivism – that is, from an understanding of the mutual interdependence of all spheres in society.

In his political outlook, Kovalevsky was a moderate liberal who believed in transforming tsarism into a constitutional monarchy. These views by no means conflicted with sympathy for “academic” socialism. On economic issues he sharply disagreed with the classical theories of economic liberalism, since he regarded free competition as a form of struggle likely to stand in the way of progress. Socialism to him was a way of organizing the forces of production so as to eliminate class conflicts;<sup>39</sup> revolution, on the other hand, seemed to him a pathological phenomenon. These ideas influenced his interpretation of contemporary issues: he drew attention to Marx’s struggle against revolutionary voluntarism,<sup>40</sup> laid stress on the Marxist contribution to a definition of the objective laws of social progress, argued that a Social Democratic party need not be republican, thought highly of the German Social Democrat Eduard Bernstein, and praised Plekhanov for his consistent support of an alliance between the proletariat and the liberal sections of the bourgeoisie. Even the communist slogan “workers of the world unite” was, in his view, merely a call for the establishment of legal working class associations.<sup>41</sup>

Another important representative of positivist sociology in Russia was NIKOLAI KAREEV (1850-1931). Unlike de Roberty and Kovalevsky, Kareev attempted to combine positivism with the Populist sociology of Lavrov and Mikhailovsky. In his theoretical works he laid special stress on the importance of the evaluational element (or “subjective” factor) in all attempts at making an orderly presentation of historical data, and attacked theories ascribing a decisive historical role to supra-individual and impersonal forces.<sup>42</sup> One of the failings of which he accused Marxism was its tendency to fatalism and the one-sided depersonalization of history.<sup>43</sup> Comte, on the other hand, he thought guilty of exaggerating the significance of intellectual evolution – to the detriment of

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38 M. M. Kovalevsky, *Sovremennye sotsiologi*, St. Petersburg, 1905, p. XIV. The influence of Kovalevsky’s research on demographic factor in the history of economy had been stressed by P. Sorokin (*Contemporary Sociological Theories*, pp. 388-391).

39 See Safronov, *M.M. Kovalevsky*, pp. 84-85.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 86.

41 See Kazakov, *Teoriia progressa*, p. 126.

42 See especially the following works of Kareev: *Osnovnye voprosy filosofii istorii*, Moscow 1883; *Sushchnost’ istoricheskogo protsessa i rol’ lichnosti v istorii*, St. Petersburg 1890; *Istoriko-filosofskie i sotsiologicheskie etiudy*, St. Petersburg 1895.

43 See N. I. Kareev, *Starye i novye etiudy ob ekonomicheskom materializme*, St. Petersburg 1896.

economic history. In his own theory, he differentiated between progress as a category in ethics, making an orderly presentation of historical data, and evolution as a process completely objective and axiologically neutral. When viewed from the epistemological perspective, he distinguished nomological theory of cognition, referring to the essence of phenomena, and phenomenological theory of cognition, related solely to the phenomena; nomological, that is specifying general laws and deontological, that is justifying the choice of ideals.<sup>44</sup> According to this classification, natural sciences were restricted to deal with “what is,” whereas social sciences entail also research on “what should be.”

Kareev’s theories were only an eclectic attempt at reconciling positivism with “subjective sociology” and certain elements of Marxism. As in the case of Kovalevsky, Kareev’s most important contribution was in the sociological interpretation of history, where he kept to concrete facts. This includes, for instance, his monograph on *The Peasants and the Agrarian Issue in France in the Last Quarter of the Eighteenth Century* (1879), which Marx called an excellent book.<sup>45</sup>

Alexander Lappo-Danilevsky (1863-1919) was a somewhat eclectic and erudite figure.<sup>46</sup> For many years, he was a professor of sociology at the University of Petersburg and after the February Revolution of 1917 he was unanimously elected president of the first Russian Sociological Society, named after M. Kovalevsky.

Just like Kareev, Lappo-Danilevsky tried to overcome the positivist determinism in social sciences. In doing so, he resisted invoking Populist “subjective sociology.” He preferred referring to the basics of positivist sociology, carrying out a detailed analysis of the doctrine of August Comte, revealing its inner discrepancies and at the same time pointing out its utility in

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44 Cf. N.I. Kareev, *Istoriko-filosofskie i sotsyologicheskie etudy*, pp. 115, 195, 245.

45 See the letter from Marx to Kovalevsky as of April 1879; *Perepiska K. Marxa i F. Engelsa s russkimi politicheskimi deiateliami* (Moscow, 1951), pp. 232-33.

46 See A. Vucinich, *Social Thought in Tsarist Russia. The Quest for a General Science of Society, 1861-1917*, Chicago-London 1976, pp. 110-124. Cf. *Sotsyologicheskaia mysl v Rossii. Ocherki nemarksistskoi sotsyologii posledniei trieti XIX-nachata XX veka*, edited by B.A. Chagin, Leningrad 1978, pp. 257-260.

One of the main works of Lappo-Danilevsky, *Istoriia politicheskikh idiei v Rossii v XVIIIv. V sviazi s razvitiem ieo kultury i khodom ieo politiki*, was not published during his lifetime. Only the introduction, entitled *Istoriia russkoi obshchestvennoi mysli i kultury XVII-XVIII v.* was published in Moscow in 1990.

refuting the schemes of positivist naturalism.<sup>47</sup> The most important, however, was the reference to the Baden School of neo-Kantianism. Lappo-Danilevsky adopted from the School a division of sciences into nomotetic, searching for general laws, and idiographic, focusing on individual phenomena in their originality. In his own methodology of social sciences (summarized in a two-volume *Methodology of History*, Moscow 1910-1913), Lappo-Danilevsky justified the possibility of synthesis of nomotetic and idiographic approach, claiming that the combination of the two methods is essential for social processes to be reconstructed in their whole complexity. Following the example of neo-Kantianists, he illustrated man as a being which creates cultural values and thus gives meaning to the history. The emphasis was put on the unity of humankind and the increasing value of the process of realizing this unity and its implementation in social institutions. This made him, needless to say, a proponent of liberal Occidentalism.

A separate group of positivist thinkers in Russia was composed of the representatives of the sociological theory of law.<sup>48</sup>

One of them was Sergei Muromtsev (1850-1910), a lawyer and liberal political activist, a lecturer of law at Moscow University (1877-1884), a recognized expert in the theory and history of civil law and reception of Roman law in Europe.<sup>49</sup> Dismissed from the chair of Roman law for political activity, Muromtsev took a job as a lawyer, worked in municipal authorities in Moscow and figured in the zemstvo [local self-government unit]. In 1905 he co-founded a political party, the Constitutional-Democratic party and a year later Muromtsev was elected a chairman of the First State Duma. His works combine theoretical approach, inspired by sociological concepts of Comte, Spencer, Edward Tylor and John Lubboch, and research on law in cultural-historical

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47 See Lappo-Danilevsky, "Osnovnye printsypy sotsyologicheskoi doktrini O. Konta" [In:] *Problemy idealizma*, Moscow 1902.

48 See W.D. Zor'kin, *Pozitivistskaia teoriia prava v Rossii*, Moscow 1978.

49 His main works include: *Ocherki obshchei teorii grazhdanskogo prava*, Moscow 1877, *Grazhdanskoe pravo Drevnego Rima*, Moscow 1883, *Receptsia rimskogo prava na Zapadie*, Moscow 1885, *Osnovy grazhdanskogo prava: Chelovek i obshchestvo*, Moscow 1908, "Tvorcheskaia sila jurisprudentscii," *Juridicheskii vestnik*, vol. 9, 1897, "Sotsyologicheskie ocherki," *Russkaia mysl*, vol. 1, 1889, "Pravo i spravedlivost," *Juridicheskii viertnik*, vol. 2, 1892.

Muromtsev was mentioned, among others, in the works of P.N. Milukov, *S.A. Muromtsev. Biograficheskij ocherk*, Prague 1915, A.A. Kizewetter, *S.A. Muromtsev*, Moscow 1918, W.D. Zor'kin, *S.A. Muromtsev*, Moscow 1979. See also: the description of Muromtsev's views in a book by B. Kistiakovski *Sotsyalnyie nauki i pravo: ocherki po metodologii sotsyalnykh nauk i obshchei teorii prava*, Moscow 1916.

contexts. He asserted that law must be studied as a social phenomenon and was opposed to the abstract, “objectifying” approach toward law. Resolving conflicts between social groups and creating basis for cooperation and social integration were to his mind the main functions of law. In his understanding, the subject of law was very broad, encompassing studies on personality, culture and social structure.<sup>50</sup>

A different, right-wing-positivist version of the theory of law was presented by Gabriel Shershenevich (1863-1912), a lecturer of civil law at Kazan and then Moscow University.<sup>51</sup> It was based on sociologism, economic materialism and psychological conceptions, emphasizing the egoistic and possessive instincts of people. He deemed law as a tool of governing elites for achieving interests and as a result of a compromise between egoistic aspirations of these governing and these governed. State authority, thus, was associated with power standing beyond law, though obliged to abide by the law in order to maintain the stability of social order. Shershenevich admitted that the progress of human civilization and cultural progress in stable societies leads to the interiorization of legal norms and diminishes the probability of violation of legal order by the willfulness of the mighty.

The most innovative and original was the theory of Nikolai Korkunov (1853-1904), a professor of “Legal Encyclopedia” at the University of Saint Petersburg.<sup>52</sup> Like Shershenevsky, he pointed at the absolute, beyond-legal character of the state authority, but at the same time claimed that an essential basis of a modern state is the freedom of the individual - free individual and centralized state are not opposites, but rather products of the same social evolution. This was consistent with the etatist variety of liberalism (Kavelin and

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50 See A. Vucinich, *Social Thought in Tsarist Russia*, pp.140-142.

51 His main works include: *O chuvstve zakonnosti*, Kazan 1897, *Socjologia*, Moscow 1910, *Obshchaia teoriia prava*, Moscow 1910-1912, *Obshchee ucheniie o prave i gosudarstve*, Moscow 1911.

For a good and concise summary of Shershenevich’s views, see “Shershenevich” by W.N. Zhukov in an encyclopedic dictionary *Russkaia filosofiia*, Moscow 1995.

52 The most important work of Korkunov is *Lektsii po obshchei teorii prava*, Petersburg 1904 (*General Theory of Law* - transl. into English by W.G. Hastings, South Hackensack, N.J. 1968. Other works include *Obshchestvennoe znacheniiie prava*, Petersburg 1890, *Russkoe gosudarstvennoe pravo*, 2 volumes, Petersburg 1892-1893, *Ukaz i zakon*, Petersburg 1894.

A monograph about Korkunov was written by E.A. Ekimov: *Korkunov*, Moscow 1983. Particularly worth reading is “Bureaucracy and Freedom: N.M. Korkunov’s Theory of the State,” written by American scholar George L. Yaney, *The American Historical Review*, vol. 71, no.2, January 1966, pp. 468-486.



Chicherin), and contradictory to Comtean doctrine, which denied an individual rights in the name of state omnipotency. State absolutism, as Korkunov argued, has to emancipate individuals to their own benefit, since within traditional collectivism, which subordinates the individuals to local communities and tyranny of tradition, centralized power has no possibility to exert effective control over the whole state. Centralized, bureaucratic administration, functioning in a systematic and foreseeable manner, increases territorially the extent of dependency, but desists from total control by endowing an individual with legal personality. It exerts control through formal rules of law; law is seen as a distinction (delimitation) between individual interests, ergo it assumes their occurrence and protection. This was how Korkunov challenged the stereotype according to which bureaucracy was a natural threat to an individual's freedom. To some extent, he anticipated the Weber conception of bureaucratic and legal rationalization of social relationships and argued that one's freedom is directly proportionate to the efficiency and rationalism of state bureaucracy.

Another, seemingly paradoxical issue with regard to Korkunov's theory was the combination of positivism in the methodological dimension with the criticism of judicial positivism, which reduced the sources of law to state legislature. Korkunov was of the opinion that society bases on a psychological bond, that state authority as such has its source in the consciousness of individuals; to put it in other words that the state's power derives not from violence but the awareness of the dependence of individuals, hence:

The power of the state exists only to the extent that it is accepted by the consciousness of the citizens, and for this reason the notions which individuals have as to their own freedom and social liberty produce a corresponding restriction upon the state's power. Thus, the limitation of power by law arises not only from well-advised representatives of the state's power limiting it by the rights of the citizens, but also and especially from the fact that the idea which the citizens have of their dependence upon the state is never unlimited.<sup>53</sup>

Korkunov's ideas influenced the psychological theory of law of Leon Petrażycki - the founder of the "Petersburg school" of Russian jurisprudence, regarded as the most "outstanding Russian philosopher of law of 20<sup>th</sup> century."<sup>54</sup> Russian intelligentsia, however, did not treat him seriously, since he admitted being a patriot, sympathizing with absolutism. Moreover, and what was worst, he was seeking the solution to Russian problems in the enlightened bureaucracy.

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53 See N.M. Korkunov, *General Theory of Law*, p. 90, 96, 321, 352, 375.

54 N.S. Timasheff, Introduction to *L. Petrażycki, Law and Morality*, transl. by H.W. Babb, Cambridge, Mass. 1955, p. XVIII. Cf. A. Walicki, *Legal Philosophies of Russian Liberalism*, Warsaw 1995, pp. 224-303.

Professional jurists, in turn, accused Korkunov of being under excessive influence of German sciences. Himself, he did not hide his Germanophilia, claiming that the German influence constitutes one of the basic, constitutive elements of Russian statehood and culture.<sup>55</sup>

Among Russian sociologists there was also Jacques Novicov (1849-1912), an author of a number of books falling within the sociology of conflict and theory of international relations.<sup>56</sup> This former businessman from Odessa spent most of his life in France and so wrote mainly in French and as a declared cosmopolite he did not give meaning to national affinity. Despite this, Novicov was interested in Russia, writing about its matters, publishing there and, last but not least, in his criticism of social Darwinism he continued to develop some ideas typical of Russian social thought. In Russia, for uncertain reasons, his ideas were hardly ever mentioned, in the West however Novicov was treated as a Russian or Russian-French sociologist.<sup>57</sup> This seems justified and no less than in the case of de Roberty.

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55 See Georgie L. Yaney, *Bureaucracy and Freedom*, p. 472.

56 Such as: *La Politique internationale*, Paris 1886; *Les Lutttes entre Societes humaines et leurs phases successive*, Paris 1893.

57 The fact that Novikov was scarcely mentioned in Russian science is striking. In the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* there is not even a short notice about him. For me, the main sources of information were English-language works, particularly “The Sociological Doctrines of Jacques Novicov: A Sociological Criticism of War and Militarism” by Harry Elmer Barnes, that is a chapter in the collected volume *An Introduction to the History of Sociology*, ed. H.E. Barnes, Chicago-London 1948, pp. 419-440 (Novicov appears there as one of the classics of sociology, equal to Durkheim and Max Weber). Also *Russian Sociology* (pp.277-284) by J.F. Hecker and *Contemporary Sociological Theories* by P. Sorokin (pp. 205-207 and 314-323) contain descriptions of Novicov’s views. See also Th. Abel, headword Novicov in *The Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Macmillan, vol. XI, New York 1933, p. 402 and the review by Rene Worms in the “Revue Internationale de Sociologie,” vol. XX, 1912, pp. 481-482.

On Russian issues Novicov wrote among others in *The Russian People. A Psychological Study* (in the volume *The Case of Russia. A Composite View*, New York 1905, pp. 139-254). It must be admitted that this study, written in 1901 is fairly cursory, which proves how little the author knew about the development of Russian philosophy and social thought during the last 25 years of 19<sup>th</sup> century. He described Russian people with sympathy, praising their generosity and lack of cruelty. The political situation of Russia in his eyes was very gloomy, a state of suspension between liberal progress and reaction. The policy of the government as far as dealing with the Populist movement was concerned, he thought stupid, though he thought highly of the reforms of Alexander II. In Novicov’s view, the assassination of Alexander II by the populists constituted a “hideous crime” which for many years impeded the development of Russia.

In his general theory of society, Novicov was a committed supporter of Spencer's organicism. He defended this conception fervently during sociological congresses, thus sympathizing with Rene Worms, a Secretary of the International Institute of Sociology. Such a stance very clearly differentiated Novicov from the dominant tendencies of Russian sociology; in Russia Spencer's organicism was heavily criticized, both by left and right wings. Populists (Mikhailovsky) saw it as a social Darwinist apology of capitalism, eliminating moral understanding of progress in the name of pseudo-objective laws of naturalistic theodicy; liberals (Chicherin) saw it as a holistic concept, subordinating individuals to the organic whole, and so incompatible with individualistic values. Slavophile conservatives, in turn, regarded liberal fundamentalism as a grotesque manifestation of antisocialist individualism, so typical of the Western societies and completely alien to Christian Russia.

The variation of Novicov's Spencerism was particular. By a way of comparison to its English or American variation (represented by a classic of American sociology, W.G. Sumner), Novicov steadfastly refused to interpret the struggle for existence and the society of free competition in the spirit of social Darwinism. He claimed that the phenomenon of struggle is universal, but also underlined that consequently lead to mutual adaptation, which creates the possibility of effective cooperation. He opposed economic reductionism, distinguishing three types of struggle, namely economic, political and intellectual struggles. Within each of these types, according to Novicov, progress was made, its sign being civilizational progress in terms of methods of struggle, that is elimination of violence. This adhered to all subjects of struggle: individuals, classes, states and nations. At the highest stage of civilizational progress, economic and political conflicts were supposed to be resolved on intellectual level and the ideal of world-peace was to be achieved. This would pose a simultaneous victory of justice and freedom; justice interpreted as a maximization of the vital energy of each individual within the confines of social order, assuring the maximum of one's freedom.

From the very beginning, Novicov drew from his sociological conceptions "futuristic" conclusions pertaining to future organization of international relations. His early book *La Politique internationale* was deemed the "first attempt to depict the theory of international political organization in a coherent and exhaustive manner." *La Federation de l'Europe* (1901) provided more details, justifying the need for pan-European federation and putting forward ideas of how to achieve this goal. Novikov argued that European patriotism, based on individual and universal values, promoting free trade and the emancipation of women and at the same time engaged in mutual help and stretching the limits of social solidarity, was conceivable. He saw its basis in the

development of communications and an intensification of processes such as exchange, economic as well as intellectual. He claimed that the European community was already in his times not only an ideal, but also a reality, spontaneously created and institutionalized by various types of international cooperation - starting with international contracts to international scientific conventions and other forms of pan-European exchange of views.

An important feature of Novicov's federalism was the conviction that European federation would transform into federation of nations represented by national elites, and not a federation of countries represented by governments. Novicov's organicism was related to "national organicism" in which the role of the brain was occupied by the elite, "social aristocracy" and not the government (as was in Comte's vision). The nation was in this conception a product higher on the evolutionary list than statehood - the genesis of the countries is connected with wars, conquests, violence, whereas national organisms are based on exchange, communication and solidarity.

It is worth mentioning that with Novicov more and more convinced of the destructive role of all forms of violence, this idea had been revised. In *Criticism of Social Darwinism* Novicov questioned all sociological theories (L. Gumplovich, G. Ratzenhof, L.F. Ward) deriving the genesis of countries from wars and conquests, juxtaposing these with a theory that solely peaceful exchange constituted a causative factor. In his last book, *Mecanisme et limites de l'association humaine* (1912), Novicov accentuated more mutual help and other forms of stretching the limits of social solidarity (as in Kropotkin theories), he did not put so much emphasis on competitiveness and other forms of rivalry anymore.

This illustrates a variation of Novicov Spencerism that is deprived of brutality, reduced to the concept of organic social self-regulation and superiority of peaceful societies over military societies. A Spencerism deprived of social Darwinism, an apology of capitalism in the Victorian style, and a depreciation of attempts to co-create social order.

This vivid modification followed the 19<sup>th</sup> century trend of Russian thought, which usually shunned from allowing naturalistic brutality in the analysis of social relations<sup>58</sup> (Shershenevich was an exception).

The same can be noticed with regard to other extremities of positivist scientism: the idea of objective and universal necessity of capital development

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58 In his book *Russian Sociology* (pp.277-278), J.F. Hecker indicated that Novicov's sociology adheres to the dominant tendency of Russian social thought of his times. He assumed that this will make the absorption of Novicov's thought easier for Russian sociologists.

and the ban of subjective evaluations in the social sciences. The above-mentioned representatives of Russian positive sociology were not extreme determinists. On the contrary, they tried to consider “subjective factor” and legitimize analysis of “what should be.” Extreme evolutionary determinism treating science as a total elimination of the ethic point of view and exclusion of alternative ways of development appeared in Russia only with Plekhanov - the author of extreme “objective” interpretation of Marxist historicism, combining positivist scientism with the Hegelian apology of historical necessity.

## Positivism and Psychology

In the positivists’ discussions on epistemology, psychology had a prominent place. This is understandable if we remember that frequently no distinction was made at that time between epistemology and psychology. For Wyrouboff the increased interest in epistemology was a symptom of confusion between philosophy and psychology; Kavelin argued that the theories of Locke and Kant actually belonged to the sphere of psychology, and that concentration on epistemological issues was evidence of the key importance of psychology in modern philosophy. Even Lesevich, who made a clear distinction between epistemology and psychology (and engaged in polemics on this issue with Sechenov), was convinced that epistemology was largely based on psychological data.<sup>59</sup>

The positivist attack on metaphysics was undertaken in the sphere of psychology by a professor at Moscow University, MATVEY TROITSKY (1835-99), who represented the English school of positivism. Troitsky’s chief work<sup>60</sup> was a vehement attack on the philosophical bias of German psychology, written from the point of view of English empirical, associationist psychology. Vladimir Soloviev relates that Troitsky always began his annual course of lectures on psychology with a short account of German idealism, ending with the pronouncement: “Well, gentlemen, you can see for yourselves! What is it? Wood shavings, wood shavings! Well then, into the stove with them!”<sup>61</sup>

A man of far wider mental horizons was the historian KONSTANTIN KAVELIN (see Chapter 8). Although he was close to positivism and supported the positivists’ arguments against metaphysics, he was distressed by the prevailing

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59 See Wyrouboff, “Remarques,” p. 392; K. D. Kavelin, *Sobranie sochinenii* (St. Petersburg 1899), vol. 2, pp. 364-71, 375, 578; Lesevich, *Opyt*, pp. 124-25.

60 M. M. Troitsky, *Nemetskaia psikhologiya v tekushchem stoletii* (M, 1867).

61 V. S. Soloviev, *Sobranie sochinenii* (St. Petersburg 1903), vol. 8, p. 417.

cult of scientific facts, which made serious philosophical discussion “almost as ridiculous as wearing a powdered wig.”<sup>62</sup> Kavelin thought that the positivists were wrong to dismiss metaphysics or explain metaphysical problems in terms of material processes; instead they ought to pluck out the real psychological kernel buried in the metaphysical systems (albeit in disguise) and examine it on its own terms – that is, they should acknowledge psychological processes to have their own autonomous existence on a par with material existence.<sup>63</sup> The fact that positivism had still not complied with this postulate inclined Kavelin to the view that it was not yet a scientific philosophy but only a transitional stage in the evolution of the human mind.<sup>64</sup>

When criticizing the positivists’ refusal to admit the reality of mental phenomena, Kavelin used arguments borrowed from agnosticism. The supporters of “scientific realism,” he pointed out, ought to remember that science itself is a “psychological fact that has no existence outside our minds.”<sup>65</sup> We can only comprehend signs, symbols of reality, and not reality “in itself.”<sup>66</sup>

In his main work, *The Tasks of Psychology* (1872), Kavelin argued that materialism and idealism are essentially belated heirs of scholasticism that do not remember their own origins and regard the two sides of Christian dualism as absolutes.<sup>67</sup> This dualism cannot be overcome by explaining mental phenomena in terms of material phenomena or vice versa. Mental phenomena are irreducible, though this should not be taken to imply that they are independent of man’s physical constitution. In his theory of the relation between mind and body, Kavelin defended a standpoint halfway between psychophysical parallelism and interactionism. Everywhere there are examples, he pointed out, of two parallel series of phenomena whose interconnection is not in doubt, although it has not been fully investigated. The integrality of human nature will not be violated if we accept the hypothesis that in man there are two organisms deriving from a common stem and therefore intimately connected; each of these organisms influences the other while still retaining its separateness.<sup>68</sup>

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62 Remarks made in 1874. See K. D. Kavelin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, p. 271.

63 Ibid., pp. 319-20.

64 Ibid., pp. 346-47. Kavelin stressed that the positivists were themselves beginning to transcend their previous one-sidedness. He thought he saw evidence of this in *Problems of Life and Mind* by George Henry Lewes (*Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, p. 338).

65 Kavelin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, p. 341.

66 Ibid., p. 337.

67 Ibid., pp. 420, 438.

68 Ibid., pp. 485, 837-38.

In psychology Kavelin distinguished two main trends: empirical psychology, deriving from Locke, and idealist psychology, deriving from Kant. The former concentrated on that part of the psyche directed toward the material world and conditioned by it; the latter was only interested in those psychic phenomena in which the mind expressed its autonomy and activity.<sup>69</sup> English psychology represented the trend initiated by Locke, German psychology that initiated by Kant. It will be readily apparent that Kavelin himself considered both trends to be one-sided and postulated their reconciliation as mutually complementary systems.

This was part of Kavelin's attempt to undertake a cautious rehabilitation of German idealism, which he interpreted as a disguised form of psychological investigation concentrating on the active side of the human psyche. The speculative constructs of German idealism become comprehensible, Kavelin argued, if they are translated into the language of psychology; one only has to realize that the logical formulas on which they rest in fact describe the moment when the soul splits into two halves and sees itself reflected in its otherness. The realistic-empirical trend that only recognizes the receptive side of the psyche has made no contribution in this field and therefore has no right to dismiss German idealism as valueless.<sup>70</sup>

Kavelin's standpoint, understandably enough, did not satisfy either the materialists or the consistent idealists and spiritualists. *The Tasks of Psychology* was attacked on two fronts: the eminent physiologist I. M. Sechenov criticized the treatment of psychic processes as autonomous phenomena, while the Slavophile Yury Samarin accused Kavelin of exaggerating the soul's dependence on the body and external environment, which, he stressed, conflicted with the dogma of immortality.

In his introduction to the book Kavelin explained that there was a clear connection between his interest in psychology and the Hegelian liberalism of his youth. Both in *The Tasks of Psychology* and in his *Brief Survey of Juridical Relations in Ancient Russia* (1847) his main concern was the defense of the strong autonomous personality.<sup>71</sup> In the 1840s he had discussed the evolution of personality in the light of Russia's past and future; in *The Tasks of Psychology* he discussed it from the point of view of its universal, or at least European, relevance. The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, he argued, was seeing the diminution of individuality – the emergence of the impersonal masses and the

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69 Ibid., pp. 507-8.

70 Ibid., pp. 509-11.

71 Ibid., p. 375.

loneliness of the crowd.<sup>72</sup> Although more stress was placed on sociality than ever before, in reality men felt increasingly alienated from each other. Statesmen and civic leaders saw individual human beings as so many statistical data, figures in a budget, or symbols in an equation. Scientists and “philosophical realists” treated people like things, objects of the external world subject to the inexorable laws of causality.<sup>73</sup> Only psychology attempted to counteract this process: it spoke up on behalf of the personality and restored it to its central position in the universe by showing that allegedly objective social processes were in fact the work of individuals, and that science itself had no existence outside the human mind.<sup>74</sup>

Kavelin’s other important book, *The Tasks of Ethics* (1885), also dealt with the problem of personality. In it he attacked the utilitarian and eudemonistic approach to ethics, with its emphasis on happiness, and argued that prerequisites of a strong moral personality were faith in supra-individual ideals and the constant effort to achieve perfection. Happiness itself could not be regarded as the ultimate purpose of human existence, although the most powerful source of happiness was the effort involved in reaching a goal (the ideal). Chasing after happiness and advantage contributed to external, material progress; but at the same time it deprived life of any deeper sense, took away men’s faith and hope, and in doing the latter ultimately destroyed men’s happiness.<sup>75</sup>

As these arguments make clear, the common practice of classifying Kavelin as a positivist is not entirely justified. There would seem to be better grounds for calling him a “semi-positivist”;<sup>76</sup> it is true that he defended positivism against Soloviev’s attacks,<sup>77</sup> but he himself opposed the exaggerated cult of scientific facts and tried to bring about a rapprochement between positivist philosophy and idealism – this indeed was the main aim of his philosophical work.

NIKOLAI GROT (1852–99), son of the philologist J. K. Grot, was a more militant and consistent positivist (though only in the first phase of his intellectual development). His interest in philosophy and psychology was stimulated by Kavelin, who was a frequent visitor in his home and invited the young Grot to take part in “peripatetic conversations” on philosophical themes. At the university Grot studied under Troitsky; he was also influenced by

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72 Ibid., p. 613.

73 Ibid., pp. 629-32.

74 Ibid., pp. 638-46.

75 Ibid., pp. 981, 1009-17.

76 See Zenkovsky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, vol. 1, pp. 345-48.

77 See his article “Apriornaia filosofii ili polozhitel’naia nauka?” in Kavelin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, p. 285.



Sechenov's work on the physiology of the nervous system. In 1886 he was appointed professor at Moscow University; shortly afterward he became president of the Moscow Psychological Society,<sup>78</sup> and in 1889, he founded the periodical *Problems of Philosophy and Psychology* [*Voprosy Filosofii i Psikhologii*].<sup>79</sup> By virtue of his official functions, he became one of the leading figures in academic philosophical circles in Russia.

In his first works – his master's thesis on the psychology of sense perception, and his doctorate on the psychological interpretation of problems of logic<sup>80</sup> – Grot displayed a consistently associationist standpoint.<sup>81</sup> Following Spencer, he defined psychic processes as one of the means used by the organism to adjust to the external environment. In order to explain these processes he formulated a theory of “psychic circulation,” which postulated a cycle of automatic reactions analogous to the circulation of elementary substances in the body. In his interpretation of mental processes (based on Spencer's biological principles and on his own theory of “psychic circulation”), he reduced the rules of inference to six types of association; the first three were purely mechanical (simple association, dissociation, and the disassociation of the psychic elements), the other three organic (integration, disintegration, and differentiation). This scheme was linked to a defense of “naive realism” in epistemology and a fascinated interest in the possibility of applying a strictly deterministic evolutionism to psychic processes. In sociology Grot rejected the “subjective method” but at the same time – somewhat inconsistently – treated human happiness as the goal of historical progress. His attempt to make the philosophy of psychology more “scientific” led him to call for the elimination of metaphysical concepts such as that of the “soul” (he suggested it should be replaced by the term *sensorium*); philosophy that was “unscientific” he dismissed as a subjective creative art, like poetry. One of his theories was that

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78 Thanks to Grot, the society (which was founded in 1885 by Troitsky) became an important center of intellectual life. The other body to which professional philosophers in Russia could belong was the St. Petersburg Philosophic Society, whose leading personality was A. Vvedensky.

79 If we do not count the ephemeral periodicals edited by A. Kozlov, this was the first – certainly the first regular – professional periodical devoted to philosophy in Russia. See the chapter on metaphysical idealism (below).

80 *Psikhologiya chuvstvovaniï v svoï istorii i glavnykh osnovakh*, St. Petersburg 1879–80; *K voprosu o teorii logiki*, Leipzig 1882.

81 The following account of Grot's views is based on P. P. Sokolov, “Filosofskie vzglady i nauchnaya deyatelnost N. Y. Grot,” in *N. Y. Grot v ocherkakh, vospominaniïakh i pis'makh*, St. Petersburg 1911. See also A. T. Pavlov, “Nikolai Yakovlevich Grot, ego mesto v istorii russkoi filosofii,” *Voprosy Filosofii*, no. 10/2003, pp. 114–122.

philosophical systems were products satisfying the subjective requirements of the mind; different systems were of equal psychological value and followed each other according to specific laws of psychic development.

Grot's faith in the validity of his theories did not stand the test of time. As early as the mid-1880s, after studying the works of Giordano Bruno and Plato, Kant, and Schopenhauer, he turned away from positivism and openly declared his conversion to metaphysics. His new philosophy, which he called "monodualism," was to be a synthesis of monism and dualism, that is a resolution of ontological antinomies: the idea of God was to be the principle reconciling spirit and matter, and the idea of the soul the principle reconciling matter and force. In psychology Grot rejected mechanism and associationism as mere "theoretical superstitions." A single novel by Dostoevsky, he declared, had more to say about psychology than the entire body of Spencer's theories.<sup>82</sup>

Grot's metaphysics did not represent a return to the speculative constructs of German idealism; in keeping with the spirit of the age, it was an inductive metaphysics that attempted to base itself on the data of inner experience and that was therefore closely (and deliberately) linked to psychology. Toward the end of his life Grot even attempted to reconcile his new system with positivism. This was owing to his interest in the energetics of Wilhelm Ostwald, which encouraged him in his belief that a scientific explanation of metaphysical problems was within the realm of probability. Arguing that the concept of psychic energy is just as valid as the concept of physical energy, Grot attempted to prove the validity of immortality on the basis of energetics. He returned to the formulas of evolutionism, but by interpreting nature as the pedestal of the spirit, and biological evolution as an instrument in the realization of reason and freedom, he gave those formulas a new spiritualist content.<sup>83</sup>

## **Toward Ethical Idealism. The Renaissance of Natural Law: Leon Petrażycki and Pavel Novgorodtsev**

Grot's intellectual evolution signaled the first phase of the anti-Positivist breakthrough in Russian philosophy – although it could be claimed that the trend had been initiated by Soloviev's M.A. thesis on *The Crisis of Western Philosophy* (1874).<sup>84</sup> In fact, however, the Positivist period lasted almost two decades longer, owing, amongst other reasons, to a decades' break in Soloviev's

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82 Ibid., p. 118.

83 Ibid., pp. 120–8.

84 See Grot's book, *Filosofia i eyo obshchiie zadachi*, Petersburg 1904, pp. 525, 529–530.

own strictly philosophical activity. Overcoming the domination of Positivist scientism proceeded gradually in the community of professional philosophers who, having embraced Positivism, abandoned it for the sake of an increasing interest in the possibilities of rehabilitating classical philosophical themes. The new periodical, *Problems of Philosophy and Psychology*, marked the first victory over the “anti-philosophical” tendency of Positivism, becoming Russia’s “philosophical parliament,” a neutral place for discussion between *diverse* philosophical trends – except (most symptomatically!) “flat Positivism and naïve materialism.”<sup>85</sup> According to Vasilii Rozanov, this meant a fundamental change of circumstances: without a periodical of that kind, the domination of “philosophy without philosophy” would have lasted longer, and even Soloviev would not have found a place to publish his works.<sup>86</sup>

The main exit from Positivism led through ethical idealism, sustained, on the one hand, by neo-Kantianism and, on the other hand, by the rediscovered home-bred moral philosophy represented in literature by Dostoevsky. The latter was favored by Grot himself who, as an editor of *The Problems of Philosophy and Psychology*, declared that he wished to continue “Dostoevsky’s line” in philosophy, that is, to create a “specifically national moral philosophy.”<sup>87</sup> The neo-Kantian line was represented in the editorial staff by the already mentioned Alexander Vvedensky, who negated scientific metaphysics as impossible, yet acknowledged metaphysical truths as an object of faith. He was also one of the organizers of the Petersburg Philosophical Society. Inaugurating it in January 1898, he expressed the hope he shared with Grot that Russia would soon see a flourishing of philosophy.<sup>88</sup>

The common denominator of Grot’s and Vvedensky’s views was, above all else, a firm conviction that Positivist naturalism was unable to offer its followers clean-cut moral directives or a satisfactory experience of the meaning of life.<sup>89</sup> As the main task of his own philosophy, Vvedensky named discovering the conditions that might make the belief in the meaning of life logically possible.<sup>90</sup>

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85 See Ivanov-Razumnik, *Istoriia russkoy obshchestvennoy mysli*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. II, Petersburg 1908, pp. 451-453.

86 See N.Y. Grot v *oчерkakh i pis'makh*, p. 386.

87 N.Y. Grot, “Yeshcho o zadachakh zhurnala,” *Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii*, vol. 6, 1891, p. VI.

88 A.I. Vvedensky, *Sud'by filosofii v Rossii*, Moscow 1898.

89 See V.G. Beznosov, “Russkaya filosofii kontsa XIX-nachala XX v. o smysle zhizni i naznachenii cheloveka,” in: *Smysl zhizni v russkoy filosofii. Konets XIX-nachalo XX veka*, ed. A.F. Zamaleyev, Nauka, Petersburg 1995, pp. 342-349.

90 A.I. Vvedensky, *Usloviie pozvolitelnosti viery v smysl zhizni* (1896), reprinted in: *Smysl zhizni v russkoy filosofii*, pp. 40-74.

Seeking an answer to the question thus posed, he arrived at the conclusion that the fundamental and absolutely indispensable condition of experiencing a sense of life was faith in personal immortality. He considered it both a logical and a moral condition, since only faith in immortality could sustain the conviction of man's life having a supreme, divine goal, while it could be reconciled with Kant's moral imperative which demanded that the human person always be treated as an end, and never as a means – even by God himself.

Vvedensky formulated that conclusion in his polemic with Kareyev's publication entitled *Thoughts on the Foundations of Morality* (1895).<sup>91</sup> For Kareyev, too, sought philosophical justification of the belief in the sense of life, albeit he resolved the problem in an entirely different way.

Kareyev's reflections started from questioning the ethics of "reasonable egotism." Disagreeing with Chernyshevsky, he argued that a moral man could not be an egotist in either sense of the word. And yet, universal happiness could not be an individual's meaning of life, since that would have contradicted the principle of personal life being an end in itself – nor could an afterlife constitute the sense of man's life on earth, for that would have degraded the earthly existence. Human dignity demanded that the meaning of man's life be neither beyond him (in the happiness of others), nor above him (in a life thereafter). Consequently, man ought to seek a goal that would be non-egotistic, and yet his own, i.e., one with which he could identify entirely – a goal to be striven for in earthly life, without any assurance of its achievement, purely for one's own moral satisfaction.

In other words, Kareyev, too, opposed the utilitarianism and the social eudemonism of the 1860s, choosing the road of ethical idealism and moral perfectionism. He followed it, however, within a manifestly lay morality, involving neither God, nor immortality – not even as the Kantian "postulates of practical reason."

Grot's stance was more complex, albeit more eclectic, too. He contradicted eudemonism with Platonism and Christianity, arguing that the "ethics of happiness" debased the "moral will."<sup>92</sup> He thus opted for perfectionism, confusing it, however, with the Kantian ethics of duty: in his dissertation *On the Foundations of Moral Life and Activity* (1895) he declared straightforwardly that the complete code of higher morality had been established by Christ and philosophically justified by Kant. Simultaneously, he did not give up the Positivist aspiration to establishing a "scientific ethics," summoning psychology

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91 See, *Ibid.*, pp. 75-119.

92 N.J. Grot, "Osnovaniie npravstvennogo dolga," *Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii*, vol. 12, 1892, p. 15.

in his attempts at creating one. At this point, however, he parted ways with the scientific psychology, considering the supra-individual psyche to be the basis of morality and defining it with the help of Schopenhauer's concept of "will of the world" – albeit rather peculiarly interpreted. In the Russian thinker's version, the "will of the world" was endowed with qualities that made it a dream foundation for an ethics of spiritual perfection. Grot presented it as: (1) the constructive force protecting extra-individual life; (2) the force opposing the egotist, animal instinct of self-preservation; (3) the force aspiring to infinite perfection; and, finally, (4) the force directed at ideal, spiritual life.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, he rid the concept of Schopenhauer's pessimism, connecting it with the idea of personal immortality. And all the time he was convinced that he remained within the limits of "scientific ethics," proving "scientifically" that morality was founded on "the spirit's creative attempt at establishing and developing a higher psychological life in the world, beyond ourselves"<sup>94</sup> – rather than on the desire of individual or collective happiness.

The transitory character of Grot's philosophy was thus only too explicit. He went far beyond the limits of Positivist "scientific philosophy," without fully realizing it. The same was true of other philosophers of the Moscow Psychological Society and *Problems of Philosophy and Psychology* circles.

Attempts at overcoming Positivism were under way also in the domain of the philosophy of law. As early as the 1890s, two tendencies had crystallized to fight juridical Positivism for the sake of rehabilitating natural law. One was represented by the psychologism of Leon Petrażycki (1867-1931) and the other – by the neo-idealism of Pavel Novgorodtsev (1866-1924), the future founder of the Moscow School of Russian Jurisprudence. The climax of their respective scientific and political activities (both were eminent members of the Constitutional Democrats Party) fell to the years that surpass the chronology of this book<sup>95</sup> – and yet, the beginnings of their activities constitute an integral part of the panorama of worldview transformations in Russia at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the 1890s, Petrażycki was known as the author of German-language works defending the ethical, deontological function of law and propagating "a

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93 N.J. Grot, "Ustoi npravstvennoy zhizni i deyatelnosti," *Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii*, vol. 27, 1895. Quoted from reprint in *Smysl zhizni v russkoy filosofii*, pp. 35-36.

94 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

95 A multisided and comprehensive presentation of the two theorists' work is given in my book *Filozofia prawa rosyjskiego liberalizmu*, Ch. IV ("Leon Petrażycki: teoria świadomości prawnej wobec pozytywizmu prawniczego") and Ch. V ("Paweł Nowgorodtsev: neoidealizm i odrodzenie prawa naturalnego").

new legal discipline – the politics of law,” or the science of general rules of using laws as tools of conscious social engineering.<sup>96</sup> This placed him on the opposite side to the Positivist negation of an “ideal element” in law and the reduction of law to institutionalized coercion monopolized by the state. A logical consequence of this attitude was the postulate of overcoming the axiological neutrality of law with rebirth of the natural law. Similar ideas were held at the same time by German neo-Kantian, Rudolf Stammler with whom Petrażycki was later to fight for priority.<sup>97</sup> Both the theorists agreed that a literal comeback of the natural law was impossible – a new natural law ought to take into account the historical changeability of the content of particular legal norms, while retaining unchanged the ultimate goal and ideal of laws (Stammler called it “the natural law of shifting content”).

The specificity of Petrażycki’s standpoint consisted in his combining methodological Positivism – or program empiricism rejecting metaphysical assumptions – with radical criticism of legal Positivism – or the doctrine identifying law with orders and prohibitions whose unique source and sanction was state authority. Petrażycki unhesitatingly declared that such views were “an absolute legal idiocy” and testified to a total incapacity of “legal experience,” i.e., of feeling legal entitlement or legal obligation. On the other hand, however, he protested with equal vehemence against the non-historical abstraction of the classical natural law, emphasizing that law made a part of social reality that should be examined causatively and sociologically, while its presence is observed not only in circumstances marked by clearly defined regulations of “lawyers’ law.” Petrażycki’s definition of law was so broad and so different from the accepted norm that he was often accused of an anti-legalist tendency to dilute law in a multitude of socio-psychological phenomena. The reverse reaction was to charge Petrażycki with a “pan-juridical worldview” – not entirely off the mark, as he indeed perceived law as omnipresent in human life and considered jurisprudence the most important of the behavioral sciences.<sup>98</sup>

As a critic of legal Positivism, Petrażycki focused on two variants of that doctrine: the so-called nominal jurisprudence reducing lawyers’ tasks to a logical analysis of the existing jurisdiction, and the “jurisprudence of interests”

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96 *Fruchtverteilung beim Wechsel des Nutzungsberechtigten: drei Civilrechtliche Abhandlungen* (1892) and *Die Lehre Vom Einkommen vom Standpunkt des gemeinem Civilrechts* (2 volumes, 1893, 1895). The latter with annex Civic Politics and Political Economy, outlining the theory of legal politics.

97 See, A. Walicki, *Filozofia prawa rosyjskiego liberalizmu*, pp. 277-279.

98 Cf. K. Opalek, “Teoria Petrażyckiego a współczesna teoria prawa,” in: *Z zagadnień teorii prawa i teorii nauki L. Petrażyckiego*, Warsaw 1969, p. 129.

propagated by Rudolf Ihering and advising a pragmatic instrumentalization of laws in order to defend particular “practical interests.” Petrażycki devoted to them his two dissertations published in 1897 – namely, *On Fashionable Slogans in Legal Science* and *On the Duties of Legal Science in Russia*.<sup>99</sup>

The former was a smashing criticism of Ihering’s theory, accused by Petrażycki of abandoning two elementary principles of honest science: the subjective principle of a disinterested search for truth, and the objective principle of adequate logical proof. Besides, Petrażycki pointed out a similarity between the “jurisprudence of interests” and Bismarck’s *Realpolitik*, both subjecting truth and justice to egotistic interests and thus poisoning the soul of the German nation. A historical justification of that attitude toward law had been offered earlier by Ihering’s book on the spirit of Roman law where he argued that the font of ancient Romans’ virtues was their huge and shameless egoism. In fact – Petrazhitshy added – Ihering himself would not have gone as far as his theory allowed, since German lawyers were attached to the good tradition of their profession. Yet, the very emergence of the “jurisprudence of interests” signaled a cultural crisis – a general and profound “enchantment of minds and hearts.”<sup>100</sup>

Petrażycki was aware of the fact that his own postulated “politics of law” could evoke associations with the Ihering-propagated employment of law in the service of particular “practical ends.” That is why he so forcibly stressed that the birth of the science of the politics of laws could be interpreted as a rebirth of the natural law,<sup>101</sup> i.e., an attempt to bring the existing law closer to such legal norms that could pretend to universal validity, independently of particular interests or the conditions of time and place. Such norms – he argued – were already existing in civil law, applicable in any country whose economy was based on free contract and private property. Their discovery was owed to the ancient Romans and it was in that fact (rather than in the art of submitting law to egotist interests) that the universal significance of Roman law consisted.

In his dissertation *On the Duties of Legal Science in Russia*, Petrażycki completed those reflections with a pessimistic diagnosis of the state of jurisprudence and general legal culture in Russia. For many reasons – he wrote – Russians had not developed an authentic respect for law: their national soul now required therapy and Russian lawyers must therefore treat the principles of law

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99 Both essays were published as supplements of Petrażycki’s book *Prava “dobrovosestnovo vla deltsa” na dokhody stochki zreniia dogmyi i politiki chastnovo prava*, Petersburg 1897.

100 *Ibid.*, p. 420.

101 See *Die Lehre vom Einkommen*, vol. 2, Berlin 1895, p. 579.

and order as an object of special importance for a national rebirth. Utilitarian manipulations of law could bring Russia to results much worse than those observed in the West. Therefore, in the Russian conditions, meticulous observance of the existing laws – even the bad ones – was much better than manipulating law in order to promote anybody’s interests and goals – even the most rightful ones. Reform of the existing laws must not be combined with the anarchization of social life.<sup>102</sup>

Petrażycki believed that the necessary condition of legislative reforms’ effectiveness was their compatibility with the existing level of legal consciousness, i.e. with the psychological readiness of the people to accept the changes. Hence his warning against too radical changes that would surpass the “average resultant” of possible psychological adaptation. Such changes could bring on unintended consequences and even cause a regressive social evolution.

Unlike the Marxist evolutionists of the Second International who also warned against premature social changes, Petrażycki founded his idea of a desirable rhythm of social transformations on the psychological theory of law, rather than on historical materialism. He drew its initial outline in his *Sketches on the Philosophy of Law*, published in 1900,<sup>103</sup> where law was described as a psychological and spiritual phenomenon – an inner voice that authoritatively directs our actions, names our duties toward other people, our rights, our justified expectations and demands. The proper way to examine law was, according to Petrażycki, through analysis of the inner experience. For law, he claimed, was, in fact, a state of mind and, being that, it required the existence neither of the state, nor of any other form of social organization that would issue commands and support it by force. Treating law as something external – given to us or imposed on us by some supreme entity, such as “the People’s Will,” “the National Spirit,” or (especially) by a sovereign state authority – was thus nothing but an external projection of that which is inside – a production of phantasms or projected ideological hypostases.

To support those theses, Petrażycki summoned rather peculiar and purposefully provocative examples. Let us imagine – he wrote – an Earthman on Mars meeting a man-like creature who takes something from him and will not

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102 Only once did Petrażycki violate his own principle, signing – in 1906 – the famous Vyborg Manifesto that protested against the arbitrary dissolution of the first Duma by summoning the people to resist military recruitment and refuse to pay taxes. However, interviewed by Ariadna Tyrkova-Williams, he admitted to having done it under pressure, against legal logic (cf. A. Tyrkova-Williams, *Na put’akh k’svobode*, New York 1952, pp. 331-332).

103 L.I. Petrażycki, *Ocherki filosofii prava*, Petersburg 1900.



give it back; surely, the Earthman would feel that his justified rights had been violated, despite his being aware of the fact that no institutionalized Earthly legal order was obtained on Mars. The same goes for our relationship with animals: do we not feel that our dogs have certain rights and that their demands could be classified as “justified” – which we are obliged to fulfill, or “unjustified” – which we may ignore? The feeling of legal rights and duties does not need a real (i.e., external) existence of another subject. A superstitious or insane person might decide to sell his soul to the devil and sign a suitable contract – from the psychological point of view, that contract would function as a legal phenomenon, no different from the experience of law and duty connected with any other formal contract.

Despite appearances, Petrażycki’s psychologism had little in common with empirical psychology. His later pupils (G. Gurvitch and G.K. Guins) justly identified his method of gaining insight into the inner essence of things as close to phenomenology.<sup>104</sup> The observation might seem strange in the context of Husserl’s renowned “anti-psychologism” – yet, it is worth remembering that the father of phenomenology, Franz Brentano, was considered an extreme psychologist and is justly named in the genesis of Petrażycki’s thought.<sup>105</sup> Undoubtedly, Petrażycki created a specific phenomenology of law, rather than an empirical science of legal consciousness. His system emphasized the centrality of the normative principle in law, even to the point of defining law and morality as two fundamental variants of ethics. This situated it outside the Positivist naturalism, the latter theoretically supporting the idea of rebirth of the natural law and a general evolution of Russian philosophy toward ethical idealism.

An important part of Petrażycki’s system (developed chiefly in his later works)<sup>106</sup> was an emphasized distinction between moral consciousness and legal consciousness. Moral consciousness was, in his rendering, the imperative consciousness ensuing from a sense of duty, while legal consciousness was of an imperative-attributive nature, combining a sense of duty with a strong sense of

104 See, G.K. Guins, *L.I. Petrazhitsky: kharakteristika nauchnovo tvorchestva*, Harbin 1931, p. XXXIII; G. Gurvitch, *Petražitskij, Sovremyenniie zapiski*, vol. 47, Paris 1931, p. 480.

105 See, H. W. Babb, *Petražitskii: Theory of Law*, Boston University Law Review, vol. 18, 1938, p. 171.

Petrażycki’s predecessors in psychological interpretation of law were, among others, Wilhelm Wundt, Gabriel Tarde, Georg Jellinek and E.R. Bierling.

106 The main one of those works is the two-volume *Teoriia prava i gosudarstva v svyazi s teoriiei npravstvennosti*, Petersburg 1909-1910. A presentation of its content is outside the frame of the present book.

one's due rights and a readiness to actively fight for their enactment. Contrary to the popular Russian belief in morality being superior to law, Petrażycki boldly preached the thesis that, in terms of social function, legal psychology was of a greater importance than moral psychology since it promoted the individual's sense of dignity and active political involvement. He found unsatisfactory the moral idea of sainthood and love of one's neighbor – especially so in Russian conditions – giving priority to a stubborn defense of one's proper rights, treated (in keeping with the tradition of the Polish gentry) as a matter of honor,<sup>107</sup> rather than to the idea of moral excellence. The ideas were welcome within the circles of professional lawyers, for even the jurists were beginning to understand that the time had come for an active struggle for a just law and it was not enough to merely observe the already existing ones.

The two most important reviews of Petrażycki's *Sketches* were written by the leaders of the idealistic trend in Russian philosophy – Boris Chicherin and Prince Evgeny Trubetskoi.<sup>108</sup> Both the reviewers criticized Petrażycki's psychologism, while they approved of his crusade against legal Positivism. In Trubetskoi's opinion, however, Petrażycki lacked consistency: in his attack on legal Positivism, he did not definitively break off with philosophical Positivism and, for fear of metaphysics, turned to psychology – which meant stopping halfway between Positivism and idealism.

Pavel Novgorodtsev – not as original a thinker as Petrażycki, but a reliable one, dexterously combining the philosophy of law with the history of ideas – was not guilty of that inconsistency. From the very onset of his activity, he joined the intellectual trend rehabilitating the idea of the natural laws, combining it with neo-Kantianism, i.e., a supra-empirical and non-causal stand.<sup>109</sup> In his master's thesis entitled *The Historical School of Law, Its Genesis and Experience* (1891),<sup>110</sup> he sought a compromise between, on the one hand, the

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107 Petrażycki was born to a Polish gentry family near Vitebsk, Byelorussia, and was brought up on Polish patriotic traditions. Following the Riga Treaty (1921), he chose Polish citizenship, settled in Warsaw and took the chair of sociology at Warsaw University. His influence in Poland was enormous, and growing steadily. And yet, he ended his life with suicide (on May 15, 1931) – a fact explained by his disillusionment with the situation in Poland and a deep pessimism regarding the all-European condition.

108 See, B. Chicherin, "Psikhologicheskaya teoriia prava," *Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii*, vol. 55, 1900; E.N. Trubetskoi, "Filosofii prava professor L.I. Petrazhitskovo," *Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii*, vol. 57, 1901.

109 See, V.I. Savelyev, "Teoriia vozrozhdennoy yestestvennoy prava v uchenii P.I. Novgorodtseva," in: *Voprosy gosudarstva i prava v obshchestvennoy mysli Rossii XVI-XIX vv.*, Moscow 1979.

110 *Istoricheskaya shkola yuristov, eyo proiskhozhdeniie i sud'ba*, Moscow 1896.

tradition of the natural law defined as “the sum of ideal visions of law” and, on the other hand, the 19<sup>th</sup> century German legal historicism of Friedrich C. von Savigny. He presented Savigny as a thinker who, in fact, shared a number of natural-law opinions – e.g., that of true law being “discovered,” rather than “established” – and thus defended the thesis that the arbitrary will of a lawmaker could not be the exclusive source of law. That reasoning was combined with a criticism of the juridical rationalism of the Enlightenment which had become a vital part of the conservative-Romantic vision of history. Another possibility of reconciling the principle of historicism with the heritage of the natural law was offered by Hegelianism which, rather than promote the rejection of rationalism, proposed its transformation consisting of reshaping abstract rationalism into a historicized one that combined reason and history with the idea of a rational development.

In the final part of his book, devoted to the experience of historicism in the philosophies of law during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Novgorodtsev tried to prove that the 18<sup>th</sup> century, classical version of the natural law had been partially reborn in Ihering’s theory which, by emphasizing the teleological element in law, rehabilitated a purely rationalist, utilitarian attitude toward legislation that was criticized by Savigny’s conservative historicism. Novgorodtsev claimed, too, that the theory acknowledged the individual’s role in history that had been degraded in Hegel’s philosophy. He also shared Ihering’s approval of state Socialism, treating it as proof of the progressiveness of his views.

Novgorodtsev’s next book, *Kant and Hegel in Their Concepts of Law and the State* (1901)<sup>111</sup> was an attempt at counterpointing historical and Positivist refusal of the normative approach with a defense of the *Sollen* (that which should be) category from a Kantian standpoint. In his concept of positive law defined as a mechanism of external coercion, Kant severed the ties between morality and law – only to reconstitute them later on in his concept of the categorical imperative which was, in fact, a pioneer reinterpretation of the old idea of the natural law. According to Novgorodtsev, Kant agreed with the theorists of the natural law who claimed that there existed an eternal, extemporal point of view allowing man to judge the shifting content of empirical morality – he stressed, however, that the absolute measure was purely formal, its only demand being that our actions agree with the universality of reason and the principle of moral autonomy.

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111 *Kant i Gegel v ikh ucheniakh o pravie i gosudarstvie*, Moscow 1901 (the book was Novgorodtsev’s doctor thesis).

In Kant, Novgorodtsev thus discovered Stammler's idea of "the natural law with a shifting changing" which for many years seemed to him to be the only possible solution to the problem of natural law.

Another important theme of *Kant and Hegel...* was a reconciliation of Kant's subjectivism, accentuating moral will of constant self-improvement and unlimited development, with Hegel's objectivism, acknowledging the necessity of socially organized ethics. Novgorodtsev treated the theme in reference to the problem that lay at the core of the Chicherin – Soloviev controversy: is law (as Chicherin believed) an entity quite separate from morality, or should it rather be, (as Soloviev believed), a social institutionalization of the "moral minimum?"

A concise summary of Novgorodtsev's views was his lecture *On the Tasks of the Modern Philosophy of Law*, held in 1902 at Petersburg University. He proclaimed war on Positivism, historicism, naturalist evolutionism and pan-sociologism, in the name of idealism, moral autonomy of the individual and normative approach. Condemning all possible practical and utilitarian conditions in jurisdiction, he appealed for deducing laws from the "powerful and undeniable authority of moral consciousness."<sup>112</sup>

In other words, his was a program of overcoming the Positivist heritage through a consistent ethical idealism in philosophy and social sciences.

## **Positivist Psychologism and a Philosophy of God: The Theological Antropologism of Victor Nesselov**

The philosophical trends that crystallized on the pages of *Problems of Philosophy and Psychology* reached also the Spiritual Academies – a fact proved by the writing activity of Victor Nesselov (1863-1937), a professor of Kazan Spiritual Academy and author of the two-volume *Science of Man* (1898-1903). The first volume was *An Attempt at a Psychological History and Critique of the Fundamental Questions of Life*, and the second volume – *Metaphysics of*

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112 See, P.I. Novgorodtsev, *O zadachakh sovremennoy filosofii prava*, Petersburg 1902, pp. 7-8.

In the preceding year, Novgorodtsev held a lecture at the Psychiatric Society, entitled The Idea of Law in V.S. Soloviev's Philosophy, wherein he expressed his solidarity with Soloviev's idea of the "right to a respectable life" (see, P.I. Novgorodtsev, *Ob obshchestvennom ideale*, editing and introduction by A.W. Sobolev, Moscow 1991, pp. 525-539). A later evolution of Novgorodtsev's work is discussed in my *Filozofia prava rosyjskiego liberalizmu*.

*Life and the Christian Revelation*.<sup>113</sup> The very juxtaposition of the two titles characterizes the author's evolution of ideas, from psychology to metaphysics. Psychology as the starting point; metaphysics as the point of arrival – the same as in the case of Nikolai Grot and the philosophers of the Moscow Psychological Society circle.

Prior to Neslemov's emergence, the leading representative of philosophical thought in the Spiritual Academies had been Professor of the Moscow Academy, Victor Kudriavtsev-Platonov (1828-1891) – a figure nearly obsolete today, but in his lifetime considered the Academy's pride.<sup>114</sup> He established an outline of a philosophical system which he named "transcendental monism." The system's central thought was the thesis that the unique philosophically satisfactory way to overcome the dualism of matter and spirit was to acknowledge the existence of a supreme, absolute reality that towered above both the material and the spiritual worlds, uniting the two in itself. The division of reality to the material, the ideal (spiritual) and the absolute was echoed by the division of cognitive powers to the senses (source of empirical cognition), reason (source of "ideal" cognition) and *um* [Mind] – defined as the capacity of non-discursive, direct cognition of extrasensory, or divine, reality. Kudriavtsev believed his concept to overcome the unilateralism of both theretofore known types of philosophical monism, namely: materialist monism which declared material reality absolute, and idealist monism which reduced all things to spiritual reality.<sup>115</sup> Meanwhile, he

113 See. V.I. Nesmelov, *Nauka o cheloveke, vol. 1: Opyt psikhologicheskoy istorii i kritiki osnovnykh voprosov zhizni* (Kazan 1898); *vol. 2: Metafizika zhizni i khristianskoe otkroveniie* (Kazan 1903). Second edition of both volumes appeared in Kazan in 1907.

114 See the chapter on Kudriavtsev in: S.V. Kornilov, *Filosofia samoznaniia i tvorchestva. Portrety russkikh mysliteley*, Petersburg 1998, p. 54. Much attention is paid to Kudriavtsev by V.V. Zenkovsky in *A History of Russian Philosophy*, vol. 2, pp. 533-547). The most important of Kudriavtsev's works (collected in the three-volume edition *Sochineniia*, Sergiiev-Posad 1894) include: *Ob istochnike idei Bozhestva*, Moscow 1864; *Religiia, eyo sushchnost' i proiskhozhdeniie*, Moscow 1871; *O proiskhozhdenii organicheskikh sushchestv*, Moscow 1883; *Ob osnovnykh nachalakh filosofkovo poznaniia*, Kharkov 1885; *Nachalniie osnovaniia filosofii, 1-2*, Moscow 1889-1890; numerous articles in the periodicals: *Pravoslavnoe obozreniie*, *Vera i razum*, *Bogoslovsky vestnik*. The 3<sup>rd</sup> volume of Kudriavtsev's collected works' includes, amongst others, the following dissertations: *Teologicheskaia idea i materialism*, *Bezuslovnii progress i istinnoe sovershenstvovaniie roda chelovecheskovo*, and *Bessmertie dushi*.

115 Almost identical ideas had been developed in the 1840s by the Polish philosopher Bronislaw Ferdynand Trentowski: he, too, wrote about "three worlds" (the material, the ideal and the divine) and three cognitive powers (the highest of which he called "um"); he also considered his own philosophy to overcome, by universal synthesis, the

stressed that the intention of his system was to philosophically support the theist concept of a transcendent personal God and faith in the soul's immortality.

Nesmelov structured his philosophy on entirely different bases. Instead of the "top-down" way: from God as the key to understanding the material world and the world of thoughts – he chose the "bottom-up" way: from man to God, to the divine element in man's inner experience and self-knowledge.<sup>116</sup> His major ally in that search became – which may seem paradoxical – the philosophic master of Chernyshevsky, Ludwig Feuerbach. Feuerbach's concept of man being the key to understanding God, which located the theological mystery in anthropology, became, in Nesmelov's interpretation, an anthropological justification of the necessity of religion and a tool to defend Christianity. That claim, according to Nikolai Berdiaev, was the great philosophical merit of the modest Kazan theologian.<sup>117</sup> We may add that, in adapting Feuerbach to the needs of theology, Nesmelov had outrun the great Protestant theologians, Karl Barth and Paul Tillich, who organically included Feuerbach in the history of 19<sup>th</sup> century German theological thought.<sup>118</sup> In fact, he went further than the two, claiming that theologians needed Feuerbach not just in a negative sense – to criticize the traditional model of theology, but also in a positive sense – to construct a new theology, based on strong anthropological foundations.

Students of the Russian Spiritual Academies naturally associated Feuerbach with the Yurkevich-Chernyshevsky controversy – a controversy that was considered unresolved, or resolved in favor of Chernyshevsky. In order to develop their own opinions, the young clerics studied Feuerbach's books, rightly considering the author to be the chief inspiration for Chernyshevsky's

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unilateralisms of materialism and idealism. Kudriavtsev could have been familiar with the early German-language books by Trentowski – *Grundlage der universellen Philosophie* (Karlsruhe 1837) and *Vorstudien zur Wissenschaft der Natur* (Leipzig 1840). Yet, we do not need to surmise Trentowski's influence. During the crisis of absolute idealism in Germany, many versions of "speculative theism" had been proposed to overcome the unilateralism of Hegel's idealism and defend God's transcendence against rationalistic immanentism.

116 See, G. Florovsky, *Puti russkogo bogosloviia*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, YMCA Press, Paris 1983, p. 445.

117 N.A. Berdiaev, "Opyt filosofskogo opravdaniia khristianstva," in: Berdiaev, *Tipy religioznoy mysli v Rossii*, YMCA Press, Paris 1989, p. 325 (first published in the periodical *Russkaya mysl*, September 1909).

118 See, K. Barth, *Die Protestantische Theologie in 19. Jahrhundert* (Zurich 1952) and P. Tillich, *Perspectives on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Protestant Theology*, London 1967.

dissertation entitled *The Anthropological Principle in Philosophy*.<sup>119</sup> The interest in Feuerbach's anthropologism naturally led onto Positivist psychology, since Feuerbach was perceived as a "scientific" thinker, while psychology was being treated as an anthropological discipline. Psychology as taught at the Spiritual Academies – i.e., a speculative science of the soul – was an obvious anachronism that did not stand comparison with the achievements of scientific psychology. The fact had been evidently realized at the Kazan Academy. The founder of the "Kazan School" of religious studies, Benjamin Snegiriov (1844-1889), realized a considered program of psychological-anthropological scientific research on religious phenomena.<sup>120</sup> His achievements were highly valued and consciously referred to by Nesselov. Thanks to Snegiriov, Nesselov did not have to start his intellectual evolution from scratch, beginning at the period of the "dogmatic slumber."

The footnotes in *Science of Man* testify to Nesselov's competent knowledge of the contemporary philosophical and psychological literature. He was obviously influenced by the works of Wilhelm Wundt, the founder of "experimental psychology," who discussed psychology without employing the concept of soul, yet tried to complete his science of psychological facts with a peculiar "experimental metaphysics." He was also familiar with the texts of the English Positivist, George Henry Lewes, author of the book *Problems of Life and Mind*, who enjoyed popularity in Russia – despite accusing him of one-sidedness in his concept of empiricism, Nesselov discovered some support for his own research on the psychological genesis of metaphysical problems in Lewes's works.<sup>121</sup> He was, obviously, particularly interested in the psychological genesis of the idea of God (which he graphically distinguished from the concept of God). Nesselov firmly rejected the opinion (represented, amongst others, by Kurdiavtsev) that the source of that idea is God himself, influencing directly the human spirit; as for empirical subjectivism, extracting the idea of God from "numerous conditions of the human mind and life" – he

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119 See. N.K. Gavrushin, "Samosoznaniie kak tainstvo." Introduction to the anthology *Russkaya religioznaya antropologia*, ed. N.K. Gavrushin, vol. 1, Moscow 1997, p. 27 (the Anthology includes a reprint of Nesselov's book, *Nauka o cheloveke*).

120 Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

Snegiriov's works include: *Nravstvennoye chuvstvo. Opyt psikhologicheskovo analiza*, Kharkov 1890; *Religioznaya idea. Psikhologicheskyy ocheok*, Kharkov 1891; *Samosoznaniie i evo lichnost'*, Kharkov 1891; *Psikhologiya*, Kharkov 1893; "Psikhologiya i logika kak filosofskie nauki," *Pravoslavny Sobesednik* No 2, Kazan 1876; "Nauka o cheloveke, *Ibid.*, No 3, 1876.

121 V.I. Nesselov, "Nauka o cheloveke," vol. 1, in: *Russkaya religioznaya antropologia*, vol. 1, p. 291, 436.

called a “capital error.”<sup>122</sup> Believing his own theory to follow the “point of view of scientific criticism,” he summarized it as follows:

The idea of God expresses man’s awareness of an existing living Personality wielding the power of free causation and the dignity of the true goal. That consciousness comprises the entire content of the idea of God, it being the only content of man’s knowledge about God. Man can imagine God as either a carnal, or a non-carnal entity; either originating in time, or timeless; either present in a particular place, or omnipresent – in other words, there may be many visions of God, largely different from one another, and even mutually contradictory. And yet, despite all the differences in the content of human thinking about God, the idea of God always remains the same and unchangeable.<sup>123</sup>

The idea of God, thus conceived, stemmed – according to Nesselov – from the twofold, real-ideal character of human personality. Ludwig Feuerbach rendered it optimally, arguing that the idea of God as an objectification of man’s spiritual nature, which made anthropology the key to theology. The author of *Science of Man* embraced the thesis wholeheartedly. At the same time, however, he accused Feuerbach of inconsistency and inner contradiction, claiming that, having started on the right track, he stopped halfway. Instead of seeing his own theory as a potent argument for the existence of God, Feuerbach found it a justification of materialism and atheism – he even began fantasizing on the link between religion and human egotism, being in fact aware that his own concept proved the exact opposite. He had coined the idea that man – directly and spontaneously – perceived his own self as infinite and unconditional, and yet he refrained from drawing hence the conclusion that the observation was tantamount to discovering in man an extrasensory, divine reality.<sup>124</sup>

In his own interpretation of the crucial sense of Feuerbach’s system, Nesselov arrived at a conclusion that was diametrically opposite to Chernyshevsky’s anthropological materialism. By his rendering, the greatest achievement of the author of *The Essence of Christianity* was his discovery that – rather than *assume* the objective existence of an ideal being as a result of reasoning – man *directly realizes* the actual existence of two different worlds –

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122 Ibid., pp. 395-397.

123 Ibid., pp. 397-398.

124 Ibid., pp. 401-404. The cited interpretation of Feuerbach’s philosophy is a certain simplification, insufficiently acknowledging the fact that Feuerbach – rather than consider himself a plain atheist – claimed to have discovered a vital (albeit mystified) truth about Christianity on which he intended to found a new religion based on the idea that “man is God to man.” He wrote about it directly in the final chapter of his book, *On the Essence of Christianity*. All in all, however, it only confirmed Nesselov’s claim that Feuerbach’s system could be interpreted in religious terms.



the physical and the spiritual – within himself. Thus, rather than merely *believe* in the supernatural world, man directly *knows* of its existence.<sup>125</sup>

God was thus discovered within the human psyche, i.e. transferred from the otherworldly heaven to an area accessible to empirical psychological examination. The operation was obviously reminiscent of the psychologization of law in Petrażycki’s theory.

In volume two of *Science of Man*, Nesmelov allowed himself more freedom in developing his religious-metaphysical ideas. He considered the idea of Godmanhood and analyzed the paradoxical nature of the world as being, and yet not being, God’s revelation. He also ventured, rather unconventionally, on ethical grounds, promoting for example, the idea of universal forgiveness. He boldly pointed out Christianity’s irreducibility to the truths of reason, calling it an “inconceivable thing.” Yet, he claimed that his principal objective was a *scientific* examination of man’s natural striving toward an ideal world. Tertullian’s *credo quia absurdum est* was, in his opinion, simply not enough.<sup>126</sup> After all – he argued – rationality of faith could be proved psychologically natural and logically possible. Christianity could and should be presented as a “philosophy of life and spirit,” accessible and convincing also to non-believers.<sup>127</sup>

In the final part of the book, Nesmelov specified those views, emphasizing that it was impossible to transform the extrasensory truth of Christianity into an experimental truth of positive science. Yet, while Christianity remained reliant on faith, attempts could be made to understand why Christians believed as they did. The task was to “link religious ideas to precise facts from the scientific knowledge of existence” in order to “have, in a purely scientific sense, a positive foundation for one’s own *religious belief* in the reality of the extra-rational contents of the Christian revelation.”<sup>128</sup>

Evidently, the project had little in common with both the anti-rationalistic “philosophy of faith,” and the neo-Romantic anti-scientistic rebellion – nor did it follow the religious philosophy typical of Soloviev (whose name, incidentally, is never quoted in *Science of Man*). Rather, it was an attempt at reconciling Positivism with the Christian religion, free from typically Orthodox qualities and echoing the attempts made by the Positivist philosophers (e.g. Grot) to overcome the scientific limitations of Positivism by a philosophical reflection on psychological data. It seemed, then, that a thinker of that kind would not

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125 Ibid., p. 404.

126 Ibid, vol. 2, pp. 7-8.

127 Ibid., p. 9.

128 Ibid., pp. 332-333.

arouse interest in the period of a flourishing religious-philosophical renaissance in Russia.

However, the opposite became true, thanks to the abovementioned essay by Berdiaev of 1909.<sup>129</sup> Berdiaev, in some respects, valued Nesmelov's thoughts higher than Soloviev's, believing that the former profoundly expressed "the truth of religious anthropology."<sup>130</sup> He portrayed Nesmelov as a clergyman of an astonishingly lay mentality, a faithful son of the Church who was also a ruthless critic of official religiosity. The central and most innovative was, in his opinion, Nesmelov's religious reinterpretation of Feuerbach's system. No doubt, he made use of it in his own philosophy marked by a radically anthropological and anthropocentric – rather than theo-cosmic – interpretation of Christianity.<sup>131</sup>

A serious, thorough assessment of Nesmelov's work has been offered by two eminent Orthodox clergymen – Father Gregory Florovsky in his excellent *Roads of Russian Theology*, and Father Vasilii Zenkovsky in his classical *History of Russian Philosophy*.

Florovsky praised Nesmelov for employing the "bottom-up" way in theology – rather than the "top-down" approach typical of Patristic studies and scholasticism.<sup>132</sup> He accepted Nesmelov's thesis that the "ideal reality" of man's personality directly proved God's existence, so that even man's fall – caused by his wish to become God – testified to the fact that the human being was not a natural slave of the natural world. At the same time, Florovsky saw Nesmelov's philosophy as an attempt at an empirical, rational, Positivist-pragmatic justification of Christianity<sup>133</sup> – moreover, an attempt deprived of a sense of history, since it ignored the question of the Church as the historical bearer of Christianity. All in all, Nesmelov's book was, in Florovsky's opinion, a document of the new times that were marked by the search for the Christian truth, yet still full of doubts.<sup>134</sup>

Zenkovsky, on the other hand, was all in favor of Nesmelov. He emphasized the strong influence of the German "psychology of consciousness" [*Bewusstseinspsychologie*] on Nesmelov's system, simultaneously pronouncing the Kazan theologian a precursor of religious existentialism.<sup>135</sup> While he

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129 N.I. Berdiaev, *Opyt filosofskogo opravdaniia khrestianstva*.

130 *Ibid.*, pp. 304, 326.

131 Cf. Y.P. Ivonin, *Mezhdru garmoniei i vosstaniem (Problema sotsyalnogo ideala v russkoy filosofii "Serebrannogo veka")*, part 2, Novosybirsk 1997, pp. 59-60.

132 G. Florovsky, *Puti*, p. 445.

133 *Ibid.*, pp. 448-449.

134 *Ibid.*, p. 450.

135 V.V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, vol. 2, pp. 561-562.

distanced himself from Neshelov's interpretation of the entire content of Christian beliefs, he praised its main part which consisted of a reconstruction of the Christian science of man. Yet, he argued against Neshelov's closeness to Feuerbach which he believed to be excessive, writing:

Feuerbach's anthropologism had been the crowning product of the religious immanentism that was so precious to Berdiaev; Neshelov's anthropologism, however, demands a movement toward transcendence, a soaring toward God as the Absolute.<sup>136</sup>

The opinion seems right, almost obvious – with one reservation, however: soaring toward God was, in Neshelov's system, a way from psychology to metaphysics, from immanence to transcendence – and thus, after all, a “bottom-up way,” to use Florovsky's terminology.

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136 Ibid., p. 576.



## Chapter 20

# Metaphysical Idealism

The years 1901-1902 shall be regarded as the starting point of a Russian religious-philosophical renaissance. A series of religious-philosophical meetings was initiated by Dmitrii Merezhkovsky and his wife Zinaida Gippius at the end of 1901, the aim being the overcoming of antireligious attitudes by the intelligentsia and the opening of the Russian Orthodox Church to contemporary culture.<sup>1</sup> *Problems of Idealism*, a series of articles published one year later, propagated a strident criticism of positivist scientism as well as an idea of a new philosophical idealism, which would be autonomous of science and would courageously rehabilitate metaphysical concepts.

Despite all their impressiveness, these intellectual events were neither a sudden nor an unexpected breakthrough. They were preceded by more than twenty-five years of gradual undermining of the dominance of materialism and positivism in Russian culture, and the sustained tradition of philosophical maximalism, which sought to answer fundamental questions related to the meaning of the world and human life. The Russian intelligentsia, capable of making the natural sciences a substitute for religion, initially used principled secularism as a shield, only to give it up later when it could no longer endure positivist philosophical asceticism, which - to make matters even worse - was subordinated to the strict discipline of scientism. In the twilight of the century, it was already more and more apparent that the triumph of the radical “enlightenment” [*prosvetitel'stvo*] of the 60s was not complete and that the “nihilistic” approach to metaphysical idealism had failed to solidly take root in Russia.

At this point, it is worth mentioning that the professionalization and institutionalization of Russian philosophy posed an important step toward a retreat from “enlightenment.” Both processes were already discussed in relation

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1 With permission granted by Metropolitan Antoni of Petersburg, and “half-permission” granted by the Director General of the Holy Synod, Konstantin Pobedonostsev, the first of these meetings was held on 29 November 1901. The questions discussed during these meetings surpassed both the frame of Church orthodoxy and that of political “correctness” and therefore, eventually were banned – the last one took place in April 1903.

to the activity of Nikolai Grot, who (together with Soloviev) in 1889 founded the Moscow Psychological Society, which was publishing an outstanding periodical *Problems of Philosophy and Psychology* [*Voprosy Filosofii i Psikhologii*]. In 1897, the Petersburg Philosophical Society was established; with famous national (Alexander Vvedenski, Boris Chicherin and Lev Lopatin) and foreign philosophers (Herbert Spencer, Charles Renouvier, Kuno Fischer, Wilhelm Windelband, Hermann Cohen and Wilhelm Wundt) sitting on its management board. In a few years, in 1902, Sergei Trubetskoi founded a student society at Moscow University, the Historico-Philosophical Society. It had its own religious-philosophical section, which in 1905 transformed into the Religious-Philosophical Vladimir Soloviev Society. In 1907, such a society was set up in Petersburg. This practice institutionalized philosophy in Russia, thus promoting a professional philosophical culture outside of academic centers. This pluralistic structure was an effective weapon in the fight against the politicization of philosophy. Ever since then, distancing oneself from revolutionary movement and radical public opinion was much easier for philosophers. This distance, as it turned out, had a beneficial impact on metaphysical idealism, which tackled problems that thus far constituting the religious domain.

## **Extending the Hegelian Tradition**

Notwithstanding the blistering attack of radical “enlighteners” on idealist philosophy, the further development thereof has not been rendered impossible. Boris Chicherin, a student of Granovsky, personified a link between the Hegelian philosophy of the 40s and Russian philosophical thought of the post-reform period of Alexander II, and so symbolized the continuity of the development of philosophical idealism; a continuity made all the more meaningful given that it was not until the 70s when Chicherin revealed his speculative views. At the time, he actively engaged himself in a fight with the dominant philosophical orientations and opposed “mysticism in science,” a current represented, to his mind, by Soloviev.

An in-depth analysis of Chicherin’s philosophy can be found in a chapter devoted to his philosophy as a whole. Here, it suffices to say that he, together with Soloviev, was involved in philosophical neo-idealism in Russia and enjoyed deep respect among its adherents. Prince Evgeny Trubetskoi, an author of many monographs on Soloviev, voiced this opinion in his works. Invited with his brother Sergei to a meeting with the patriarch of Russian Hegelianism in his youth, he established regular, valuable intellectual contact with Chicherin, even

though their first conversation already revealed vast differences between the two generations of Russian philosophical idealists. The Trubetskoi brothers disliked Chicherin's criticism of Soloviev, whereas Chicherin, unlike Sergei Trubetskoi, was unenthusiastic about F.A Trendelenburg, who, advancing from Aristotelian realism, directed his criticism at Hegel.<sup>2</sup>

Another philosopher who combined the Hegelian doctrine of the 40s with anti-positivist neo-idealism of *fin de siècle*, was the brother of the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, Pavel Bakunin (1820-1900). His two books – *A Belated Voice from the Forties* (1881) and *Foundations of Faith and Knowledge* (1886) – are the religious reflections of a romantic against a Hegelian background,<sup>3</sup> a belated echo of the discussions held in the Stankevich Circle in the late 1830s. Bakunin's pantheistic vision of a world animated by the "breath of the Absolute" is combined with theist and personalist motifs, a defense of the immortality of the soul, and a romantic cult of womanhood. Hegelian dialectics makes its appearance in the model of a "universal dispute" – the reciprocal negation of particular entities struggling with each other and attempting to devour each other. This "dispute," according to Bakunin, only died down in the presence of beauty. Man's mission was to transcend his sinful self-affirmation in his own "particularity." Thanks to the bonds linking it to the Absolute, the human mind is capable of grasping the world as a whole and of transcending its own subjectivity through its understanding of reality as a higher rational unity of opposites.

Bakunin formulated his ideas in conscious opposition to positivism, which he accused of overturning the "mystical ladder" reaching from earth to heaven. As a belated romantic he was an isolated thinker and found few readers, although his *Foundations of Faith and Knowledge* was enthusiastically praised by Tolstoy.<sup>4</sup>

Another variant of a broadly conceived Hegelianism was the philosophical theory of the dramatist Alexandr Sukhovo-Kobylin (1817-1903). His philosophical writings remained unpublished, and it is only recently that a short account has been published of his three-volume manuscript dealing with the nature of the universe [*Ucheniie Vsemira*] and the philosophy of the spirit.<sup>5</sup>

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2 See E.N. Trubetskoi, *Zproshlogo. Vospominaniia*. Tomsk 2000, pp.169-171

3 See V. V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, trans. George L. Kline (2 vols.; London 1953), vol. 2, p. 629.

5 See *Istoriia filosofii v SSSR*, ed. V. E. Evgrafov (M, 1968), vol. 3, pp. 321-83. The chapter on Sukhovo-Kobylin was written by I. A. Korkhova.

In contrast to Chicherin, who was a strong opponent of Darwinian evolutionism, Sukhovo-Kobylin appears to have thought of his own philosophy as a specific synthesis of Hegelian and Darwinian ideas. In fact, he considered Darwinian theory to be part of the Hegelian teaching on the dialectical development of the Absolute Idea. In his historiosophical conceptions, he combined Hegelianism with social Darwinism, and stressed the importance in society of the struggle for survival, natural selection, and the rights of the stronger. He foretold the victory of reason in the coming final epoch, interpreting it as the victory of a higher race directed by an aristocracy of the spirit.

As Sukhovo-Kobylin's philosophical writings are not available in print, it is difficult to analyze or assess them adequately. Nevertheless, in view of prevailing opposition to positivism and naturalism among the Russian Hegelians, this attempt to incorporate positivistic naturalism into a system based on metaphysical idealism is worth mentioning as an interesting exception.

Hegelians in Russia in the second half of the 19th century also included Nikolai Debolsky (1842-1918), professor at the St. Petersburg Theological Academy and author of an excellent translation of Hegel's *Logic*. Debolsky, a mathematician by training, made an attempt to reconcile Hegelian rationalism with traditional Christian theism. In his chief work, *The Philosophy of Phenomenalistic Formalism* (2 vols. 1892-95),<sup>6</sup> he tried to make a clear distinction between the infinite reason of the Absolute and its individualization – finite human reason. The fundamental mistake of Hegelian philosophy, according to Debolsky, was that it identified human reason with Absolute Reason; Hegel also erred in equating logic with ontology – in reality his logic was not a “system of being” but only a “system of possible ideas about being.” Furthermore, Hegel paid too little attention to the relative validity and autonomy of empirical reasoning and formal logic. It was in fact Debolsky's interest in reviving formal logic that led him to try and bring Hegelian dialectics closer to pre-Kantian rationalism.<sup>7</sup>

Debolsky defined his own philosophical position as formalistic meta-empiricism, which he opposed both to empiricism and mystical conceptions of immediate non-discursive cognition. Every experience, he argued, should be analyzed into its empirical and meta-empirical, phenomenalistic and

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6 *Filosofii fenomenal'nogo formalizma*. Of Debolsky's other works, mention should be made of his *Filosofii budushchego. Soobrazheniia o eyo nachale, predmete metode i sisteme* (1882). In the introduction to this work, Debolsky outlines the evolution of his philosophical ideas.

7 Tschizevskij, *Gegiel v Rossii*, p. 303.



metaphysical aspects. Meta-empirical cognition enables the human mind to acquire knowledge about Absolute Reason, but the mind cannot come to know the reality of the Absolute because only its formal aspect is accessible to cognition. It is not possible to grasp the meaning of the absolute First Principle through reasoning, or through mystical contemplation, because the Absolute only reveals itself to man in the formal aspects of the world of phenomena. Finite individual human reason cannot penetrate the inner essence of the Absolute, but its formalism is a reflection of the formalism of Absolute Reason.

The late Russian Hegelians had no heirs; it is true that the Constitutional Democrats borrowed certain ideas from Chicherin, but they were interested only in his philosophy of law and the state, not in his reform of dialectics or metaphysical conceptions. There was a tremendous revival of interest in Hegel under the shadow of Marxism (in this case, Plekhanov's contribution was of peculiar importance), but this was, of course, an entirely different, materialistic trend in the reception of Hegelianism.

## **Aleksei Kozlov and Neo-Leibnizianism**

It was the philosophy of Soloviev which posed as an impulse prompting the rebirth of metaphysical idealism in Russia. As has already been mentioned, in turn, the focal point of reference to Soloviev constituted the "positivist philosophy" of the late-Schelling period, which supported the idea of a downfall of Hegel's absolute idealism. This was supposed to be achieved through the rehabilitation of the positive data of revelation, the reestablishment of reality in the material world (which in Hegel's philosophy was reduced to the mere alienation of self-consciousness) and through the acceptance of positive proof of revelation. The Russian religious philosophy of the "religious-philosophical renaissance" was based exactly on this model of reasoning. Invoking Slavophiles and Soloviev, Berdiaev called this combination of philosophy with religion a characteristic feature of Russian philosophy. For this reason, he described the late Schelling as "largely [a] Russian philosopher."<sup>8</sup>

By virtue of comparison, it is worth noting that the alleged similarity of the Schellingian "philosophy of revelation" and "Slavic spirit" was also highlighted by the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz in his Paris lectures. As early as June of 1842, six months after Schelling started lecturing in Berlin, he publically declared his solidarity with a new current in German philosophy: "Schelling, the most

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8 N. Berdiaev, *Sobranie sochinenii, vol. 3 - Tipy religioznoj mysli v Rosii*, Paris 1989, p.693.

outstanding of the German philosophers, now formulates in Berlin his theories, elements of which can be found in the works of Polish poets.”<sup>9</sup>

The spiritual monadism of Leibniz constituted another source in the Russian reconstruction of metaphysical idealism. Monadism was the main source of the philosophy of Aleksei Kozlov (1831-1901), a student of Gustav Teichmüller, who lectured on neo-Leibnizian philosophy at the University of Dorpat. By the way, it also should be stressed that Wincenty Lutosławski, a neo-Romantic ideologist of messianism, an internationally recognized expert on Plato, was one of Teichmüller’s students.

Like Soloviev, Kozlov rejected idealism in the narrow sense of the word, i.e. the monistic view of the world as pure thought; he called this interpretation of idealism the typical philosophy of an era of transition, a kind of compromise between spiritualism and materialism or between theism and atheism. Unlike Soloviev, however, he was not concerned with restoring the links between philosophy and religion or making a philosophical interpretation of Christian truths; on the whole he confined himself to strictly philosophical problems and attempted to work out the ontological and epistemological foundations of spiritualism. This is what his biographer, S. A. Askoldov, had in mind when he stated that the ideas of Kozlov and Soloviev are “one and the same problem, approached from different ends, as it were.”<sup>10</sup>

Kozlov only began to study philosophy seriously when he was nearly 40, after coming across a book on Schopenhauer by J. Frauenstädt. A few years later, he published a work on the philosophy of Hartmann (*Sushchnost’ mirovogo processa, ili filozofija biezsonatielnogo E. fon Gartmanna*, vol. 1-2, 1873-1875), and in 1875 he was appointed to the chair of philosophy at the University of St. Vladimir in Kiev. In 1878, he published a book about Dühring (*Filozofija diejstwitielnosti, izloženiye sistemi Djuringa*) in which he polemicized with the positivist conception of “scientific philosophy.”<sup>11</sup> He

9 A Mickiewicz, *Dzieła*, vol. 10, Warsaw 1955, p.411. Mickiewicz meant messianist ideas of Zygmunt Krasiński, and his own. Cf. A. Walicki, *Filozofia a mesjanizm. Studia z dziejów filozofii i myśli społeczno-religijnej mesjanizmu polskiego*, Warsaw 1970, pp.46-52. On the influence of Schellingian criticism of Hegel on the Polish romantic philosophers, see A. Walicki, “‘Filozofia narodowa,’ romantyzm i kryzys ‘absolutnego idealizmu’” [in:] *ibid.*, *Między filozofią, religią i polityką. Studia o myśli polskiej epoki romantyzmu*, Warsaw 1983, pp.100-156.

10 Cf. S.A. Askoldov, *Aleksiej Aleksandrowicz Kozlov*, Moscow 1912, p.217. The author of this book was an illegitimate son of Kozlov, whereas Kozlov himself was an illegitimate son of I.A. Pushkin, a distant relative of Alexander Pushkin.

11 Other works of Kozlov include *Filozofskie etudy* (1896) and *Rieligiia grafe L.N. Tolstogo, ego uczenie o zhizni I lubvi* (1896).

began publication of “*The Philosophical Quarterly*” [“*Filosofskij Triochmiesjacznik*”] in 1885, the first philosophical journal in Russia, but he soon had to give it up as a result of a serious disease (an attack of apoplexy) that left his right side paralyzed for six months. His biographer suggests that by forcing him to concentrate on his inner self for so long, this illness allowed him to experience the substantiality of the Ego and thus contributed to the ultimate shape of his metaphysics.

In 1888, Kozlov again started to publish occasional issues of a new journal, “*My Own Word*”, in which he expounded his mature philosophical ideas (he was the sole contributor to the journal, which appeared at irregular intervals). Of the articles published in this journal, the most important is the philosophical dialogue “Conversations with a Petersburgian Socrates,” in which the Petersburgian Socrates represents the author’s views while his chief opponent is the positivist Shugaer. Other “contributors” included the brothers Ivan and Alyosha Karamazov; no doubt this was Kozlov’s way of suggesting that his philosophy offered an answer to the “cursed questions” posed by Dostoevsky.

The point of departure for philosophical speculation, according to Kozlov, can be neither the notion of “pure being” (as in Hegelian logic) nor Hume’s description of the mind as a “bundle of sense impressions.” An analysis of consciousness shows that it can be divided into primary consciousness (the sum of simple immediate sense experiences) and derivative, or complex, consciousness (the totality of all mental acts). Within primary consciousness, it is possible to distinguish between (1) an awareness of the content of experiences, (2) an awareness of one’s acts, and (3) an awareness of the “I-hood,” of one’s own identity as an individual spiritual substance. It is within and by means of the “I-hood” that a synthesis takes place between the awareness of experiences and an awareness of one’s acts, allowing for a transition to complex consciousness. The “I-hood” is therefore a prerequisite of reason and consciousness, and there can be no justification or ignoring of it as a category of being, as with both empiricism and idealistic monism. The knowing subject is therefore a substance and not an empty vessel; discounting all concrete attributes of being does not empty it of content, but leads to the concept of the “I” as a simple, irreducible spiritual monad.

Kozlov treated the spatio-temporal world as the sum of states of consciousness. He differed from Kant in not allowing for space and time as categories of *a priori* knowledge, but he was even more opposed to the mechanistic associationism of empiricists. Basically, he saw the world as a system in which an infinite plurality of spiritual substances interact with one another. What we call material objects, he suggested, are really symbols of substance with which we happen to be interacting. Time and space are also

symbols: space is a symbol of the interconnection of substances, whereas time symbolizes the fact that substances, though themselves unchanging, are variable and mobile in their nonessential attributes. The network of mutual relationships linking substances is non-temporal, but owing to the narrow grasp of our consciousness we cannot encompass that network as a whole; hence we move over it from point to point, thus arriving at the notions of “before,” “now,” and “after.” The world evolves, but in a logical rather than a temporal sequence. Every moment of being is determined by all other points of the sequence within which the substance is developing, not excluding those which from a temporal point of view appears to be in the future.

The name Kozlov gave to his philosophy was “pan-psychism.” He also used the term “pluralistic monism”; the point of this self-contradictory label was to show that the principle of pluralism (the infinite plurality of separate spiritual substances) does not nullify the unity of the world, since all substances are linked to the central substance, or God.

The main source of Kozlov’s philosophy was of course the monadism of Leibniz and the views of his 19<sup>th</sup> century continuators, especially Gustav Teichmüller and Rudolf Hermann Lotze who founded “theistic idealism.” Just as Lutosławski, Kozlov also followed Leibniz in his conception of immortality based on a certain version of the idea of reincarnation.

Kozlov’s leading disciple was N. O. Lossky (1870-1965), who, as was mentioned earlier, attempted to combine a spiritual monadism with Soloviev’s metaphysics of “all-unity.”<sup>12</sup> Kozlov’s ideas were also developed by his son, S. A. Askoldov (1870-1945), who was one of Lossky’s colleagues at the university. Lossky and Askoldov were active in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and therefore their work does not fall within the scope of this book.

Among the philosophers active in 19<sup>th</sup> century, Petr Astafiev (1846-1893) was also in favor of Kozlov’s pan-psychism and the author of *Faith and Knowledge in Unity of World Conception* (Moscow, 1893).<sup>13</sup> A student of Teichmüller, Evgeny Bobrov (1867-1933) was the author of a series of books published, amongst others, in Warsaw, where he had occupied the Chair of

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12 Lossky is an author of an article on Kozlov, “Kozlov: His Pan-Psychism” (*Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii*), vol. 58, 1901. Vasily Zenkovsky in his *History of Russian Philosophy* described the philosophy of Kozlov and Lossky in a chapter “Neoleibnizianism in Russian Philosophy” (cf. V.V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, vol. 2, pp. 631-676).

13 *Vera i znaniie i yedinstvie mirovozzrieniia: opyt nachal kriticheskoi monadologii*, Moscow 1983.

Philosophy since 1906.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, there was Nikolai Bugaev (1837-1903), a professor of mathematics at Moscow University, and father of the poet Andrei Bely. Nikolai Bugaev developed a theory of “evolutionary monadology,” according to which the world is composed of autonomous spiritual monads that derive perfection through the process of creative evolution.<sup>15</sup>

## Lev Lopatin and Spiritualistic Personalism

A thinker who was close to Kozlov, yet occupied a separate place in Russian philosophy, beyond the neo-Leibnizian frame, was Lev Lopatin (1855-1920) – a philosopher and psychologist, professor at Moscow University, and, for many years (following Grot’s death), president of the Psychological Society; he was also a close friend of Soloviev.<sup>16</sup> An integrating figure in the philosophic community of Moscow, he made his home a place for meetings and discussions.

Lopatin’s major work, *Positive Tasks of Philosophy*, had two volumes, each of them a diploma dissertation: the first volume, *The Domain of Speculative Questions* (1886) was Lopatin’s master’s thesis,<sup>17</sup> while the second volume, *Law of Causative Association as the Foundation of Speculative Knowledge about Reality* (1891) was his PhD thesis which won him the Chair of Philosophy at Moscow University. The work as a whole was both an outline of a consistent philosophical system and a program of employing philosophy in the task of

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14 See E.A. Bobrov, *Novaia rekonstruktsiya monadologii Leibnitsaa*, Dorpat 1896; *O samosoznani*, Kazań 1898; *O poniatii bytija*, Kazań 1898; *Bytie individualnoje i bytije koordinalnoje*, Yuryev 1900; *Filosofia v Rosii*, Kazań 1899-1902. In Warsaw, Bobrov published *Filosofskie etudy* (1911), *Istoricheskoe vviedenie v logiku* (1913), *Istoricheskoe vviedenie v psikhologiu* (1913) and last, but not least, *Istoria novoj filosofii* (1915).

15 This theory, advanced in “Osnovnyje nachala evolutsiionoi monadologii” (*Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii*, vol. 17, 1893) earned the high esteem of V. Zenkovsky (cf. V.V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, vol. 2, pp.675-676).

16 The relationship of Lopatin’s and Soloviev’s philosophical ideas has been thoroughly examined by A. Loslev in his monograph, *Vladimir Soloviev i ego vremia*, Moscow 1990, pp. 546-571.

To celebrate the 30th anniversary of Lopatin’s academic and didactic activity, the Moscow Psychological Society published his collected essays, *Filosofsky sbornik. Lvu Mikhailovichu Lopatinu k tridsatiletiiu nauchno-pedagogicheskoy deatelnosti*, Moscow 1912.

17 In pre-Revolutionary Russia, the master’s degree corresponded to the present PhD, while the doctoral degree was the equivalent of the present post-doctoral degree.

resolving a great problem of civilization – namely, the crisis of European culture marked by the increasing relativism of all values.

In philosophy, the crisis was signaled – according to the author – by the decline of great metaphysical systems, while the tasks of philosophy were narrowed down to Positivist generalizations of scholarly achievements or – in the case of the Kantians – to epistemological questions. All metaphysics had been accused of essentialism, even though the term properly applied only to Plato and the medieval “realists.” The generally accepted attitude was phenomenalism, negating the possibility of knowing things themselves – a logical consequence of empiricism, for the very essence of absolute empiricism bred radical skepticism, irrevocably transformed into *absolute* nihilism that entirely negated the objectiveness of reality.<sup>18</sup> A consistently empirical, inductive philosophy had to result in a negation of the objective world – both material and spiritual. And by negating materialist ontology, it became pure idealism – by negating the objectiveness of a spiritual reality, it justified “theoretical egoism.”<sup>19</sup>

According to Lopatin, there existed two versions of an alternative to pure empiricism: either rational metaphysics – i.e., an ontology of reason based on non-empirical truths, or mysticism – i.e., ontology of faith. By this rendering, materialism became a variant of the philosophy of faith, since it relied on an irrepressible, uncritical belief in the objectivity and empirical cognizability of the external world. At the same time, however, it was a philosophy requiring constant proof of its own arguments, which made it alien to the original “philosophers of faith” (like Jacobi, Reid or Hamilton) who referred only to a direct obviousness that needed no proof.<sup>20</sup> Besides, materialism was an exceptionally one-sided philosophy, mechanistic and reductionist, identifying relative qualities with their own final nature and defining existence as an accumulation of coincidences. It also negated the existence of an absolute principle and the spiritual values rooted therein – simultaneously refusing to be reconciled with the elementary demands of philosophical criticism. For neither does experience offer us grounds for accepting the necessity of matter as an external substrate, nor – having accepted matter – do we have grounds for deducing consciousness from it.<sup>21</sup>

Having rejected both Positivist phenomenalism and materialism, Lopatin was not satisfied with the mystical attitude of the philosophy of faith either,

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18 L.M. Lopatin, *Polozhitelnie zadachi filosofii*, vol. 1, Moscow 1886, pp. 79-80.

19 Ibid., p. 86. Lopatin used the term “theoretical egoism” for a solipsism.

20 Ibid., pp. 162, 173-176.

21 Ibid., p. 137.

believing that mysticism was but the reverse side of skepticism, rather than its true master. Therefore, he tried to construe a rational metaphysics that would defend the substantiality of the human spirit, freedom and creativity, thus philosophically justifying personalistic values. He was convinced that a metaphysics of that kind ought to focus on the relationship between God and the world, opting for either pantheism or theism.

With its accent on God's immanence and the fundamental homogeneity of God and the world, pantheism takes on its extreme forms in – on the one hand – acosmism, preaching the world dissolved in God, and – on the other hand – atheism, preaching God dissolved in the world.<sup>22</sup> In the former case, the world is no longer and, consequently, the prefix “pan-“ has no more sense, while in the latter case, God is no longer, thereby nullifying the sense of the word “theism.” From that observance, the author of *Positive Tasks...* drew the conclusion that the term “pantheism” had but a contractual, approximate meaning, comprising both the tendency to play down the independence of the world and finite things (as in mysticism) and the reverse tendency to play down God's independence in relation to the world. Likewise typical is the situation when pantheism and theism – i.e., the concept of God's immanent presence in the world vs. the concept of God as a transcendent personal entity – cannot be neatly separated. Thus, the best we can do is state that Plato, Aristotle and the Medieval scholars were predominantly theists, while Neo-Platonism, Gnosticism, the mysticisms of Eckhart and Boehme, as well as the systems of Spinoza, Schelling and Hegel, were each dominated by varying forms of pantheism.

In modern philosophy, the standard of pantheism was set by Kant and Hegel. The Kantian breakthrough in philosophy consisted in his proving that the only possible object of rational knowledge was reason itself – since thought did not surpass the limits of its own forms and rules. This thesis gave rise to either phenomenological skepticism, embraced by the Positivists – or a reduction of the world to pure thought, i.e., panlogism. The latter was embraced and brought to abstract extremes by Hegel whose absolute idealism compromised philosophical rationalism.<sup>23</sup>

While passing the above judgment, Lopatin summoned the Slavophile critique of Hegel, pronouncing it too favorable toward Hegel and too severe toward the rationalist tradition in philosophy. After all, he observed, Hegelianism was not the logical crown and climax of that tradition's development. Indeed, Hegel's idealist rationalism was so one-sided and so reductive on the notion of reason that it deserved to be called a distortion of

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22 Ibid., pp. 185-187.

23 Ibid., pp. 260-261.

rationalism, which made it an “abnormal extremism” – rather than the necessary point of arrival – in the progress of philosophical rationalism.<sup>24</sup>

Lopatin named the theosophic period in Schelling’s philosophy as the onset of overcoming the crisis of rational metaphysics that had been caused by Hegelianism. Characterizing that system, he used Soloviev’s term “All-unity” [*vseyedinstvo*],<sup>25</sup> arguing that it expressed an aspiration to reconcile, in a higher synthesis, Christian theism with “the truth of immanentism.” In the philosophical concept of the Divine Absolute, he claimed, transcendence does not exclude immanence – rather, the two make “two sides of one all-embracing truth.”<sup>26</sup>

Yet, the synthesis postulated by Schelling (Lopatin could have added the name of Soloviev here) had been dominated by a theist theme. God, by that rendering, was “the monad of monads,” i.e. the spiritual living force uniting the entirety of creation. According to Lopatin, that eliminated the threat of the three forms of pantheism that were equally destructive to the idea of God and man’s personality: the naturalistic, the a-Cosmic, and the pan-logical. A profound analysis of the inner logic of consistent pantheism had left philosophy practically no choice – for now it should either abandon, once and for all, the idea of the Absolute – which was impossible – or arrive at theism as the constant and unchangeable truth.<sup>27</sup>

To complete the argument, Lopatin re-emphasized his fundamental agreement with Schelling’s critique of Hegel. He defined Schelling’s “positive philosophy” as a philosophical rationalism which arrived at a concordance with mysticism following the rational approach – while Boehme’s mystical inspiration had been paid due respect, it was replaced with rational knowledge. Lopatin hoped that the future development of philosophy would reconcile it with revelation, so that “true philosophy” would end the destructive influence of “false philosophy,” without sacrificing reason for the sake of direct faith, or transforming living truths of faith into “allegories of dead abstractions.”<sup>28</sup> In

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24 Ibid., p. 267.

Typical of this opinion is the combination of concurrence with the Slavophile criticism of Hegel, with the accents within that criticism having been given a new layout. Kireyevsky and Khomiakov had considered Hegel’s “absolute idealism” the climax and unavoidable consequence of the entire development of Western rationalism, whereas Lopatin believed himself to be a rationalist, far from any form of anti-Westernism.

25 Cf. Ibid., p. 273.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., pp. 275-281, 287.



order to hasten that result, Lopatin postulated that philosophical truth be sought in a speculative thought that could break with the one-sidedness of rationalistic idealism and develop within itself an understanding of the living and the concrete.

In the second volume of the same book, Lopatin developed a detailed study of the problem of causality. He argued that neither Hume who questioned the objectivity of causal relationships nor Spinoza nor Hegel who identified real causality with logical results had been right. Lopatin himself believed that causality was an objective rule governing reality – although he defended the free will and self-determination of the human spirit. Consequently, he criticized the mechanistic concept of causality that was current in the natural sciences and tried to substitute it with the notion of *creative* causality that would leave room for the irreducible “irrationality of existence” (which he proposed to distinguish from “non-rationality.”)<sup>29</sup> In this context, he summoned Leibniz’s monadology, employing it – along with Maine de Biran’s philosophy – to support the thesis of the substantial human self as a subject endowed with its own will and capable of self-creation.<sup>30</sup> On these grounds, he formulated his program of “concrete spiritualism” that conveyed “two great truths,” namely: “All that is real is, in its essence, spiritual” and “All that is real is, in its essence, free.”<sup>31</sup>

The thesis was concurrent with the axiological intention of Kozlov’s “pan-psychism,” despite being ontologically based on the “philosophy of All-Unity.” Unlike Kozlov, Lopatin was not a pluralistic monadologist but, rather, a panenteistic monist.<sup>32</sup> In his concept, plurality of substantial selves did not contradict ontological monism – it just demanded that unity be conceived as “liberal unity,” just as it had been conceived in his philosophy by Soloviev. For that reason, Lopatin’s spiritualism did not employ a notion in which the self was defined as “a windowless monad” – precisely the opposite: his position emphasized the meaning of mutual connections and interpersonal communication.

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Evidently, Lopatin shared the Slavophiles’ favorable judgement of the final phase of Schelling’s philosophy, but – unlike the Slavophiles – he emphasized that he valued it as an autonomous philosophy, rather than philosophy’s surrender to revealed faith.

29 *Polozhitelnie zadachi filosofii*, vol. 2, Moscow 1891, pp. 252-253.

30 Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 215-219, 304-309.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 309-310.

32 Pointed out by Zenkovsky, even though it collides with his own classification of Lopatin’s philosophy as “neo-Leibnizianism.” See, V.V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, vol. 2, pp. 651-653.

However, we must not ignore the opinion of Evgeny Trubetskoi, who, having been acquainted with Lopatin since his early youth, knew the latter's interpretations of his own ideas. According to his testimony, the author of *Positive Tasks...* emphasized the individuality of the human self, tending to absolutize it in the monadological spirit, which distinguished him from Soloviev, who – in his philosophy of “Godmanhood” – had focused on humanity as a collective, generic entity, *Le Grand Etre* of Comte.<sup>33</sup> An analysis of Lopatin's texts shows that he was able to reconcile philosophical individualism founded on Leibniz's concept of the substantiality of individual spirits, with the pantheistic monism of the philosophy of All-Unity. There can be no doubt, however, that he differed from Soloviev in his interpretation of “liberal unity,” stressing plurality in unity, rather than unity in plurality.

Another characteristic feature of Lopatin's philosophy of All-Unity was its consistent, radical spiritualism, which was distanced from any kind of “positive religion.” Unlike Soloviev, Lopatin was not a “religious philosopher,” nor did he wish to be one. Neither did he deplore the “one-sidedness of spiritualism” or try to mend it through a “rehabilitation of matter” or an ennoblement of “religious materialism.”

An ethical doctrine constituted a vital part of Lopatin's system. It proclaimed ethical idealism, entirely autonomous from religion and, at the same time, manifestly anti-Positivist. Lopatin named two indispensable, fundamental premises of ethics, namely: freedom of will and the “moral rationality of universal life.”<sup>34</sup> He acknowledged that experiential data did not confirm those assumptions which, however, only led him to the conclusion that moral consciousness could not be explained on the basis of empirical knowledge.<sup>35</sup> The awareness of how things should be was not deducible from the knowledge of facts.

Lopatin developed those theses in his speeches on freedom of will and the “moral freedom of the human person” delivered in 1889 at Moscow Psychological Society and published as an Annex of *Positive Tasks of Philosophy*. Echoing Schelling and Soloviev, he claimed that necessity could be “liberal” and, being that, did not exclude freedom; that laws governing phenomena depended “on the activity of the original forces that constitute them,

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33 See E.N. Trubetskoi, *Vospominaniia*, in: Trubetskoi, *Iz proshlovo. Vospominaniia. Iz put'evykh zapisok bezhentsa*, pp. 219-223, 226.

34 See L.M. Lopatin, “Teoreticheskie osnovy soznatelnoy nravstvennoy zhizni,” *Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii*, No 5, 1890, p. 50.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 60.

i.e., are free in relation to them.”<sup>36</sup> He interpreted the freedom, however, differently from Schelling and Soloviev, emphasizing the inalienable freedom of choice and arguing that man was not “a slave of his own character” and could always consciously choose between good and evil. According to him, the existence of that freedom was proved by the individuals’ capability of accomplishing moral transformations. Man – he claimed – can always change thoroughly and be morally reborn, since he is a spiritual being motivated by creative impulses and subject to no “mechanical fatalisms.”<sup>37</sup>

Evident in Lopatin’s philosophy was its voluntaristic note, concordant with the spiritualism of Maine de Biran whose works were familiar to and esteemed by the Russian thinker. Equally symptomatic was Lopatin’s admiration for the activist personalism of William James.<sup>38</sup>

Lopatin’s place in the history of Russian metaphysical idealism is defined, amongst other things, by the scant influence of Kant’s philosophy on his own system. Evgeny Trubetskoi described Lopatin as a philosopher who “firmly and entirely rejected all things Kantian,” faithful to the philosophical style of the pre-Kantian rationalism of Leibniz’s era.<sup>39</sup> However farfetched the observation might seem,<sup>40</sup> the thesis of Lopatin’s connections with pre-Kantian philosophy can hardly be denied. Yet, further development of philosophical idealism in Russia has allowed for seeing the author of *Positive Tasks of Philosophy* in a new light – not as a relic of pre-Kantian metaphysics, but as a precursor of a radical criticism of Kant’s system from the position of a philosophical ontologism, so typical of the Russian religious-philosophical renaissance.

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36 *Polozhitelnie zadachi filosofii*, vol. 2, p. 331.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 373, 375.

38 Lopatin praised especially the theory of “tychism” holding that the elements of reality are relatively independent which allows for the emergence of new things. See, Lopatin, “Nieotlozhnie zadachi sovremennoy mysli,” *Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii*, No 28, 1917 (pointed out by Randall Poole in his entry “Lopatin” from the Internet edition of the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*).

39 E.N. Trubetskoi, *Iz proshlovo*, p. 219.

40 Lopatin’s allegedly program rejection of Kant’s heritage is denied by the fact that he took part in the celebrations of the 100th anniversary of Kant’s death, publishing – especially for the occasion – an essay entitled “Uchenie Kanta o poznanii” (*Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii*, No 76, 1905). As for his interest in Kant’s ethics, Lopatin manifested it from the very onset of his scholarly activity (cf. Lopatin’s essay, “Nravstvennoe uchenie Kanta,” *Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii*, No 4, 1890).

## Sergei Trubetskoi and “Concrete Idealism”

The brothers Evgeny and Sergei Trubetskoi, descendants of the Lithuanian Prince Gedyuin family, were leading figures in the Moscow Psychological Society circle. The younger brother, Evgeny (1863-1920), produced his major philosophical works after the 1905 Revolution; both his master's and his doctoral theses pertained to the history of Western Christian social ideology, which made them strictly historical (yet closely connected with the Ecclesiological theme of Vladimir Soloviev's philosophy). As for Sergei Trubetskoi (1862-1905), he had won acclaim as an outstanding philosopher of system-making ambitions even by the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Despite character differences, the intellectual ties between the two brothers were very strong.<sup>41</sup> The evolution of their worldviews, described by Evgeny Trubetskoi in his *Memoirs*, was essentially identical.<sup>42</sup> Both brothers grew up in the classicalist and small family palace of Akhtyrka (neighboring the Trinity Monastery of St. Sergius), in an atmosphere pervaded by the cult of music. Their father, Prince Nikolai, was co-founder of the Moscow Conservatory and the Tsarist Musical Society.<sup>43</sup> As teenagers, both succumbed to a “nihilist period” marked by a fascination with French and English Positivism: even as fourth-grade high-school students in Kaluga (i.e., as 15-16-year-olds), they diligently studied the works of Comte and Spencer, J.S. Mill, Buckle, Darwin and Claude Bernard. Both shook off the positivist spell thanks to the four-volume *History of New Philosophy* by Kuno Fischer (translated by Nikolai Strakhov) from which they learned that the philosophical foundations of empiricism had been long dismantled by Leibniz (in his critique of Locke) and that Spencer had not understood Kant, confusing aprioricism with nativism, etc. Since that moment – still as high-school students – they immersed themselves in the study of German philosophy to which they devoted every minute of their time outside of classes, plus eight to nine hours a day during the summer holidays.<sup>44</sup> They were especially impressed by the philosophical pessimism of Schopenhauer, as well

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41 According to Marian Zdziechowski who knew both, Sergei Trubetskoi “won your heart with great, cordial warmth which the introvert and formal Evgeny lacked.” See, M. Zdziechowski, *Testament księcia Eugeniusza Trubieckiego* (1924), in: *Zdziechowski, Wybór pism*, „Znak”, Cracow 1993, p. 312.

42 See E.N. Trubetskoi, *Iz proshlovo* (Moscow 1918) and *Memoirs* (Sofia 1921). Reprinted in: Trubetskoi, *Iz proshlovo. Vospominaniia. Iz put'evikh zapisek bezhentsa*, Tomsk 2000.

43 The Trubetskoi's friend and frequent visitor was the eminent virtuoso and director of the Moscow Conservatory Nikolai Rubinstein, as well as his brother Anthony.

44 E.N. Trubetskoi, *Iz proshlovo*, pp. 132 and 146.

as by Edward Hartmann's "philosophy of the unconscious" (which Soloviev believed to be the last word on Western philosophy).

The shaping of the two brothers' worldviews was also strongly influenced by the great surge of populist-messianic feelings connected with the Turkish War of 1822, regarded by the Russian patriots as a war to liberate the Balkan Slavs. As Marian Zdziechowski points out, neither the court, nor the government wanted the war, yet they had to succumb

to the voice of a thinking and feeling Russia that demanded a war in the name of the mission of the "Third Rome," i.e., Moscow, destined to liberate Orthodox Christians from the Turkish yoke, to resurrect the Eastern Empire and to unite the entire Greek-Slavic world under the scepter of the tsar.<sup>45</sup>

The young Trubetskoi princes ate and drank this messianic atmosphere. The assassination of Alexander II by the populists strengthened their conviction that Russian revolutionaries – along with the entire Russian radical movement – had compromised themselves once and for all and that the key to Russia's future was found in the novels of Dostoevsky, whose influence as the author of *The Brothers Karamazov* was then at its apex.

The Trubetskoi's were naturally fervent readers of Soloviev as well, adopting his *Criticism of Abstract Principles* (1880) as their own philosophy, meant to become part of the great historical destiny of Russia. Reflecting on the "sentiments of the early 80s," Evgeny Trubetskoi wrote:

A great, all-embracing synthesis of East and West, religion and science, Church tradition and Western philosophy – all that filled the soul with a joyful hope. Please, look at the early works of V. Soloviev where those sentiments are so vividly manifested. Both in his *Criticism of Abstract Principles* and in *The Great Controversy*, or in the *Lectures on Godmanhood*, the "great synthesis" has been outlined as something that is bound to happen soon.<sup>46</sup>

By way of digression, it is worth noting the drastic contrast between the above characteristics of social feelings and the descriptions written at the same time by authors who reflected the emotions and the social memory of the radical intelligentsia. A representative and influential example of the trend is *A History of Russian Social Thought* by Ivanov-Razumnik, written from the standpoint of New Populism. The book portrays the 80s as "an era of social bourgeoisie," or a

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45 See M. Zdziechowski, *Wybór pism*, pp. 305-306.

46 E.N. Trubetskoi, *Iz proshlovo*, p. 163. The words, written in 1919, were completed with the author's remark that what had lacked at the time was a premonition of the catastrophe driving toward the world, and especially toward Russia; Trubetskoi self-critically observed: "We should have sensed not just the higher, divine truth being Russia's destiny, but also the depth of untruth in the Russian reality."

philistine pact with reality: once the heroic days of the 70s had ended in a defeat of the revolutionaries and the progressive intelligentsia, the intellectuals started “dying out” – their best representatives locked in prisons, sent to Siberia, or absent through emigration, there came a time of hopelessness far worse than under Nicholas I, when people had united in protest against bureaucratic despots. By contrast, in the 80s, a despotic authority enjoyed the support of the “cultural society” [*kulturnoe obshchestvo*] that came to the fore, taking on the role of the intelligentsia. In this perspective, the young Trubetskoi did not belong to the intelligentsia, since that presumed estrangement from “official Russia” and total submission of spiritual culture to the social cause of liberating the people.<sup>47</sup> The Trubetskoi, however, represented a materially secure and self-assured cultural elite free of any inferiority complex against the Western elites, no longer ashamed of the peasants’ serfdom or obliged to follow the “contrite” gentry and, moreover, equipped with a critical reflection on the experience of revolutionary “nihilism.” From their point of view, things looked entirely different.

In the autumn of 1881, the Trubetskoi brothers entered Moscow University, intent on studying philosophy. They were deeply disillusioned to quickly discover that their own knowledge surpassed that of their professors, while the positivist Mateusz Troitsky could not teach them anything new. They worked individually, thereby provoking the curiosity of Chicherin who (as we have already said) invited them to a discussion which led him to the conclusion that philosophical idealism did have a future in Russia. It was only in the winter of 1886-1887 that they met Soloviev (at a meeting at Lopatin’s), whose works they had been diligently following, considering the author their master.<sup>48</sup> While they did not approve of Soloviev’s turn toward Catholicism, siding in this respect with Ivan Aksakov, they nevertheless tried to understand Soloviev’s motivation and were able to profit by his influence to correct many Slavophile stereotypes, including accusing Western culture of a one-sided rationalism. Soloviev’s pro-Catholic essays even managed to convince them that the Catholic ideal did contain “a relative truth” which Orthodoxy ought to adopt.<sup>49</sup> Attempts at a

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47 See Ivan-Razumnik, *Istoriia russkoy obshchestvennoy mysli. Individualizm i meshchanstvo v russkoy literature i zhizni XIX veka*, 2nd edition, vol. 2, Sankt Petersburg 1908, pp. 290-292.

48 Emphasizing the fact, the future monographer of Soloviev, E.N. Trubetskoi, remarked that Soloviev had never – not even in the period of his pro-Catholic theocratism – stopped being the intellectual model for both himself and his brother, as well as the font of major impulses of their intellectual developments (*Iz proshlovo*, p. 169).

49 Ibid.

comprehensive historical explanation of the question defined the subject-matter of Evgeny Trubetskoi's first academic works: his master's thesis (1892) was devoted to the social-religious ideals of St. Augustine, while his PhD thesis (1897) discussed the ideal of God's kingdom in the opinions of Pope Gregory VII and his contemporary publicists.<sup>50</sup> Both the books thereby tried (even though the author never stated it openly) to explain and introduce to Russian culture the "relative truth" of Soloviev's theocratic utopia.

Sergei Trubetskoi likewise started his academic career by publishing historical works that were not without Soloviev's inspiration. Rather than on the great classics of Greek philosophy,<sup>51</sup> his master's thesis, *Metaphysics in Ancient Greece* (1890), focused on the period of transition from mythology to philosophy and on the Hellenistic period, i.e., the period when philosophy and mythology met again – all according to Soloviev's scholarly priorities evoking Schelling's "philosophy of mythology and revelation." Sergei Trubetskoi's PhD thesis, *The Teaching on Logos in Its History* (1900) was a monograph on how the ancient notion of the universal mind – i.e. Logos – had paved the way for the Christian concept of "Word made Flesh" – i.e. Christ-Logos – which was an obvious historical commentary to the theme developed in Soloviev's *Lectures on Godmanhood*.

Both of the aforementioned books by Trubetskoi were indirect contributions to the ongoing debate on the modernization of the Orthodox Church that had been started (a fact easily forgotten) by Archimandrite Bukharev and featured so vividly in the works of Soloviev. From the point of view of the clerical conservatives, emphasizing the Hellenic heritage of Christianity meant relativization of the revealed truth and rehabilitation of pagan culture, whose heritage had helped to secularize the life of Renaissance and Enlightenment

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50 See E.N. Trubetskoi, *Religiozno-obshchestvennii ideal zapadnogo khristianstva v V veke: Mirosozertsaniie blazhennogo Avgustina* (Moscow 1892) and, Trubetskoi, *Religiozno-obshchestvennii ideal zapadnogo khristianstva v XI veke: Ideia Bozheskovo tsarstva u Grigorii VII I publitsistov – ego sovremennikov* (Kiev 1897).

51 Trubetskoi's marginal treatment of Plato and Aristotle has been emphasized by G. Florovsky in his essay "Prince S.N. Trubetskoy as a Philosopher" (*Put'*, No 26, Paris, February 1931). See the English translation in vol. XII of Florovsky's *Collected Works*, Belmont, MA 1989.

See S.N. Trubetskoi, *Mietafizika v drevney Gretsii* (Moscow 1980) and *Ucheniie o Logose v ego istorii* (Moscow 1900). Both books were reprinted in the five-volume edition of S.N. Trubetskoi's works, ed. and Introduction by L.M. Lopatin (*Sobraniiie sochinenii kn. Sergeia Nikolaevicha Trubetskogo*, Moscow 1907-1912, vol. III, 1910, vol. IV, 1906). *Ucheniie o Logose* has also been published separately, with Introduction by P.P. Gaidenko (S.N. Trubetskoi, *Sochineniia*, Moscow 1994).

Europe. That is how the master's thesis of Trubetskoi was interpreted by the conservative priest, Sergei Butkevich, whose charges were then repeated by Archbishop Abrose of Kharkov.<sup>52</sup> Trubetskoi responded in the Church reformers' organ, *Pravoslavnoe obozreniie* (which made its columns available to Soloviev), but did not succeed in initiating a constructive dialogue. To make matters worse, Soloviev conducted lectures *On the Fall of the Medieval Worldview* (1891), arguing that abstract dogmas were less important than Christian practices and that many a pioneer of secular progress paid a greater service to humanity than did men of the Church. The conservative journal *Moscow News* [*Moskovskiiie Vedomosti*] connected Soloviev's lecture to Trubetskoi's book (which Soloviev had highly praised), accusing the circle of the Moscow Psychological Society of spreading heresy. The Society's president, Nikolai Grot, rightly ignored it as a charge unworthy of response. And yet, the hope that time itself would turn the crisis into a trifling incident, born of a misunderstanding, was in vain: the conservative ecclesiastical circles never – not even after his death – stopped treating Trubetskoi as a formal atheist, deftly feigning Orthodox faith.<sup>53</sup>

Sergei Trubetskoi's academic career had linked him from the very beginning to Moscow University where, having completed his PhD, he was appointed a professor. One of the leading figures of the Psychological Society, after the death of Nikolai Grot, he joined the editorial board of *Problems of Philosophy and Psychology*. He was very active in the struggle for the University's autonomy, as well as in the liberal movement of the "zemtsy" – local Land Assembly [*zemstvo*] activists who demanded the broadening of self-government prerogatives and the transformation of the Russian monarchy into a state of law. A highly moderate liberal, he opted for a compromise between the authorities and the people – to him, Petr Struve's "Union for Liberation," not to mention Pavel Milukov's budding party of Constitutional Democrats, were infected with the sin of the old intelligentsia's radicalism. Yet, the events of the 1905 Revolution convinced him that the transformation of Russian autocracy into a "gendarmocracy" could be averted only with the participation of society. As a result, he agreed to sign the "zemtsy" petition for a National Assembly and presented its postulates at a meeting with the emperor on the 5<sup>th</sup> of June 1905.<sup>54</sup>

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52 See M. Bohachevsky-Chomiak, Sergei N. Trubetskoi. *An Intellectual Amongst the Intelligentsia in Pre-revolutionary Russia*, Norland, Belmont, MA 1976, pp. 73-76.

53 Cf. B. Melioransky, "Teoreticheskaya filosofiiia S.N. Trubetskogo," *Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii*, March 1906, p. 220 (cf. M. Bohachevsky-Chomiak, op. cit., p. 76).

54 Trubetskoi's speech is quoted in Bohachevsky-Chomiak's book, pp. 150-155. Received favourably by the tsar, it made Nicholas II consider the petition's signatories his allies.



The event was an important step in the process of convincing Nicholas II to follow a policy of compromise that produced the October 1905 Manifesto.

In August of 1905, Moscow University was granted autonomy and soon afterward Trubetskoi was elected its first president. For all his efforts to strengthen the academy's autonomy – by separating study from politics – he did not manage to stop the misuse of the latter by the politics-crazy student movement. To defend the University's autonomy “on two fronts” – from political bureaucracy, as well as from one's own students – was obviously stressful. Unable to sustain the huge psychological tension, Trubetskoi died of a fit of apoplexy on September 29, 1905, during an interview at the Ministry of Education, while handing in a Polish students' petition to the authorities. His death provoked mass social demonstrations, initiated in Petersburg and continued in Moscow where Trubetskoi's funeral brought together more than twenty thousand people.<sup>55</sup>

The first work to systematically present Trubetskoi's original philosophical views was his dissertation *On the Nature of Human Consciousness*, published in 1889-1891 in the journal *Problems of Philosophy and Psychology*. It referred to the crisis of Western philosophy diagnosed by Soloviev who declared that the development of European philosophy ultimately brought on a reduction of reality to either concepts (in rational idealism), or states of consciousness (in positivist empiricism). In both cases, cognition was limited to the world of phenomena (which Trubetskoi called a theoretical-cognitive “illusionism”), while the objective, ontologically-grounded reality of the world dissolved in a “general subjectivism.” Trubetskoi believed that the situation was a consequence of the flourishing Protestant “absolute personality” principle.<sup>56</sup> In empiricism, it identified the absolute value with individual experience, while in idealism, it made absolute the universal, supra-individual and essentially unconscious subjectivity (as evidenced in Schopenhauer's philosophy of will and Hartmann's concept of the “unconscious”). The original link in the development of idealism had been mysticism or the subjectivization of the contents of revelation. Initially, empiricism, mysticism and rationalism had not been separated, jointly combating the Catholic scholastics that defended philosophical realism. Their further development, however, brought on an obvious differentiation of standpoints and an entailed division of tasks. Empiricism, flourishing mostly in England, produced Hume's skepticism and Berkeley's extreme subjectivism,

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55 See O.N. Trubetskaia, *Kn. S.N. Trubetskoi: Vospominaniia sestry*, New York 1953, pp. 163-165. Cf. Bohachevsky-Chomiak, *Sergei N. Trubetskoi*, pp. 174-178.

56 S.N. Trubetskoy, *Sochineniia*, ed. and Introduction by P.P. Gaidenko, Mysl, Moscow 1994, p. 487.

followed by the simplistic system of association psychology. In its French, Cartesian version, rationalism became a philosophy of the individual mind, i.e., a rationalist variant of individualism. On the one hand, German mysticism split into the extreme anti-rationalist pietism, or mysticism of feelings, and, on the other hand, the speculative rationalism that generated the science of the “modern Gnostics” – in other words, German idealism.<sup>57</sup>

The fundamental and fatal error of all those trends of modern philosophy was – according to Trubetskoi – a failure to understand the collective nature of human consciousness. A justified wish to break free from the “clerical organization of collective consciousness” led to severing ties between the universal mind, individual experience and the historical experience of humanity.<sup>58</sup> In fact, individual consciousness is a function of supra-individual consciousness, and when it is cut off from this font, it loses a sense of the world’s objectivity and falls inexorably into one or another form of subjectivist illusionism. The social nature of consciousness finds proof in the rules of grammar and logic, as has been perfectly illustrated in the ancient concept of Word-Logos.

To grant the sense of an objective reality of the world – and thereby to avoid the subjectivist errors of modern philosophy – Trubetskoi’s theory offered a firm anchoring of individual consciousness in a supra-individual, generic context [*rodovoe soznanii*].<sup>59</sup> Referring to the terminology proposed by Khomiakov (whose works he had read in the early 80s), Trubetskoi coined a name for his own theory: “*sobornost’ soznanii*.” He also used the term “metaphysical socialism.”<sup>60</sup> His theory was supported by philosophical anthropology declaring man to be a creature who inherits the experience of earlier generations and is equipped with a collective memory comprising, amongst other things, all that has been forgotten on an individual level, generating languages and collective images to integrate communities.<sup>61</sup>

The metaphysical and epistemological anti-individualism of the concept was linked with personalistic values and with the defense of the idea of an individual soul’s immortality. Realizing how paradoxical it might seem, he patiently explained that a paradox was apparent: the negation of an individual soul had been, in fact, a logical – albeit unforeseen – result of the religious individualism of the Reformation: an unavoidable consequence of the error of subjectivism in

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57 Ibid., p. 499.

58 Ibid., pp. 493-497.

59 Ibid., p. 577.

60 S.N. Trubetskoi, *Sochineniia*, p. 577.

61 Ibid., pp. 564-586.

both the major trends of modern philosophy – rational idealism and empiricism. Idealism, culminating in Hegel’s philosophy, diffused individuality in an abstract universality, while empiricism – which in the form of Positivism had dominated European thought following the downfall of the great idealist systems – was transformed into a total destruction of the idea of personality itself. All that led to a philosophical crisis, threatening victory of an absolute nihilism.<sup>62</sup> In those circumstances, “metaphysical Socialism” was meant to play a therapeutic role, overcoming the fatal results of triumphant subjectivism by means of defending Christian personalism, including belief in personal immortality.

Being a conscious follower of Soloviev’s ideas, Trubetskoi also made use of Soloviev’s notion of Sophia – the world’s soul. He outlined (never quoting the term “Sofia”) the concept of a pre-human “universal sensibility” serving as a metaphysical guarantee of the sensory world’s objectiveness.<sup>63</sup> The anchoring of man’s own sensibility in the universal [vseobshchaya chuvstvennost’] safeguarded the objectivity of sensory experience against empirical subjectivism. Analogously, the anchoring of the individual mind in the universal – i.e., in Logos – was meant to protect rational thought from falling into the trap of abstract idealism.

In his next dissertation, *The Foundations of Idealism* (1896), Trubetskoi revisited the concept of Logos, undertaking the task of transforming abstract idealism into that of the “concrete.” This task meant opposing both the positivists, who declared idealism to be a discredited standpoint, and influential Protestant theologians (A. Ritschl, and A Harnack) who argued that the notion of Logos was strictly Hellenic and irreconcilable with biblical theology. Opening *The Foundations of Idealism* was a philosophical credo, openly declaring that a return to the concept of Logos remained the sole alternative to a

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62 Ibid., pp. 577-582.

63 Ibid., pp. 565-566. Cf. Introduction by P.P. Gaidenko, pp. 27-29.

Trubetskoi was interested in the idea of Sofia even as a student when he wrote an unfinished paper on the subject (see, I.W. Basin, “S.N. Trubetskoi O sviatoi Sofii, Premudrosti Bozhei,” *Voprosy filosofii*, No 9, 1995).

Later on, responding to Chicherin’s charges (formulated in the latter’s essay, “Sushchestvo i metody idealizma,” *Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii*, XXXVII, 1897), Trubetskoi explained that the notion of the “World’s soul” had allowed him to avoid a pantheistic identification of the cosmic subject with God (see, S.N. Trubetskoi, *Sobraniie sochinenii*, vol. 2, p. 298).

consistent skepticism that denied the cognitive processes an objective-logical nature.<sup>64</sup>

The idea was expanded as a critical analysis of the three levels in the development of idealist philosophy, completed by the argument that each of those levels absolutized a certain partial truth and, for that reason, led one astray.

The initial level of idealism was the discovery that it was phenomena, rather than things in themselves, that constitute the object of our cognition. Adopted by empirically-oriented thinkers, the discovery became a radical victory over naïve realism – being, at the same time, a step toward relativism and subjectivism, an undermining of man’s faith in the reality of the outside world and the substantiality of the human spirit.

On the second level, being was declared to be an idea, i.e., reality was identified with thought – which found its climax in Hegel’s panlogism. The drastic one-sidedness of that panlogism, however, had to provoke protest, leading to a radical rejection of Hegel’s thesis that whatever was real was also rational. Philosophers of diverse orientations, materialists included, united to fight back the autocracy of reason, defending the thesis that being is irreducible to logical thought. As a further consequence, it led to the claim that being [*sushchee*] is, indeed, the opposite of reason. Thus, a lawful protest against panlogism paved the way to a total irrationalism declaring that “Whatever is real is irrational.”<sup>65</sup> According to Trubetskoi, this happened in Schopenhauer’s philosophy of blind will and Hartmann’s apology of the “unconscious.”

The third level of idealism belonged, in Trubetskoi’s system, to mystical idealism, emphasizing the cognitive function of faith and will. However, that concept – the author argued – ignored Kant’s discovery of *a priori* forms of cognition and did not stand up to philosophical criticism, annihilating both real plurality and concrete consciousness, and thereby contradicting the overall experience and the universality of reason, which – in the extreme version – made it akin to Hindu a-cosmism.<sup>66</sup>

These findings led to the conclusion that the only way to a philosophical rebirth was through acknowledging a “concrete unity of cognitive abilities” and building a synthesis of sensory, rational and mystical cognitions that would assume the objectivity of being, based on a “law of universal interdependence” of all kinds of cognition which, in turn, was conditioned by an objective

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64 Ibid., p. 569. Trubetskoi had met Harnack and owed him much, which, however, never stopped him from opposing the latter’s views on the Hellenization of Christianity.

65 S.N. Trubetskoi, *Sochineniia*, pp. 626-627.

66 Ibid., pp. 665-693.

interdependence of beings in the system of All-Unity.<sup>67</sup> Realization of that program was to transform “abstract” idealism into a “concrete” one that would correct speculative metaphysical idealism by acknowledging the truths of sensory and mystical cognitions – thereby establishing “a concrete difference between reality and its absolute principle” and reconciling the achievements of philosophy with the truths of religious belief.<sup>68</sup>

Justifying that project, Trubetskoi summoned the achievements of the modern history of philosophy, being himself its eminent representative in Russia.<sup>69</sup> The gist of those achievements, he believed, was the employment of historical method, allowing for observing “the inner, living sense” of philosophical progress that explained the *necessity* of a given line of thought, rather than another. The name of Hegel was obviously summoned in the context, and yet Trubetskoi accused Hegel of reducing the history of thought to an abstract and purpose-oriented dialectics of ideas. In a separate dissertation, *What Does History of Philosophy Teach?*, written soon after *Problems of Idealism*, Trubetskoi corrected Hegelian one-sidedness in the spirit of Soloviev’s All-Unity, which – in the name of maximum comprehensiveness – ordered concentration on understanding the examined systems from within and exposing their respective partial truths.<sup>70</sup> The warning against the dogmatism of abstract theory was by no means a concession to historical relativism: the essence of the historical method was, according to Trubetskoi, the fact that it revealed the inner “logic” of the succession of ideas, rather than their conditioning by external circumstances and cultural incompatibilities. Therefore, his crucial argument in favor of his own philosophical program was that it followed the logic of the development of modern European philosophy – a strictly theoretical argumentation seemed less important to him.

Premature death cut short his attempts at presenting “concrete idealism” in the form of a complete, structured system – which resulted in its liberal and misguided interpretations. The philosophers of the Psychological Society circle were principally interested in the genesis of Trubetskoi’s views: Chicherin traced them back to a mystical idealism of Slavophile provenance, while Lopatin associated “concrete idealism” with the classical tradition of pre-Kantian

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67 Ibid., pp. 697-699.

68 Ibid., pp. 716-717.

69 The emergence of the history of philosophy as a philosophical discipline and a critical metaphysics meant, in Trubetskoi’s opinion, a real breakthrough in philosophical studies (Ibid., p. 637).

70 See *Problemy idealizma*, Moscow 1902, pp. 216-235.

rationalism.<sup>71</sup> In the following years, Vassily Zenkovsky found Trubetskoi's philosophy (which he held in high esteem) to be, in fact, nothing but a continuation of Soloviev's thought.<sup>72</sup> All those interpretations one-sidedly ignored the question of Trubetskoi's place in contemporary European philosophy. It was only in post-Communist Russia that the problem was acknowledged: as P. P. Gaidenko rightly observed, the author of *Foundations of Idealism* had been one of the forerunners of the anti-subjectivist trends in 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy that involved such names as Husserl, Heidegger and Gadamer – thinkers who, despite all their differences, were united in opposition against idealistic subjectivism.<sup>73</sup> Trubetskoi, let us add, foreshadowed Husserl with his fundamental axiological intention, both perceiving subjectivism as an omen of a deep cultural crisis and opposing it in favor of reconstructing an objective order of values. Unlike Husserl, however, the Russian thinker summoned God and the immortality of the soul in his defense. His argument against “abstract idealism” combined innovation with a certain old-worldliness reminiscent of the ideas of theist critics discussing Hegel's panlogism.<sup>74</sup>

From the point of view of the history of Russian thought, Trubetskoi is, above all, an outstanding representative of the initial phase of the anti-positivist breakthrough in culture, as well as the initial phase of the reception of Soloviev's philosophy. It was a time when the rebirth of metaphysical idealism coincided with the professionalization of philosophy as an academic discipline, which imposed strict mental rigor, dissolved later on by the leading representatives of the Russian religious-philosophical renaissance. Unlike his major mentor Soloviev, Trubetskoi – who also wished for a reconciliation of philosophy and Christianity – never featured as a religious thinker who referred directly to revealed truths, trying to give them a philosophical interpretation. He would have found it still more unthinkable to adopt the role of a prophet preaching “a new religious consciousness.” Forever faithful to the Orthodox

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71 See B.N. Chicherin, *Sushchestvo i metody idealizma*; L.M. Lopatin, *Kniaz' S.N. Trubetskoi i ego obshchee filosofskoe mirosozertsaniie*, Moscow 1906.

According to Evgeny Trubetskoi's *Memoirs*, Chicherin was particularly critical of the *sobornost' soznaniia* theory (E. Trubetskoi, *Iz proshlovo*, p. 171).

72 See V.V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, vol. 2, p. 794.

73 See P.P. Gaidenko's Introduction on the quoted edition of Trubetskoi's works, p. 19. A good review of the “philosophy of subjectivity” in various 20th century trends is offered by Fred R. Dalmyr's *Twilight of Subjectivity. Contributions to Post-Individualist Theory*, Amherst 1981.

74 Similarly, in Soloviev's dissertation, *The Crisis of Western Philosophy*, the subject-matter stemming from Hegel's crisis of absolute idealism continues fluently as a series of questions initiating the anti-Positivist breakthrough.

Church, he considered himself above all a Christian, never accentuating his Orthodox specificity. He owed some of his ideas to the Slavophiles but never got involved in any form of anti-Westernism – to the contrary: he thought of himself as a European and conceived of the notion of *soborbast'* in universal – rather than “civilizational” or nationalistic – terms. In his youth, he had felt the temptation of a Dostoyevsky-inspired national Messianism, but shook it off, never to recall it in any form.

Similar traits were characteristic of his brother Evgeny's worldview. The latter's fundamental, two-volume monograph of Soloviev – published during the years of the hottest debates over “the new religious consciousness” and “the Russian idea” – was the work of a professional historian of philosophy, focused on theoretical philosophical problems and rejecting all attempts at burdening philosophy with a soteriological mission – a radical critic of all utopian projects aimed at a total transformation of earthly life.<sup>75</sup> As an ideological inspirer and co-founder of the publishing house “Put” that has served Russian philosophy so well, Evgeny Trubetskoi stood against the tendencies to establish a specifically “national” and manifestly anti-Western philosophy.<sup>76</sup> In 1912, in his essay *The Old and the New National Messianism*, he strongly criticized the tradition of considering Russia “the chosen nation” – while approving of the idea of Russia's part in realizing, together with other nations, Christian values.<sup>77</sup>

We may justifiably assume that Sergei Trubetskoi would have manifested the same attitude.

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75 See E.N. Trubetskoi, *Mirosozertsaniie V.S. Solovieva*, vol. 1-2, Moscow 1913 (re-edited: Moscow 1995).

76 See E. Gollerbach, *K nezrimomu gradu. Religiozno-filozofskaya gruppya “Put” (1910-1919) v poiskakh novoi russkoi identichnosti*, Aleteia, Sankt Petersburg 2000.

77 E.N. Trubetskoi, “Starii i novii natsyonalnii messianizm,” *Russkaya mysl*, No3, 1912 (reprinted in: E.N. Trubetskoy, *Izbrannoe*, Moscow 1997, pp. 299-323).





## **Part V**

### **From the Turn of the Century to the Aftermath of the First Revolution**



# Chapter 21

## Three Variants of Marxism at the Turn of the Century

The foundation of the Emancipation of Labor Group by Georgy Plekhanov in Geneva is usually regarded as the beginning of Marxist domination in the Russian revolutionary movement. However, this assumption is a considerable simplification. The group, functioning from abroad, was engaged in a theoretical polemic against Russian Populism and involved in the translation of works written by Marks and Engels into Russian.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, it did not maintain close contacts with domestic movements nor did it influence these movements. Overshadowed by the reputation of the heroes and martyrs of the People's Will, the Emancipation of Labor remained unpopular among the socialists of the West. Extremely characteristic, in this respect, is the reply of Engels to the letter of Wiera Zasulicz, who asked him to evaluate the work by Plekhanov entitled *Our Differences*. Engels avoided addressing this matter. What is more, he did not express any enthusiasm about the conversion of former populists to Marxism and in relation to politics, he did support the People's Will, claiming that in the context of Russia, the idea of coming to power through revolutionary socialism was more justified than anywhere else.<sup>2</sup> Engels reacted to Plekhanov's anxiety about such a course of events by invoking the historical necessity, which will, in the end, properly revise the illusions of revolutionary voluntarism.

From the viewpoint of Plekhanov's biography, the years 1883-1893 constituted a "decade of isolation." 1889, the year of the formation of the Second International, brought change, with Plekhanov taking part in the activities of the Second International from the very beginning. Plekhanov was gradually gaining international recognition and respect. Upon the death of the ultraconservative Alexander III (1894), the possibility to directly influence the intellectual situation in Russia was wide open for Plekhanov. At the beginning

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1 Plekhanov published, among others, the Russian translation of *The Communist Manifesto*, together with a preface to the Russian edition by Marks and Engels (1882).

2 The letter from Engels to W. Zasulicz as of 23 April 1885 (see *Filozofia społeczna narodnictwa rosyjskiego*, vol.2, pp.738-739).

of 1895, under the pseudonym of N. Beltov, Plekhanov published his major philosophical work in Russia, *A Contribution to the Development of the Monistic Conception of History*, followed by a series of studies in the fields of philosophy (including the very popular *On the Question of the Individual's Role in History*, 1898), aesthetics and the history of social thought in Russia. Owing to this intellectual offensive, Plekhanov Marxism attained an authoritative position in the interpretation of Marxism. It was increasingly associated with the dispute concerning how Russia could develop but also - in the first place - with a comprehensive, all-embracing philosophical worldview, referred to as "dialectical and historical materialism."

This philosophical codification of Marxism was not unprecedented, its traits can be noticed in the works of Engels like *Anti-Dühring* and *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*. Still, the philosophical ambitions and accomplishments of Plekhanov remained a novelty in the history of international Marxism. Not until Plekhanov had "dialectical materialism" (as opposed to historical materialism, as commonly accepted by Marxists) become the necessary philosophical basis for all branches and applications of Marxist thought. This stance was principally adopted by Russian Marxists (it goes without saying that not all were inclined to accept it). It had no influential followers in Germany and Poland.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from the integral Plekhanov Marxism, which was driven by philosophy, another variant of Russian Marxist thought emerged in the 1890s, namely "legal Marxism," a movement which was in favor of the capitalist industrialization of Russia under Prime Minister Witte. With the publication of *Critical Notes on the Economic Development of Russia* by Petr Struve in 1894, legal Marxism became a strong intellectual trend, with its own journals and representatives in several faculties of higher education (A. Skworcow, A. Czuprow, N. Tuhan-Baranowski). Almost every work in the field of economy that dealt with the progression of capitalism, the destruction of community and proletarianization of peasants was written from the point of view of legal Marxism. The Russian intelligentsia, not related directly to the revolutionary movement, associated the beginning of Marxism in Russia with Struve, not Plekhanov.

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3 In the century to come, the situation reversed itself: the theorists of "Western Marxism," G. Lukács and K. Korsch, accepted the Hegelian dialectic, at the same time fiercely criticizing the interpretation of Marxism by Engels, particularly the concept of a "dialectics of nature." See A. Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom. The Rise and Fall of the Communist Utopia*, Stanford, CA 1995.

The following quote from Lenin illustrates the prevalence and influence of legal Marxism:

Speaking generally, this was an altogether curious phenomenon that no one in the eighties or the beginning of the nineties would have believed possible. In a country ruled by an autocracy, with a completely enslaved press, in a period of desperate political reaction in which even the tiniest outgrowth of political discontent and protest is persecuted, the theory of revolutionary Marxism suddenly forces its way into the censored literature and, though expounded in Aesopian language, is understood by all the “interested.” The government had accustomed itself to regarding only the theory of the (revolutionary) *Narodnaya Volya* as dangerous, without, as is usual, observing its internal evolution, and rejoicing at any criticism leveled against it. Quite a considerable time elapsed (by our Russian standards) before the government realized what had happened and the unwieldy army of censors and gendarmes discovered the new enemy and flung itself upon him. Meanwhile, Marxist books were published one after another, Marxist journals and newspapers were founded, nearly everyone became a Marxist, Marxists were flattered, Marxists were courted, and the book publishers rejoiced at the extraordinary, ready sale of Marxist literature.<sup>4</sup>

The quote requires, however, a more precise commentary. Legal Marxism, in the broadest sense, covering the whole of legally published Marxist literature (together with the works by Lenin), should be differentiated from legal Marxism in its narrower sense. Legal Marxism in the latter, narrower understanding, was a movement represented by Struve. It was not subject to censorship and this was not an oversight. On the contrary, this was deliberate, since legal Marxism in its narrower sense was treated as a current opposing the revolution, favoring the economic policy of Witte (who did not recoil from invoking Marx in reference to the necessity of capital development).

Legal Marxism, thus, in its narrower sense, was a form of interpreting Marxist theory, a focal point of which constituted the conviction of the necessity of the “capitalist phase.” Reasons for this necessity could involve the hopes placed in the labor movement, as a force supporting liberal reforms and even the sincere, although somewhat abstract approval of socialism as a distant, in terms of time, phase of post capitalist evolution. The fundamental issue, nonetheless, lied in the unconstrained development of capitalism, and not in the collapse of capitalism, social revolution or the realization of a social ideal. Therefore, the evolution of “legal Marxism,” toward Bernstein revisionism and eventually different variants of liberal thought, was natural.

The third variant of Marxism of the 1890s was embodied in the young Lenin. Marxism-Leninism was formed (as already mentioned) in the

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4 See W.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol.5, p.361. [Progress Publishers Moscow], 2009.

revolutionary circles of the Volga region. They attempted to combine access to “scientific socialism” with the continuation of the revolutionary tradition of Populists. This made Lenin declare, as completely obvious, that Marxists are revolutionaries in the first place, and only secondarily theoreticians of social development, not the other way round, as suggested by the Marxist orthodoxy of Plekhanov. Moreover, Lenin took it for granted that the core of the views of Marxist revolutionaries was to be found in the concept of class struggle, in which a natural ally of the proletariat was the oppressed class - peasantry, and not the liberal bourgeoisie, as claimed by Plekhanov and Struve. He was also convinced that it was a duty of Marxists to consider the effects of capital development, the condition being it was not to be transformed into the apologia of capitalism or ideological support for the industrialization policy of the government. In other words, already in its early period, Marxism-Leninism centered around the issue of effective methods of consequent class struggle and not on “the objective laws of social development.” At that time, Marxism already emphasized the will to struggle, conditioned by the power of the contradictory nature of social classes and the level of preparation for this struggle, and not “developmental necessity.” For Lenin, the sign of preparedness for the revolution was constituted by class antagonisms.

These features of revolutionary, voluntary Marxism-Leninism were not immediately clear. Initially, Lenin himself was eager to diminish their significance. Plekhanov was an authority figure for him, just as Struve, whom he criticized for “objectivism.” However, the course of events led to the escalation of antagonisms, a divergence of interests, and a polarization of standpoints.

## **Plekhanov’s Necessitarian Orthodoxy**

### *The Philosophy of “Rational Necessity”*

The notion of “historical necessity” constituted the cornerstone of the “orthodox” Marxism of the Second International. The most prominent theoretician of the Second International, Karl Kautsky, propagated the idea that Marxist “scientism” lies in the total rejection of the normative interpretations of socialism. He understood scientific socialism as a matter of historical necessity, which shall be comprehended and accepted and not as a matter of choosing “what should be.” Ethics itself shall be subject to “scientific inquiry,” that is

rendered free from arbitrary evaluations and subordinated to the scientific acknowledgement of the objective needs of social development.<sup>5</sup>

In Plekhanov's Marxism, the notion of historical necessity seemed more crucial than in the Kautsky's vision. Whereas Kautsky referred to necessity in a naturalistic, causal manner, Plekhanov interpreted necessity with a Hegelian accent - theologically, as a "rational" necessity, giving meaning to the historical process and paving the way to the "kingdom of freedom."

Plekhanov's interpretation relied on the dialectical (Hegelian) philosophy of Engels, which was regarded with respectful skepticism by the theoreticians of the Second International, who were under the intellectual influence of positivist scientism. Plekhanov, guided by the need for moral enhancement, the need for theodicy or rather historiody, approved of the Hegelian theories. These were helpful, in so far as he had to convince Russian socialists that the "capitalist phase" was a necessity of a higher level, and therefore justified suffering. By the same token, Plekhanov indicated the heightened sense behind the demand to give up the "direct road to socialism."

In order to understand Plekhanov in the history of philosophy and place him in the history of Russian thought, one must be acquainted with his articles on Belinsky, particularly "Belinsky and Rational Reality" (1897).<sup>6</sup> This text, to some extent, referred to Mikhailovski, who was engaged in a dispute with Struve, comparing the "objectivism" of Russian Marxists with Belinsky's ideas dating to the period of "reconciliation with reality." In both cases - as the Populist's theoretician claimed - the dispute between "personality" and "reality" was resolved in favor of the latter. Also, in both cases, on behalf of alleged "necessity" and "rationality," it came to the surrender to reality. Belinsky awoke, however, cursed the "despicable reconciliation," rebelled against 'rational reality' and refused it the right to sacrifice people.

In contrast with Mikhailovski, Plekhanov was fascinated with Belinsky's "philosophy of reconciliation," not his "rebellion." According to Plekhanov, this philosophy was an attempt to overcome the idealistic subjectivism typical of Schiller's works, to break with the "abstract rationality" of the Enlightenment and the utopian hues of early socialism. To Plekhanov, Belinsky appeared to be a "sociological genius," who instinctively understood that the Hegelian doctrine of the rationality of everything real provided the only possible foundation for the social sciences.<sup>7</sup> In his reasoning, Belinsky was mistaken only when taking an

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5 See A. Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap*, pp. 210-211.

6 See G. Plekhanov, *Sochineniia*, vol.20, p. XXVII.

7 In the *History of Russian Social Thought [Historia rosyjskiej myśli społecznej (Wybór)]*, vol. 2, pp. 161-162, Plekhanov expressed this opinion in his monograph about

excessively static approach toward reality, and failing to develop the "concept of negation." It had not been the revolt against Hegelian "necessity" that rectified the mistake; on the contrary, this revolt came to be regarded as an "original theoretical sin," a lowering of intellectual standards triggered by an outburst of suppressed passions.

Hence, the readers noticed a close analogy between Belinsky's anti-Voluntarism, which rejected the condemnation of reality on account of "abstract idealism" and Plekhanov's anti-Voluntarism, which, in turn, rejected the utopian ideal of a direct transition of Russia to socialism. Plekhanov's Marxism could be in a way regarded as a "reconciliation with reality" in the name of historical necessity, a reconciliation lacking a mistake made by Belinsky, that is to say, accepting the dynamic reality coupled with the "concept of negation." What is worth mentioning at this point, is that in his unfinished "History of Russian Social Thought" Plekhanov himself had intended to draw a parallel between Belinsky's "reconciliation with reality" and Russian Marxism.<sup>8</sup>

Plekhanov deemed the development of capitalist relations in Russia a "rational reality," and to put it more precisely, a reality understood as a dynamic process unfolding according to the rational laws of historical progress. On this issue, too, he referred to Belinsky, whose comment that "the process of internal civic development will begin in Russia only when our gentry has transformed into a bourgeoisie" he called a perceptive guess about "Russia's future fate as a civilized country."<sup>9</sup>

Plekhanov projected an image of Belinsky as a virtual precursor of Russian Marxism (or, more accurately, of Plekhanov's Marxism). Also "subjective sociologists" made a claim that Belinsky is their own ideological predecessor, a claim not conflicting with the image presented by Plekhanov. Plekhanov admitted that Belinsky had not entirely succeeded in overcoming his "utopianism"; in his "negation" of Russian reality he had frequently abandoned the dialectical view in favor of the subjectivist attitudes of Enlightenment rationalism [*prosvetitel'stvo*]. The Russian Marxists based themselves on Belinsky's strong side, whereas "subjective sociology" harked back to his weak side, to the "original theoretical sin" demonstrated by his moral revolt against Hegelianism. In later years, Plekhanov tried to demonstrate that the Bolsheviks' "subjectivist" tactics also sprang from this "original sin." It is significant that at

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Chernyshevsky (published in the form of articles in the years 1890-1892, and in the form of a book in 1909 in Petersburg), proving that Chernyshevsky's understanding of Hegelian doctrine was not as profound as Belinsky's.

8 See Plekhanov, *Sochineniia*, vol. 20, Moscow-Leningrad 1923-1927, pp. XXVII.

9 Plekhanov, *Izbrannye filosofskie proizvedeniia*, vol. 4, Moscow 1956-1958, p. 521.



the very end of his life – after the October Revolution, which he considered to be a voluntaristic violation of the laws of history – he continued to draw attention to Belinsky’s struggle against utopianism and felt impelled to warn the victorious Bolshevik party against the dangers of an “abstract ideal.”<sup>10</sup> Equally characteristic was his desire to be buried in St. Petersburg next to the grave of Belinsky.

Plekhanov’s major philosophical work, “A Contribution to the Development of the Monistic Conception of History,” aimed at depicting the history of European thought as successive stages moving toward Marxism. Plekhanov essentially perceived this history as consisting of just the same phases as could be discerned in Belinsky’s thought. The first phase – the stage of the “abstract ideal” – was embodied in Enlightenment rationalism, which used the subjective yardstick of individual human reason to evaluate social realities. The second phase – the stage of the discovery of historical necessity was manifested in anti-Enlightenment German idealist philosophy, which reached its climax in Hegel’s philosophy. The last, third phase, is rooted in Marx’s philosophy; it is the stage of reconciliation of the ideal with objective necessity. The remaining pages of the “Contribution to the Development of the Monistic Conception of History” were devoted to utopian socialists and French historians of the Restoration. Both were viewed by Plekhanov as pioneers of Marxism: utopian socialists for coining the definition of a socialist ideal, French historians for presenting history as a process governed by objective laws and highlighting the importance of class struggle.

When it comes to the relation “necessity-freedom,” the most crucial element is the chapter on German idealism and, needless to say, Marx. The idealists referred to Spinoza’s thought as follows: “it is a freedom that identifies itself with necessity, necessity that has transformed itself into freedom.”<sup>11</sup> They recognized that the fact of being dependent upon the mere coincidence and not

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10 In 1917, Plekhanov justified the necessity of passing through the capitalist phase as follows: “One of the creators of scientific socialism, F. Engels, once expressed a brilliant thought: without ancient slavery, modern socialism would have been impossible. Let us reflect on this thought: it amounts to a relative justification of slavery, a justification within a certain historical epoch. Is this not a shameful betrayal of an ideal? Please ease your mind – there is no betrayal at all. It is only the rejection of a utopian idea born in the vague sphere of abstraction and divorced from the concrete conditions of *hic et nunc*. Engels was right to reject such an ideal, not wrong. An abstract ideal has too long hindered the development of the human mind. And it was not without reason that our Belinsky deplored the period in which he found himself under its harmful influence.” Plekhanov, *God na rodine* (Paris, 1921), vol. 2, p. 260.

11 Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, vol. 1, pp. 571, 574.

the laws of necessity, without which the world would be absolutely unpredictable, was humiliating for human beings. Therefore, the term ‘freedom’ gained a philosophical basis and proofs were offered to suggest that history is not a matter of coincidence, but rational development. In terms of Hegelian philosophy, world history is the “progress of the consciousness of freedom – a progress whose necessity we have to investigate.”<sup>12</sup>

In his interpretation of the Marxist doctrine, Plekhanov was entirely guided by what Engels had propagated. On the one hand, the development of productive forces enabled independence from nature. On the other hand, with more and more complex forms of production, which went out of control, a new kind of slavery, namely economic necessity, emerged. The inner nature of the development of production allowed for the comprehension of why people are dependent on machines. This comprehension, influenced by Marxism, posed the possibility of finally defeating necessity and social conditioning.

By the same token, the “necessitarian” interpretation of history was fading and allowed for Engels’ “leap into the kingdom of freedom.” Becoming acquainted with the “iron laws of development,” enables the subordination of necessity, rendering it an “obedient slave of reason.” Consequently, dialectical materialism, taken in its most comprehensive form, can be understood as a “philosophy of action.”<sup>13</sup>

It is sometimes argued that Plekhanov’s stance resulted from the conviction that “there is no basic difference between the study of human history and the natural sciences.”<sup>14</sup> Given the significance of the book in which this is claimed, this conviction shall be further explained. Plekhanov, like Kautsky, was also convinced that “social processes can be studied in the same completely objective way as natural phenomena, human history being subject to universal laws of change - evolution, contradiction, and qualitative leaps - in the same way as geological formations.” However, these observations are only correct up to a certain point. Plekhanov underlined that the “spirit of research” is “absolutely the same” in Darwin and Marx, pointing out at the same time that “the investigation of Marx begins precisely where the investigation of Darwin ends.”<sup>15</sup> This claim could be justified in the following manner: whereas Darwin studied humankind as a biological species under the influence of the physical environment, Marx explained the historical development of man, determined by social relations arising from the external nature of man. The object of research in

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12 Ibid, p.111

13 Ibid, pp. 230-231

14 L. Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, Oxford 1981, vol. 2, pp. 342-343.

15 Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, vol. 1, p. 665.

the social sciences was so different from the object of research of geology, for instance, that to Plekhanov this constituted a qualitative difference. He considered the laws of history much like Engels, as nature-like rather than simply natural. Again alongside Engels, but against Kautsky, Plekhanov also attributed an immanent rationality to the laws of history and perceived history as a reasonable construct. Despite rejecting the idea of an “essence of humanity” and holding a visibly negative attitude toward the early works of Marx<sup>16</sup>, Plekhanov’s philosophy of history possessed some traits of the Marxist scheme of self-enriching alienation. One must bear in mind that Plekhanov understood history as a process in which man loses control over products and becomes their slave. Later on, as a result of a lengthy development in an enslaved state, man begins to comprehend his own situation, which in turn enables movement toward the “kingdom of freedom.”

All these ideas were derived from Engels, not Kautsky. It was easier for Plekhanov to refer to Hegel through Engels. Based on Hegel, Plekhanov developed his concept of necessity from a dialectical and rational-theological view, in conscious opposition to naturalistic determinism. In an article written to mark the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hegel’s death, Plekhanov exhorted Marxists to remain faithful to Hegelian philosophy, a philosophy defined by “striving for the great historical goal, a striving which nothing can stop.”<sup>17</sup> And obviously that “magnificent and irresistible forward-march of History” differs from the concept of necessity, which governs geological formations.

“Faithfulness to the spirit of Hegel’s philosophy” was not restricted to the aforementioned concepts. Having drawn a parallel between the Marxist idea of the mission of the proletariat and the Hegelian idea of the mission of “historical nations,” Plekhanov conceded that Hegel was right in claiming that anyone professing a new historical order has the right to defend its inviolability. He quoted Hegel when stating that one may not get away with confronting the “world spirit.”<sup>18</sup>

The Hegelian Marxism of Plekhanov posed a threat to the freedom of the individual, a threat greater than the positivist Marxism of the Second International. This was the case because Hegelian Marxism justified the primacy of the whole over the parts. Freedom was subject to the assimilation of Marxism as an entire system, with no scope for intellectual pluralism.

Notwithstanding all this, the necessitarian philosophy of Plekhanov favored liberal capitalism rather than some form of a political authoritarianism. The

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16 Cf Plekhanov, *Sochineniia*, vol. 18, p. 334

17 Plekhanov, *Izbrannye filosofskie proizvedeniia*, vol.1, p.450

18 *Ibid*, pp. 439-440

interpretations of the concepts of "necessity" and "regularity" were of decisive importance.

The requisite for "regularity" [*zakonomiernosti*] was associated with spontaneous and "organic" development – only a process "that has its own intrinsic cause, that starts from within and not from some alien 'without'"<sup>19</sup> fit with Plekhanov's conception of historical necessity. If we add that he condemned starting from "without" – as a subjectivist violation of history – every attempt on the part of a body of revolutionaries (or government) to resist the "inner logic" of economic development, it becomes clear that what he meant by the inevitable trend of development was very often simply the specific pattern of development associated with laissez-faire capitalism. This was of course a form of "economic materialism," aptly defined by Gramsci as a blend of bourgeois liberal political economy with an appropriately castrated and simplified Marxism.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, Plekhanov's conception of what was "regular" and "necessary" inevitably relied on a normative view of the ideal development process. An assumption that the "course of ideas" was determined by the "course of events" let him draw a conclusion that men were duty bound not to attempt to interfere from without in events with the object of changing their course in accordance with their own ideals. It is readily apparent that this was a prescriptive argument, a deviation from facts to value-judgments.

An additional element in this edifice of thought was Plekhanov's "Eurocentrism," or what might be called an essential component of his Westernism. On this particular issue he broke most decisively with his own past and accepted with pride the reproach of "Westernism" leveled by the Populists against the Russian Marxists. His hostility to "Asiatic despotism"<sup>21</sup> (whose mainstay, as he saw it, was the peasant commune), coupled with his view of the regular processes of development as inviolate laws of universal Historical Reason, meant that his conception of "historical necessity" was extraordinarily abstract – seen in isolation from the "historical and geographical conditions of development," as Belinsky once wrote about his own "abstract ideal." It is ironic (and part of the tragedy of Plekhanov) that the recognition of historical necessity, which he thought would save him from "utopianism," turned out to be the essence of his very own utopianism. When Plekhanov accused the Bolsheviks of ignoring the "concrete conditions of time and place" in 1917 and 1918, it was because he had his own abstract ideal that laid down the most rational way to achieve a socialist Russia. This was the ideal of a Russian

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19 Cf Plekhanov, *History of the Russian Social Thought, Sochineniia*, vol. 20, pp. 82-83.

20 Cf A Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*, London 1957, pp. 153-161.

21 Cf Plekhanov, *Sochineniia*, vol. 15, p. 31.

Westernizer who wished for his country to have a “normal” European type of development, following a rational sequence of “phases” and always perfectly in harmony with the intrinsic tendencies of economic and cultural growth. In the end, the ideal of socialism to be built in Russia after the final completion of the process of Westernization on the firm foundations of a highly developed capitalist democracy proved to be no less “abstract” than the ideals of the Russian Populists. Therefore, at the moment of the revolution of 1917, what Plekhanov tried to avert - isolation, political helplessness, and an idle dogmatism of abstract theories - fell to his lot.

### *Aesthetics and Literary Criticism*

Plekhanov’s writings on art and literature should be regarded as an integral part of his work as a whole. Many of these pieces were written only in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, yet the views they express were largely formed by the "father of Russian Marxism" much earlier, in the 1880s.

The motivation underlying aesthetic studies such as the *Letters without Address* (1899-1900), *French Dramatic Literature and Eighteenth-Century French Painting from the Standpoint of Sociology* (1905), and *Art and Society* (1912-13) was the desire to show through the example of art the value of historical materialism as an interpretative tool. Plekhanov chiefly utilizes these works not to dispute idealistic aesthetics but to explain art from the standpoint of naturalistic materialism (above all Darwinian evolutionism) or positivistic psychology. A common denominator of both these points of view, according to Plekhanov, is the attempt to explain art by invoking an ahistorical concept of “human nature” or variations on this theme (i.e. Taine’s notion of “race”). Plekhanov conceded that there were certain “general laws of human psychology,” certain inborn tendencies such as the instinct of imitation or contradiction (Darwin’s “principle of antithesis”); but he argued that the manner in which they manifested themselves, or even whether they appeared at all – in other words the transition from potentiality to reality – was determined by differing historical circumstances.

Plekhanov derived this argument directly from the theory of evolution; in his view, the difference between Darwinian evolutionism and historical materialism could be reduced to the proposition that in historical development it is not the natural environment that plays the decisive role (although it must be taken into consideration) but social conditions, determined by the level of the forces of production. Plekhanov found numerous arguments in favor of this thesis in ethnological and sociological literature on the life of primitive tribes. He pointed out, for instance, that animal motifs give way to plant motifs when

tribes cease to be hunters and become cultivators, and that musical rhythm depends on the rhythm of work, and therefore also on the development of the productive forces. He also laid great stress on the fact that useful activity – i.e. work – is older than play and that man’s recognition of objects for their use value precedes any aesthetic point of view.

It was a peculiar paradox of Plekhanov’s aesthetic theories (of his philosophy, too) that though he insisted on the superiority of historical to naturalistic materialism, his sociological interpretation of beauty made use of many of the categories of naturalism: it was not for nothing that he declared that his investigations of social phenomena would utilize principles applied by Darwin in the realm of biology.<sup>22</sup> By explaining the history of art in terms of the operation of external conditions on man’s psycho-physical nature, Plekhanov’s sociology conceived of man not as the creator of his own nature and history, but merely as a product, a passive medium of objective processes subject to the strict determinism of “natural necessity.”

Apart from the clear evidence of positivistic naturalism, Plekhanov’s aesthetics also reveal the influence of Hegel, which was mostly absorbed second hand through Belinsky. Hegel regarded art as a separate form of the Absolute Spirit; Plekhanov saw art as a separate, irreducible form of social ideology. The sphere of beauty, he wrote, is not the intellect but instinct; a true artist, as Belinsky was right to stress, thinks in images. By implying that art has its own specific rules and develops according to laws that are not straightforward reflections of the laws of society, this argument ran counter to the positivists’ reductionism. It also implied that writers ought to avoid the excessive rationalization of the creative process, as well as the substitution of the language of political journalism for the language proper to art. This was a criterion that Plekhanov applied rigorously, regardless of his personal attitude toward the ideology advocated in a given work of art: he criticized the Populist writer N. Naumov for using literature as a vehicle for Populist propaganda, just as he later criticized Maxim Gorky for subordinating art with Marxist propaganda in his novel *Mother*.

As part of his emphasis on “objectivity,” Plekhanov also felt that critics ought to be moderate in expressing their own political preferences. Since all social and aesthetic ideals are historically and sociologically justified, a normative approach in aesthetics is clearly unscientific. If aesthetics intends to be taken seriously as a scientific discipline, it must stop preaching to artists about what art should be and what ideals art should proclaim, and must instead

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22 Plekhanov, *Sochineniia*, vol. 14, p. 10.

try to explain what art is and why it takes a particular form in a particular age. In literary and art criticism strict scientific canons are of course less binding and prescriptive views are more in order. However, according to Plekhanov, even a critic should not judge a work of art by the subjective yardstick of his own abstract ideal. In particular, a critic should not ask the artist to support a particular political line with his art, as this would necessarily detract from the work's authenticity and its aesthetic and intellectual impact. The function of art is to reflect the consciousness of the community, and if it wants to do this well it cannot pay heed to the views of critics.

Plekhanov outlined his views on the critic's role in his theory of "two acts of materialist literary criticism." The "first act" is to trace and investigate the "sociological equivalent" of the work of art under review, to transpose the ideas of the work analyzed from the language of artistic imagery into the language of sociology. The "second act" is the artistic analysis of the work, which means establishing how adequately its form expresses the content.<sup>23</sup>

Although this theory did not advise critics to judge a work of art from the standpoint of their own aesthetic and social ideals, a closer investigation suggests that here, too, Plekhanov's "objectivism" was not consistent – either in theory or in practice. The most glaring departure from his theoretical objection to a normative aesthetics was Plekhanov's acceptance of what he called "Belinsky's aesthetic code." This code, which it should be noted was not so much taken over from Belinsky as ascribed to him by Plekhanov, laid down five requirements for a work of art: it must (1) represent life as it is with the help of images, not syllogisms; (2) portray the truth without embellishments or distortions; (3) express a concrete idea that encompasses the whole subject in its unity; (4) have a form appropriate to its content; and (5) show unity of form, that is, the harmonious coordination of all its parts.<sup>24</sup> It is obvious that these five requirements were essentially a reiteration of the aesthetic principles of 19<sup>th</sup> century realism, and that raising them to the status of a universal norm was not only incompatible with Plekhanov's declared opposition to evolutionary aesthetics, but also sinned against historicism.

If we examine Plekhanov's contribution as a critic more closely, it is striking that he was far readier to accept historical relativity in his evaluation of past achievements than in his assessment of more recent trends. This showed itself most clearly in his radical condemnation of the modernist movement, especially Symbolism, which he judged by the standards of realism.

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23 Plekhanov, *Sochineniia*, vol. 14, pp. 183-189.

24 *Ibid.*, vol. 23, pp. 156-157.

This inconsistency sprang from the internal contradictions of Plekhanov's standpoint. On the one hand, it was based on the assumption that everything that existed was historically justified and inevitable, but on the other it also postulated that a scientific understanding of the laws of development made it possible to determine which trends were progressive; therefore anything that contradicted this diagnosis by its existence could be condemned. In his attitude toward contemporary intellectual and artistic movements (those he did not approve of as well as those he had not foreseen), Plekhanov behaved less like an objective scholar interested in discovering their social genesis than like someone delivering a final judgment from the heights of his superior scientific understanding of "what should be." Of course, this was another expression of the same dogmatic certainty that led him to condemn the Bolshevik Revolution as a violation of the scientifically established laws of historical development.

His insistence on the absolute value of 19<sup>th</sup> century realism and his inability to foresee or accept other trends in modern art shows that Plekhanov's historical materialism suffered from the same limitations as Hegel's historical idealism; it was able to explain the necessity of what had been, but it failed as a compass for the future.

That having been said, concluding on this note would be unjust to Plekhanov. Today his aesthetics is certainly outmoded, but it is important to remember that he was a pioneer in Marxist art criticism. Of considerable interest are his attempts to create a Marxist interpretation of social psychology as a sphere that would explain those features of works of art that cannot be directly related to the development of the forces of production. His study *French Dramatic Literature and Eighteenth-Century French Painting from the Standpoint of Sociology*, in which these ideas were developed in most detail, still has many fruitful insights to offer to the contemporary reader.

## **Petr Struve and the Evolution of "Legal Marxism"**

*Antecedence: Marxist Economism of Nikolai Ziber*

The central work of "legal Marxism," *Critical Remarks on the Economic Development of Russia* by Petr Struve, was published as Finance Minister Sergei Witte initiated an intensive capitalist industrialization of Russia, contested by the "legal Populists" who considered themselves Marx's disciples. In such a climate, Struve's book attracted widespread attention. It had an enormous influence on circles of the intelligentsia who received it as a sensational novelty. In point of fact, the history of "legal Marxism" had commenced as early as the 1880s. Struve had an important predecessor – Nikolai Ziber (1844-1888),



professor of Kiev University and author of the book *David Ricardo and Karl Marx*, favorably reviewed by Marx himself in his “Afterword” to the second edition of *Capital*.

Although Ziber’s book had not appeared until 1885, the texts it included – a dissertation on Ricard’s theory of value (1871) and a series of essays jointly entitled *Marx’s Theory of Economy* – had been published in periodicals even during the 1870s, largely augmenting the interest in Marxism amongst the Zemlia and Volia Populists (it is worth noting that Plekhanov was strongly influenced by them, referring to the texts in his essay *Law of Social Economic Development and the Tasks of Socialism in Russia*). Soviet scholars’ judgment on Ziber differed from that on Struve, stressing the former’s pioneering merits in propagating Marxism in Russia, and indeed, from the perspective of a general typology of various receptions of Marxism, it seems undeniable that it had been Ziber who initiated the economist-liberal interpretation of Marx in Russia. In Ziber’s eyes, Marx was, above all, a disciple and fellow traveler of Ricard: *Capital* – Ziber argued – “is nothing but a continuation and development of the principles underlying the foundations of Ricard and Smith’s teachings.”<sup>25</sup>

Forms of social life – Ziber argued – cannot be an object of choice: they are the result of natural development in which man’s conscious activity may perform the role of a midwife shortening labor pains. The necessity of passing through a capitalist phase ensues from the universal law of economic development – the harmful social effects of capitalist progress can be counteracted, e.g. by following factory laws modeled on the English, but an ambition “to eliminate them entirely is like wishing to lift oneself by one’s own hair.”<sup>26</sup>

Economic development proceeds evolutionarily in phases which can neither be overstepped, nor removed; the state’s legal structure is automatically self-adapted to the economic structure. Ziber’s faith in the automatism of progress brought him to the conclusion that Socialism would win the day without a revolution, as it would become an economic necessity – the future introduction of Socialism, Ziber argued, should be decided by an international congress of the industrial states.

Obviously, Ziber was a fervent opponent of the Populists. He accepted the fatal necessity of the fall of peasant communities, and even of the dispossession and proletarianization of a large part of the peasant population: “nothing will become of the Russian peasant – he used to say – until he has been stewed in the factory boiler.” Production by small, dispersed producers must be replaced by

25 N.I. Ziber, *Izbranniie ekonomicheskiie proizvedeniia*, vol. 1, Moscow 1959, p. 556.

26 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p.673.

concentrated production on a grand scale – this, according to Ziber, was a general, inexorable law, applicable not only to industrial production, but also to agriculture. In a letter to Plekhanov, Axelrod observed that there was one conclusion the Socialists could draw from Ziber’s views: “the peasants’ fate [must] be left to the spontaneous historical process, while we turn into Liberals or sit back with our arms crossed.”<sup>27</sup>

Struve had a somewhat different opinion on the matter: it was not the Socialists who ought to turn into Liberals, but the Liberals who, in order to act more effectively, should – from time to time, at least – turn into Social Democrats. An opinion meaningfully exposing the weakness of the Russian Liberal movement at the time.

### *The Breakthrough - Critical Remarks*

Struve’s *Critical Remarks* (published in September 1894) were – for all their formal inadequacies resulting from the author’s haste – much broader in scope and far deeper intellectually than the specialist monograph by Ziber.

Viewed in the light of the economic and mental transformations that occurred in Russia and the “post-Communist” East-European states a hundred years later, *Critical Remarks* may offer some interesting and refreshing reflections. There was a common denominator behind the 1890s and the 1990s in Russia: both demanded a theoretical and ideological legitimization of the capitalist road that had been extremely unpopular up to that point with the public. The fact that the turn taken at the close of the 20th century – being a general transformation of the system, i.e., incomparable to anything that could be expected a century earlier – was effected without any public debate comparable with those that had been once initiated by Struve, speaks in favor of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian intelligentsia.

The author of *Remarks*, Petr Struve (1870–1944) came from a Russified Protestant German family whose members had contributed to Russian scholarship and statehood. Influenced by Ivan Aksakov in his early youth, he transformed his mentor’s ideas in the spirit of liberal, Westernizing nationalism, dreaming of a “great, vivid and cultural Russia.”<sup>28</sup> Introduced to Marxism as early as the late 1880s, he accepted the general principles of historical materialism without any reservations. In his opinion, Marxism was an additional, important argument in favor of a consistent Westernization of Russia – for that reason, he was anxious about the misuse of Marx’s authority by the

27 *Perepiska G.V. Plekhanova i P.B. Axelroda*, vol. 2, Moscow 1925, p. 197.

28 R.Pipes, *Struve. Liberal on the Left, 1870-1905*, Cambridge, Mass. 1970, p. 15.

“legal Populists” who defended the idea of “a separate way of development.” While a student at Petersburg University, he co-founded (with future Menshevik Alexander Potresov) a students’ Social Democratic circle, aimed against the narodniks’ interpretation of Marxism.

The year 1893 saw the publication of Danielson’s *Sketches on Our Social Household* and two new books by Vorontsov.<sup>29</sup> The Students’ Social Democratic Circle read it as a signal that the opponents of capitalist transformation had launched an offensive which deserved their immediate counterattack. Struve summoned all his skills and, in record time – as if “inspired” – wrote his *Critical Remarks*.<sup>30</sup>

In his “Foreword” to *Remarks*, Struve distanced himself from Marxist orthodoxy, declaring that he did not mean to defend any particular doctrine, but only to present a standpoint on the question of the roads of Russia’s development.<sup>31</sup> He was more explicit in his letter to Potresov, openly stating that the book was intended as a manifesto of a “new Westernism.”<sup>32</sup> The task demanded a determined counterargument to the concepts of Marxism-oriented narodnik economists, as well a convincing justification of the progressive historical mission of capitalism.

In the first chapter of the work, Struve presented the Populists’ concept as an ideological expression of the interests of small businesses in a traditional pre-capitalist economy. He introduced some new notions (borrowed later by Lenin), such as “objective reactionarism” and “economic romanticism.” He likewise named two trends of the narodnik movement: the Westernizing one that rejected “the capitalist road” within a general pro-European orientation, and the “Slavophile” one that preached integrally “anti-European” ideas. To the former trend he ascribed Chernyshevsky, Mikhailovsky and Lavrov, reserving the latter for Vorontsov and critics of the Europeanized intelligentsia, such as Y.I. Kablits (Yuzov). The division was discontinued further in the book as one blurring the major division and thus colliding with the book’s main aim. The aim was to cement an unequivocal association of Westernism and capitalist modernization.

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29 V.V. (Vorontsov), *Nashi napravleniia* (Petersburg 1893) and *Popytki obosnovaniia narodnichestva* (Petersburg 1893). A year earlier, Vorontsov’s *Progressivniie techeniis v krestianskom khazaistve* (Petersburg 1892) had been published.

30 See “P.B. Struve, My Contacts and Conflicts with Lenin,” *Slavonic Review*, vol. XII, No. 36, April 1934, pp. 580-581.

31 P.B. Struve, *Kriticheskie zamietki k voprosu ob ekonomicheskom razvitiu Rossii*, Petersburg 1894, pp. VIII-X.

32 Struve’s letter to A.N. Potresov, dated as of 18th July, 1894. Quoted by R. Pipes, *Struve*, p. 103.

In the next chapter, devoted to Marxism as “historico-economic materialism,” Struve explained that the “capitalist road” was not a matter of choice: the laws of social development being entirely objective, it was wrong to claim that the “subjective principle” – i.e., individual thought and will – could play any substantial role in the process in question. Indeed, sociology lawfully ignored the individual as a product – rather than a causal agent – of social life.<sup>33</sup> Ludvik Gumplovich (Struve attended his Graz lectures in 1892) aptly observed that the very assumption of “man thinks” was a mistake, thinking being an entirely socialized process: it is thus not an (individual) “man” who thinks – he claimed – but a social group.<sup>34</sup> The illusion of the opposite effect was a product of the division of labor which, by promoting individual specializations, weakened the sense of group solidarity.

In Struve’s opinion, historical materialism was the ultimate word in the social sciences. Its method was marked by entire objectivity, wary of any evaluation and containing (as Marx himself liked to stress) “not a single gram of ethics.” In Marxism, Socialism (just like capitalism), found an economic – rather than ethical – justification. Therefore, one could be a Marxist (from the point of view of method) without being a Socialist. And the other way round: you could be a Socialist who hated the intellectual rigors of Marxism.<sup>35</sup>

The following chapter attempted a Marxist interpretation of the mechanisms of transition from the autarchic natural economy to a barter economy and, finally, to centralized capitalist production. Struve distinguished between commodity production itself – i.e., a *sensu largo* market economy – and a capitalist economy, considering the latter to be the highest stage in the progress of economic centralization<sup>36</sup> – one that broke the bond of ownership between the direct producer and the means of production. In this perspective, Socialism seemed a natural and lawful continuation of capitalist evolution.<sup>37</sup>

Describing that evolution, Struve quoted both Marx and Friedrich List, accepting the latter’s thesis that capitalism had been born within and with the active co-operation of the nation-state. Indeed, he found List superior to Marx, arguing that – while Marx combined his development of Ricardo’s theories with an unmasking attitude toward capitalism – List was entirely in favor of capitalism and free of any ambivalence.<sup>38</sup>

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33 P.B. Struve, *Kriticheskie zamietki*, p. 30.

34 *Ibid.*, pp. 33-35.

35 *Ibid.*, p.69.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 126.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 128.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 123.

The next chapter – and the most important one in many respects – was entitled *Economic Progress and Social Progress*. Struve’s innovation here was to firmly combine two interpretations of Marx’s theory – both equally contradictory to the spirit of revolutionary Marxism. One presented Marxism as an important source of anti-egalitarian argumentation – since it preached the ruthless primacy of production, i.e., development of the means of production, over distribution, i.e., social equality – it economically justified the necessity of a huge growth of inequalities and spoke against egalitarian criticism of capitalist development, calling it “vulgar Socialism, at once utopian and reactionary.”<sup>39</sup> The other interpretation rejected the generally accepted understanding of Marxism as a theory prognosticating an inexorable crisis of the capitalist system and a revolutionary “dispossession of the dispossessed.” Struve did not deny that such a vision was present in *Capital*, arguing that it had nevertheless been radically questioned by Marx himself when he approved of the progressive nature of British factory law, thus acknowledging the possibility of improving the workers’ situation within the capitalist system.<sup>40</sup> The idea was then picked up and developed by the leaders of the reformist trend in Socialism, such as Schulze-Gäwernitz, Lujo Brentano and the British Fabian Society. It was proven right by the real evolution of capitalism which showed that capitalist production demanded mass consumption, which necessitated transforming the working classes into affluent consumers. The economic progress of capitalism that had initially been achieved at the price of soaring inequalities and mass pauperization, was thus transformed into a source of a substantial enrichment of the whole society, workers included.<sup>41</sup>

The entire remainder of the book was devoted to specifically Russian questions: the “economic worldview” of the Populists – Vorontsov and Danielson in particular – and the title problem, i.e., the economic development of Russia after land reform. Struve quoted the United States as a model for Russia, arguing that following the American way was possible thanks to – amongst other things – the vastness of the country, which allowed for developing capitalism that relied almost entirely on the home market.<sup>42</sup> He defended the Russian Marxists against the *narodniks*’ charge of supporting, in the name of capitalism, the painful process of peasants’ proletarianization – and yet, he obviously approved of the thesis popularized by the Erfurt Program of German Social Democrats (1891) that capitalist development must necessarily

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39 Ibid., p. 133-134.

40 Ibid., pp. 130-131.

41 Ibid., pp. 159-160.

42 Ibid., p. 260.

cause expropriation of the small producers.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, he firmly opposed using economic policies to defend the peasant owners and, above all, peasant communities – advising, in turn, the support of strong, individual farmers, fit to meet the demands of the market economy.<sup>44</sup> As will be easily observed, this opinion was, in fact, an anticipation of the agrarian reform undertaken in the following decade by the Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior, Petr Stolypin.

The general task of economic policy was defined by Struve as follows: “Russia ought to be transformed from a poor capitalist country into a rich capitalist country.”<sup>45</sup> The task was meant to engage the co-operation of the intelligentsia who needed to abandon their inveterate anti-capitalist prejudices. They must realize that capitalism “is not but evil, but also a powerful factor for cultural progress; a factor [that is] not only destructive, but also creative.”<sup>46</sup> The final sentence of the book read as follows: “Let us own up to our lack of culture and take a lesson from capitalism.”<sup>47</sup>

The conclusion became a sensation in Russia. Government circles interpreted it as wholehearted support for the Minister of Finance (Witte) against the Minister of the Interior, who feared social destabilization in rural regions. The narodnik intelligentsia reacted with predictable moral indignation, calling Struve “a bourgeois Marxist” and “an ideologue of the plutocracy.”<sup>48</sup>

Especially active and inventive in his polemics with Struve was Nikolai Mikhailovsky, who attacked both the author of *Critical Remarks* and Beltov (Plekhanov), as well as Marxism itself. Calling Marxism “a Hegelianism *a rebours*,” he accused it of fatalism and methodological reductionism, doctrinarian rigidity combined with dialectical sophistry, of a dogmatic conceit and supercilious indifference toward the fate of concrete, living men. While not denying the social sciences the right to discover and comprehend the rules of

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43 The position was strongly defended by Kautsky who argued that “helping manufacturers and agrarian producers while preserving their backward forms of production is contradictory to the direction of economic progress and unfeasible.” See. K. Kautsky, *Zasady socjalizmu* (translation of *Das Erfurter Programm in seinem grundsätzlichen Teil erläutert*, 1892), London 1902, 145-146. The opinion found strong support in Marx’s thesis that small businesses, peasant ones included, are economically backward and destined to perish. See, D. Mitrany, *Marx Against the Peasant*, Chapel Hill 1951.

44 P. B. Struve, *Kriticheskie zamietli*, p. 281.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 250.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 287.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 288.

48 See R. Pipes, *Struve*, pp. 114-117.

social life – which he considered the “ABCs” of science – he opposed the Marxists’ claim that they were the sole possessors of objective truth about those rules, while their ideology was the only one concordant with the direction of historical development which was predetermined. Mikhailovsky observed that the Russian narodnik movement had seen class struggle and the role of the “economic factor” in history from the very beginning, rejecting only the treatment of elemental economic processes as an autocrat to whom human consciousness, reason and will must surrender. An excellent illustration of the anti-human consequences of Marxist-Hegelian historicism was, in his opinion, Engels’ argument for the necessity of slavery quoted by Struve: had there not been slavery in antiquity, there would be no modern Socialism. Had there not been slavery in antiquity – the narodnik thinker retorted – there might have emerged something worthier than contemporary civilization. The argument that slavery had been necessary to make possible modern Socialism (read: Marxism) was, according to Mikhailovsky, analogous to Hegel’s argument that the entirety of historical development had existed only in order to enable the spirit to recognize itself in absolute philosophy (read: Hegelianism).<sup>49</sup>

### *Further Evolution*

The narodnik intelligentsia had lost the power to effectively defend its hegemony in the intellectual circles. Struve’s book had made it obvious that the best educated segments of the intelligentsia – those who deserved to be called intellectuals – wished to break free from the Populist movement, both intellectually and morally.

Being an ideology of a hasty – and yet non-revolutionary – Europeanization, Marxism brought the young intellectuals a welcome sense of relief. It turned out that neither revolutionary heroism, nor narodnik asceticism were necessary to side with progress and represent the final word of European thought, without suffering social guilt or feeling obliged to repay a moral debt to the people.<sup>50</sup>

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49 Long fragments of Mikhailovsky’s essay, “Mr Struve and His Critical Remarks on the Economic Development of Russia” (*Russkoe Bogatstvo*, October 1894) are included in the anthology, *Filozofia społeczna narodnictwa rosyjskiego*, vol. 2, pp. 615-645. The anthology also includes excerpts from Mikhailovsky’s Literary Memoirs of 1892-1894, with reflections on Marxism (pp. 574-589, 605-614). For Engels on slavery (also quoted by Plekhanov), see, F. Engels, *Anty-Dühring*, Warsaw 1949, p. 178.

50 The fact has been emphasized by A. Mendel in his book *Dilemmas of Progress in Tsarist Russia. Legal Marxism and Legal Populism*, Cambridge, Mass., 1961, pp. 138-143, 168.

Aspirations to Western freedom and Western comfort had been granted strong legitimization. Marxism (as interpreted by Struve) seemed to teach that self-restraint in the name of egalitarianism was nonsense, curbing development and multiplying obstacles on the way to emancipation. A Marxist intellectual was persuaded that the suffering of the masses caused by forced industrialization was the absolutely inexorable price to be paid for progress – a price that would be bountifully compensated for in the future. Moreover – not a trifling thing in Russia – one could opt for capitalism without accepting philistine bourgeois ideals, Struve having proved that conscious support of the capitalist way was not tantamount to supporting the middle class as a real social force.

No wonder then that for the young intellectuals gathered around Struve, Marxism was spiritual liberation. Prominent in the group were two thinkers who were to perform important roles in the anti-Positivist breakthrough a few years later: Sergei Bulgakov (1871-1944) and Nikolai Berdiaev (1874-1948). They differed in many respects. Bulgakov, the son of a provincial clergyman, educated in economics, sought a surrogate of religious faith in Marxism. Berdiaev, the descendant of a Russian-Ukrainian aristocratic family related to French royalist immigrants and Polish magnates (Branicki and Sapieha),<sup>51</sup> combined a Populist social sensitivity with prominent spiritual elitism and aristocratic individualism. And yet, both experienced Marxism in the same way: as a spiritual breakthrough restoring the values of an individualist European culture. Both likewise admitted as much in their autobiographies: Berdiaev described Marxism as “a spiritual revolution,” while Bulgakov called it the only worldview acceptable for an intellectual.<sup>52</sup> Bulgakov best expressed the general sense of their respective accesses to legal Marxism, writing: “There is but a single way of development facing Russia – a necessary and unquestionable one: East to West. It’s high time!”<sup>53</sup>

The Marxist involvement of both philosophers is also confirmed by their initially overly critical attitude toward neo-Kantianism – harsher than that of Struve himself, who was willing to combine historical materialism with Alois Riehl’s neo-Kantianism. In 1895, Berdiaev warned against the criticism of determinism initiated by the neo-Kantians, arguing that it led to a Hume-like “suicidal skepticism.”<sup>54</sup> A year later, Bulgakov picked up the subject in his

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51 See N.A. Berdiaev, *Samopoznaniie*, Leningrad 1991, pp. 33-34.

52 See Berdiaev, *Ibid.*, p. 120; S.N. Bulgakov, *Autobiograficheskiie zamietki*, Paris 1946, p. 30.

53 Nemo (Bulgakov), *Prostaia rech' o mudrenikh veshchakh*, *Novoe Slovo*, Part II, June 1897, p. 57.

54 N.A. Berdiaev, *F.A. Lange i kriticheskaia filosofii*, *Mir Bozhii*, March 1895, p. 233.



ample critique of Rudolf Stammler's views, opposing the attempt at completing the causality principle in the social sciences with a teleological standpoint.<sup>55</sup> All such attempts, starting from Kant's own "escape from the law of causality" into the sphere of "practical reason" were, in his opinion, variations of a "subjective sociology," ethically motivated but unacceptable on the grounds of science.

Bulgakov rejected Stammler's claim that a rigorous determinism made conscious action nonsense: what – Stammler asked – would be the sense of having a political wing support something that must follow anyhow, like an eclipse of the Moon? Bulgakov countered the argument, observing that an eclipse of the Moon was an external phenomenon, while the rules of social life emerged through us and within us, becoming real in our actions.<sup>56</sup> The active stance propagated by the Marxists was thus not a violation of the modes of development, but a means to realize those modes. In order to achieve the desired effects, however, we must base our actions exclusively on the principle of causality, rather than on chosen goals:

Even in his inner life, man wishes to get rid of the sense of freedom from causal dependency – to liberate himself from an accompanying fantasy of choice [...]. He is peaceful only when he knows how he will act in a given case, without hesitation, that is, without a choice.<sup>57</sup>

It was practically an echo of Engels' thesis that freedom is, in fact, "a realization of necessity." It is worth noting that the Russian thinker opted for that concept of freedom for axiological as well as purely theoretical reasons. The *certainty of choice* was to him more important than the *freedom of choice*, the former offering peace and harmony, while the latter led to an inner instability and a permanent skepticism.

Bulgakov's argument was critically analyzed by Struve who, following the neo-Kantians, evolved toward separating "being" [*Sein*] from "obligation" [*Sollen*].<sup>58</sup> In his response to Struve, Bulgakov admitted that moral indignation about the existence of evil in the world was an inalienable part of the human psyche. For support, he quoted Dostoevsky's Ivan Karamazov's rebellion against the evil-sanctioning order of the world – stressing, however, that it was but a "rebellion," rather than a scientific formulation and solution of the

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55 S.N. Bulgakov, "O zakonomiarnosti socialnikh yavlenii," *Voprosy Filosofii i Psikhologii*, V. 1896. Reprinted in: Bulgakov, *Ot marksizma k idealizmu. Sbornik statiei (1896-1903)*, Petersburg 1903.

56 Bulgakov, *Ot marksizma k idealizmu*, pp. 31-32.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

58 Cf. P.B. Struve, "Svoboda i istoricheskaia nieobchodimost'," *Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii*, I-II, 1897.

problem.<sup>59</sup> Marxism – he argued – is a science, and science is exclusively about cognition, rather than subjective evaluations or ideals. A rebellion against the world can be deeply felt, but real problems must be solved by scientific methods.

A step toward reconciliation between Marxism and neo-Kantianism was to be had in Berdiaev's book about Mikhailovsky, published in 1900, with a long introduction by Struve.<sup>60</sup> Berdiaev opposed philosophical materialism as an attitude closer to vulgar eudemonism and middle-class utilitarianism – yet he strongly approved of historical materialism, perceived as a scientific refusal of the ethical relativism of “subjective sociology.” Like Mikhailovsky, he rejected attempts at a metaphysical grounding of ethical ideals – claiming, however, that this must not lead to a legalization of a subjectivist freedom in ethical engagements. Subjectivism and objectivism – he argued – had been scientifically overcome by Kant who installed order in the chaos of empirical phenomena by means of “logically obtaining” – i.e., objective – categories of time and space, causality, the principles of identity and of the excluded middle.<sup>61</sup> Marx had done the same for social sciences, creating a universal and logically obtained theory of progress. According to this theory, the universally obtained ideals are those of the “universal class” – i.e., the one which best represents general human progress. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century this meant the Enlightenment ideals of the middle class and now – the ideals of the working class. The objective measure of this progress is the development of productive forces augmenting man's power over nature.<sup>62</sup> Progress is guaranteed by the “immanent teleology of history”<sup>63</sup> governed by laws of necessity, currently evident in the class struggle of the proletariat. Therefore, the ideals preached by the Russian Marxists are firmly rooted in the social base, while Miklailovsky's ideals “were suspended in the air.” Free will is an illusion – real, measurable freedom is the increase of generic human power, symbolized in the myth of Prometheus.<sup>64</sup>

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59 S.N. Bulgakov, “Zakon prichinnosti i svoboda chelovecheskikh deistvii,” *Novoe Slovo*, IV, 1897. See, Bulgakov, *Ot marksizma k idealizmu*, pp. 48-51.

60 N.A. Berdiaev, *Subiektivizm i obiektivizm v obshchestvennoi filosofii. Kriticheskii etiud o N.K. Mikhailovskom*, Petersburg 1900.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 122.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 92.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 129. Stanisław Brzozowski based his article “Monistyczne pojmowanie dziejów a filozofia krytyczna” [“The Monist Concept of History and Critical Philosophy”] (1904) on these views of Berdiaev. The article was representative of his first, Marxist-Kantian interpretation of the philosophy of Latour (see S. Brzozowski, *Kultura i życie*,

Evidently, Berdiaev's innovation with respect to Marxist orthodoxy consisted in the following: (1) the rejection of philosophical materialism, and (2) the attempted completion of historical materialism with the anti-relativist argumentation of the Kantians. During his controversy with Mikhailovsky, Berdiaev was still an adherent of orthodox monism, negating the dualism of "being" [*das Sein*] and "obligation" [*das Sollen*]. At the same time, however – which did not escape Struve's attention – he made a meaningful reservation, namely, that his entire argument was based on the assumed *existence* of general progress. While admitting a possible error in that respect, he asked: Will the ideal of justice stop being universally obtained if it turns out that historical progress leads only to a new form of slavery?<sup>65</sup>

Predictably, he answered the question himself in the spirit of ethical absolutism: the category of justice will not stop applying, since it is given *a priori* in the moral sphere, just as the category of causality applies in the sphere of scientific knowledge.<sup>66</sup> It must be so, because man – as Kant had observed – is always an end, and never a means.

Berdiaev's first book was thus, in fact, an eclectic work – an expression of a certain transitory phase in the author's evolution from Marxism to idealism. Struve then represented the next level of that evolution. In his introduction to Berdiaev's book, he praised the author for "a critical reconstruction (*perestroika*) of Marxism on the grounds of idealist philosophy,"<sup>67</sup> being himself much more advanced on that track as an advocate of a dualist contradiction of facts and values, with the latter transferred into the supra-empirical sphere. He praised Lavrov and Mikhailovsky as critics of Positivist evolutionism that denied the legitimacy of ideas in the name of adjusting human actions to objective laws of development. At the same time, he accused the two of a needless relativization of truth and of the "moral error" of identifying an ethical attitude with the sense of social guilt, as well as of putting equality above freedom.

Struve's own political evolution in that period proceeded at an astonishing pace. In March of 1898, he participated in the congress of Russian Social Democratic circles at Minsk and authored the Manifesto of the Russian Social Democratic Party that the congress established. A year later, he published his seminal dissertation in Germany, *Die Marx'sche Theorie der sozialen*

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foreword by A. Walicki, Warsaw 1973, p.277). Cf A. Walicki, *Stanisław Brzozowski and the Polish Beginnings of "Western Marxism,"* Oxford 1989, pp. 88-111.

65 Ibid., pp. 69-80.

66 Ibid., p. 73.

67 Ibid., p. VII.

*Entwicklung (Marx's Theory of Social Development, 1899)*, much bolder in its revision of Marxism than Berenstein was in his postulates. That made him an intellectual patron of the “economism” program presented in the famous *Credo* by Sergei Prokopovich and Katerina Kuskova; according to that program, the Social Democrats ought to focus on the workers’ struggle for economic goals, leaving the political struggle to the liberals. At the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Struve was perceived as a highly controversial figure by the Social Democrats: Plekhanov, who was actively engaged in fighting revisionism, declared Struve a traitor to Marxism, intolerable in the Social Democratic party (which did not make co-operation with Struve impossible as a liberal). At the end of December 1900, the one to break with Struve was Lenin, who, even a short time before – despite the fundamental differences that separated him from the author of *Critical Remarks* – tried to shield him from Plekhanov’s attacks.<sup>68</sup> A year later, Struve himself decided to part ways with Social Democracy and become a liberal. In December 1901, he and his family immigrated to Switzerland, taking the money (collected by the liberals) for a new periodical that would propagate the idea of constitutionalism in Russia.<sup>69</sup>

The Social Democratic Manifesto written by Struve proclaimed that the historical mission of the Russian working class was to replace the “weak and cowardly” middle class in the struggle for political freedom. Thereby, it faced the working-class movement with an all-national goal of abolishing autocracy, never mentioning the question of Socialism. While referring to the tradition of fighting autocracy established by the Populists, it obviously proposed new methods: instead of conspiracy and terrorism – the organization of a legal workers’ movement that would be transformed into a potent lever of the political opposition. Struve emphasized the historical role of workers in Russia – without, however, summoning the Marxist concept of the all-human tasks facing the proletariat. According to him, the political legitimacy of the Russian workers’ movement emerged from the fact that the further to the East one travelled in Europe, the weaker, more cowardly and baser the middle-class became.

In his memoirs written several decades later, Struve distanced himself still further from specifically Socialist goals, explaining that he had written the Manifesto as if on commission and had not expressed his personal views in it. Political freedom – he declared – had always been a goal in itself: he was a liberal “by passion,” accepting Socialism rationally, as the necessary result of economic progress.<sup>70</sup>

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68 See R. Pipes, *Struve*, pp. 257-265.

69 *Ibid.*, pp. 311-312.

70 P.B. Struve, *My Contacts and Conflicts*, p. 577.

In *Marx's Theory of Social Development* – published in the prestigious Social Democratic journal, *Archiv für Soziale Gesetzgebung und Statistik* (Berlin 1899, vol. 14) – Struve developed and radicalized his revision of Bernstein, no longer in the Fabian spirit, but in openly liberal terms. He accused Marx of confusing science with utopia, tracing the latter back to Hegelian dialectics; he rejected the diagnoses of an inexorable pauperization of the working class and of social polarization, replacing the visions of the revolutionary crash of capitalism [*Zusammenbruchstheorie*] with the concept of Socialism as a natural evolutionary trend of capitalist relations, activated by the “organized world of labor.” Like Bernstein (but independently of him), Struve emphasized the lack of a serious philosophical foundation for Marxism, postulating a liberation of Marx’s theory of development from Engels’ cumbersome materialism, and its completion with a neo-Kantian theoretical-epistemological criticism and ethical idealism.

Struve’s Introduction to Berdiaev’s book on Mikhailovsky was a vital step in the realization of his own philosophical program. In the opinion of his friend, Semen Frank, Struve was thus closing the process of his departure from a broadly defined Positivism, initiating the transition of the former “legal Marxists” into a phase of philosophical idealism.<sup>71</sup>

The fact that a radical revision of Marxism had emerged in Russia so early – earlier than even Germany<sup>72</sup> – has a fully historical explanation. “The specificity of our history in recent times – Plekhanov wrote in 1909 – consists in the fact that even the Europeanization of our middle class was performed under the Marxist banner.”<sup>73</sup> Struve – who distinguished between the pro-capitalist attitude and the political stance of the socially immature (by his definition) Russian middle class – would have said the same of the intelligentsia. “Legal Marxism” was the first pro-capitalist ideology to win a broad response and popularity amongst the Russian intelligentsia. An openly bourgeois ideology would not have stood a chance of playing such an important role – on the other hand, however, an ideology that was so much in favor of capitalism was bound, from the very start, to accordingly revise Marxism.

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71 See S.L. Frank, *Biografiia P.B. Struve*, New York 1956, p. 24.

72 The revisionist book by Edward Bernstein, *Die Voraussetzung der Sozialismus*, was published in March 1899, i.e., five years after Struve’s *Critical Remarks*.

73 G.W. Plekhanov, *Sochineniia*, vol. 24, p. 181.

## Lenin and Revolutionary Marxism

### *The Preparatory Period*

The third trend of Russian Marxism – one that had not yet been fully fledged in the 1890s, but even then managed to distinguish itself from both Plekhanov’s orthodoxy and Struve’s “legal Marxism” – was the revolutionary Marxism of Vladimir Lenin (born Ulianov, 1870-1924).

As has already been said, the young Vladimir Ulianov – just as his elder brother, Alexander, and unlike Plekhanov – was emotionally related to the tradition of *People’s Will*. His revolutionary activity started in Kazan, in one of the circles organized in the 1880s in the Volga region by Nikolai Fedoseev (1871-1898) – a revolutionary who tried to combine Marxism with pro-Populist sympathies and a desire to continue the Populists’ struggle against autocracy. At the same time, however, Lenin’s early texts – including, *Who Are “the People’s Friends”?* (1894) and *What Is the Heritage That We Disown?* (1897) – appealed for a firm rejection of populist social philosophy, especially in Mikhailovsky’s version, accusing him of utopianism, looking back, idealizing the anachronistic natural economy and blurring inner class contradictions amongst the peasants.<sup>74</sup> In that respect, Lenin was an opponent – rather than a disciple – of Fedoseev, considering that the latter had been involved in an exchange of letters with Mikhailovsky, trying to convince the populist ideologue that the Russian Marxists were – just like the Populists – defendants of the working masses and had nothing in common with the advocates of the capitalist road.<sup>75</sup>

The fundamental difference between the two young Marxists of the Volga region is best illustrated by their respective reactions to the great starvation of 1891-1892. Fedoseev tried to convince Mikhailovsky that the news of the Orenburg Marxists’ ostensible appeals for refusing aid to the starving countryside, to avoid hampering the process of peasants’ proletarianization that conditioned the development of capitalism, was a calumny. Lenin, on the other hand, admitted that counteracting the starvation would have brought disadvantageous economic effects and (more importantly) would have restrained the process of revolutionizing the masses. Giving in to humanitarian impulses

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74 Lenin distinguished between the properly Populist heritage and the “enlightener” heritage of Chernyshevsky and the radical democrats of the Sixties. He identified “enlightenment” with a consistent “middle-class conservatism,” free of retrospective utopias – and he esteemed it very highly. He declared Chernyshevsky to have been a direct predecessor of his own class-revolutionary interpretation of Marxism.

75 See Fedoseev’s letter to Mikhailovsky as of November 8, 1893, in N. Fedoseev, *Stat’i i pis’mu*, Moscow 1958.

would be “another demonstration of a saccharine-sweet sentimentality” that was so typical of the Russian intelligentsia.<sup>76</sup>

Thus, the young Lenin combined solidarity with *People's Will* with a ruthless criticism of ethical populism that emphasized the social problem of the price of progress and demanded repayment of the “moral debt” of the intellectuals. There was no contradiction in his attitude: Lenin indeed saw *People's Will* as a model of a ruthless revolutionary struggle, irreconcilable with the moralistic sentimentalism that characterized the Populist intelligentsia.

Lenin's program's lack of sentimentalism was very helpful in accepting the capitalist development and its atrocities of “primary accumulation” described by Marx. This made Lenin an ally of Struve in anti-Populist polemics. In fact, however, Lenin accepted the “capitalist road” punctuated quite differently from Plekhanov or Struve's understandings of the concept. Like the “legal Marxists,” the Liberation of Labor Group, conceived of capitalist development as a civilizing progression that was to close the process of Russia's Europeanization – Lenin prized capitalism for its extremely acute class antagonisms that opened the road to a thorough social revolution: a revolution that (according to Marx's prognoses) was bound to become pan-European and put an end to the rule of capitalism all over the world. In glaring contrast, Plekhanov and Struve's attitude was marked by admiration for European civilization, Lenin's was marked by class hatred of capitalism.

Those differences were blurred by Lenin's tactical alliance with Struve in the struggle against the “petty bourgeois illusions” of the Populists in the 1890s. A careful study reveals, however, that specifically Leninist characteristics of Marxism were articulated quite clearly. Especially telling in this context is Lenin's work, *The Economic Content of Populism and Its Criticism in Mr. Struve's Book* (1894-1895).

The text opens with Lenin's striking thesis (in light of Plekhanov) that Marxism “has nothing in common with Hegelianism, faith in the necessity of each country having to pass through the phase of capitalism and much other

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76 See R. Conquest, *Lenin*, New York 1972, pp. 21-22, and N. Harding, *Lenin's Political Thought*, vol. 1, Atlantic Highlands, N.J. 1983, p. 19. Harding rightly observes that an identical opinion on how the Russian Marxists should treat the starving peasants had been voiced by Plekhanov.

Fedoseev's suicide, committed in exile in 1898, and came as an unexpected epilogue to his correspondence with Mikhailovsky. It was mainly the result of a moral depression caused – amongst other factors – by the fact that some of his co-exiles had accused him (as a Marxist) of representing bourgeois interests (see, B. Volin's introduction to *N.Y. Fedoseev, Statii i pis'ma*, Moscow 1958, pp. 24-26).

nonsense.”<sup>77</sup> He also ridiculed Mikhailovsky’s divagations on “men’s influence on the objective course of things.” ‘The course of things’ is nothing but men’s “actions” and “influences,” and so this is again an empty phrase.”<sup>78</sup> Directed at Mikhailovsky, the words also struck at Plekhanov and Struve, since all three of them acknowledged the existence of an “objective course of things,” differing only in that, while Mikhailovsky called for a heroic struggle, Plekhanov and Struve stigmatized such claims as “subjectivist.” Lenin went on to reject not only the “subjectivism” of the Populists, but also the “objectivism” which seemed at the time to be inseparable from Marxism. The “objectivist” – he wrote in a polemic with Struve – “always runs the risk of becoming an apologist for these facts; ... a materialist discloses class contradictions and in so doing defends his standpoint.” Objectivism, he argued:

Gives a survey of the process as a whole, but not of those particular antagonistic classes whose struggles go to make up the process; materialism, on the other hand, obliges one in any assessment of events to stand up simply and openly for the standpoint of a definite social class.<sup>79</sup>

In short, Lenin – rather than treat history as a reified process, accomplished on the strength of an impersonal necessity – treated it as a battlefield and an arena of man’s actions presuming a conscious or unconscious identification with a particular class, i.e., a conscious or unconscious choice of particular values. In this conception, the contrast between “an objective course” (emphasized by Plekhanov and “legal Marxists”) and consciousness and the will of the individuals (emphasized by the Populists), practically lost sense, the “objective course” having been reduced to human actions, while individual consciousness and will had been placed in an insoluble match with social determinants.

Original and surprising was also Lenin’s opinion on “the fate of capitalism in Russia.” Countering Vorontsov’s claim that capitalism does not and will never exist in Russia, Lenin declared that not only does a Russian capitalism exist, but it is “definitely and irrevocably established.”<sup>80</sup> The opinion, originally used in a polemic with Struve and developed later in *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (written in 1896-1899), was directed first of all at the Populists, but also questioned the views generally accepted amongst Russian Marxists of the day who – while holding that Russia had already embarked on the capitalist road of development – strongly emphasized that the “definitive and irrevocable” constitution of Russian capitalism was still a song of the future, to

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77 V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, p. 338.

78 *Ibid.*, p. 399.

79 *Ibid.*, p. 401.

80 *Ibid.*, p. 495.



be realized only after the tsarist system was brought down by a political revolution.

Is it permissible to speak of a “definitively and irrevocably” established capitalism in Russia of the 1890s? Did Lenin seriously believe that Russia had seen the accomplishment of a definitive and irrevocable capitalist economic formation in the initial phase of its industrialization, without changing the political system? Perhaps – as some researchers suggest – Lenin purposefully exaggerated the degree of development of the productive forces in order to justify more revolutionary political tactics?<sup>81</sup>

There is a grain of truth in the aforementioned supposition, but it also contains a gross misunderstanding. Lenin did not need to consciously minimize Russian backwardness – he simply used a different concept of “mature capitalism.” Its originality consisted in shifting the accent from the development of the productive forces to the nature of fundamental class antagonisms. Speaking of a “definitively and irrevocably established” Russian capitalism, Lenin meant a completed formation of commodity production based on the exploitation of hired labor. Thus, Lenin’s concept did not refer to the advancement of the capitalist formation’s development, but to the nature of fundamental social antagonisms (accentuating – against the “legal Populists” view – the class divisions amongst the peasants). It was consistent with the attitude that the young Lenin contrasted with that of the objectivist: paraphrasing the definition quoted above, we might say that Lenin “disclosed the class contradictions and in so doing defended his standpoint.”

Following this line of thought, we come to another essential difference between Lenin and the “objectivist” interpretation of Marxism. In his article *On Our Revolution* from 1923, he ridiculed those who thought that “a textbook written on Kautskian lines” could foresee “all the forms of development of subsequent world history.”<sup>82</sup> A study of Lenin’s early works reveals that such a “textbook” kind of Marxism had been alien to him from the very beginning. Marx’s thesis that social-economic formations collapse only when they have exploited their potential for development, was to Lenin a formula of the *classical model* of development, rather than a universal pattern that must be true

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81 Cf. e.g., the opinion of R. Pipes: “In this way Lenin preserved his former Jacobinian views in a modernized Marxist shape. Preaching that Russia was a capitalist country, he could still demand an immediate Socialist revolution, rather than patiently wait for capitalism to mature.” (R. Pipes, “The Origins of Bolshevism,” in: *Revolutionary Russia*, Cambridge, Mass. 1968, p. 40).

82 V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 33, p. 480.

of any country, regardless of its particular, empirical conditions.<sup>83</sup> Lenin's book *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* is an example of an acute perception of both general-capitalist and specific-national features of Russian economics. Its rich documentation of the peculiarity of Russian capitalism – the peculiarity consisting in the “simultaneous existence with the most advanced forms of industry and semi-medieval forms of agriculture”<sup>84</sup> – in Lenin's opinion, this justified his thesis that in Russia the class antagonisms were more acute than in purely capitalist countries, which thereby made Russia ripe for a radical social revolution.

Another striking fact is that the thesis naming capitalism as the necessary prerequisite of Socialism has acquired a different significance in Lenin's polemics with the Populists than was the case with, for example, Plekhanov. Rather than emphasize the maximum development of capitalist forces of production and necessary education in classical bourgeois democracy, Lenin stressed education in the school of capitalist economic relations and the capitalist class struggle. Lenin's texts unequivocally suggest that education in that school was possible even in autocratic conditions and that Russian capitalism had already had considerable achievements. A necessary premise of a Socialist movement was the destruction of “the old cramped conditions of human life” – a victory over the patriarchal stagnation that generated mental dullness and prevented the immediate producers from directing their own lives. That – Lenin claimed – had already been largely achieved by Russian capitalism.

To sum up, Lenin's Marxism was, first of all, a theory of class struggle, rather than a theory of economic (let alone technological) determinism. That is why he explained his theory in terms of class struggle, rather than in terms of “objective necessity.” Viewing history from the perspective of a struggle means discovering its various possibilities and realizing that every choice entails a risk. In the above cited essay *On Our Revolution*, Lenin confirmed that opinion,

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83 Lenin referred in this context to Marx's letter to the editor of *Otechestvenniie zapiski* (cf., *Collected Works*, vol. 1, p. 519). Lenin had not read Marx's letter to Vera Zasulich of March 8, 1881, in which the author of *Capital* unequivocally declared the possibility and purposefulness of a non-capitalist development of Russia – the “Liberation of Labour” group had refused to publish it (the letter was not published until 1924).

84 V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 3, p. 594.

Witold Kula called the phenomenon described in the quoted passage “co-existence of asynchronisms” (W. Kula, *Problemy i metody historii gospodarczej*, Warsaw 1963, p. 189).

approvingly quoting Napoleon's words: "*On s'engage, et puis [...] on voit.* – First engage in a serious battle, and then see what happens."<sup>85</sup>

Emphasizing class struggle, Lenin presented a different attitude toward the Populists and the liberals from that emerging from the Marxism of Plekhanov and Struve. The Populists were to him ideologues of the peasant class, i.e., of the "immediate producers," men of hard labor, closer – in class sense – to the proletariat than were the bourgeois represented by the liberals.<sup>86</sup> He utterly rejected Struve's apologetic arguments on rationalizing production by capitalist ownership. Comparing the opinions of the author of *Critical Remarks* with those of the Populists (and "legal Populists" at that!) on aiding small producers by offering them cheap credit and improving the technology and organization of sales – he firmly opposed the liberal program.<sup>87</sup>

Lenin's attitude to the liberals and the Populists irritated Plekhanov. In 1895, at his first meeting with Lenin (who, incidentally, favorably impressed him), Plekhanov said: "You turn your back on the liberals, while we turn round to face them."<sup>88</sup> Their difference of opinion entailed serious discrepancies in both the choice of tactics, and the very understanding of Marxism – discrepancies that the two opponents did not yet fully realize. Plekhanov, contemplating alliance with the "bourgeois liberals," perceived them as advocates of the capitalist progress that drove the Europeanization of Russia – while Lenin found Marxism to be an ideology free of any illusions about liberalism. While Plekhanov saw the peasant class as the most backward bulwark of Russian "Asiaticism," Lenin – who also stressed the backwardness and "Asiaticism" of the peasants – declared them the main force of the budding bourgeois-democratic Russian revolution. For that reason, the Populists – as representatives of the peasants' interests – were "class-wise" closer to him than the "bourgeois liberals," even though the liberals' theoretical views on the historical role of capitalism were closer to Marxism than those of the Populists.

### *Theory of the Party*

Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?* (Stuttgart, March 1902) is rightly considered to be the ultimate crystallization of the revolutionary trend in Russian Marxism. The

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85 V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 33, p. 497.

86 *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 373.

87 *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 504.

88 *Perepiska G.V. Plekhanova i P.B. Axelroda*, ed. A.P. Berlin, V.S. Voitinsky and P.B. Nikolaevsky, 1, Moscow 1945, pp. 270-271. Cf., L.H. Haimson, *The Russian Marxists and the Origins of Bolshevism*, Cambridge, Mass. 1955, 105-108.

book was written in connection with the preparations for the Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Party. The Congress (opened on July 17, 1903, in Brussels, and then moved to London) resulted in the Party's split into the "Bolsheviks" (i.e., "those in the majority," headed by Lenin) and the "Mensheviks" (surrounding Yuly Martov).

The split was the result of "an organizational question:" whether the Party was to be made up of disciplined revolutionaries who actively participated in the tasks of their party units (as Lenin proposed), or was it to include all who accepted the Party program and paid the fees (as Martov postulated). Lenin's project gravitated toward an organization of professional revolutionaries, i.e., the conception known as "Blankism" or "Jacobinism" and associated within the Russian revolutionary movement with Tkachev and the *Narodnaia Volia*. Let us observe that Lenin himself distinguished between Jacobinism and Blankism, narrowing down the latter's definition to a revolutionary-conspiratorial tactic neglecting the problem of winning the support of the masses – he therefore rejected "Blankism" so conceived, supporting "Jacobinism" as a synonym of decisive and well-organized revolutionary activity. Martov thought little of the distinction, rejecting all forms of revolutionary elitism and was intent on transforming Russian Social Democracy into a mass party modeled on the German Social Democrats.

Developing his revolutionary concept of the party in *What Is To Be Done?*, Lenin was not motivated by the desire of innovating Marxist theory. He merely wished to defend that theory from a double threat: Bernstein's revisionism and the "economic" bias within the Russian revolutionary movement, which he believed to be a reaction to Bernstein's ideas. He was appalled by Bernstein's disparagement of "the ultimate end" expressed in his phrase: "movement is all, the ultimate end is nothing." He was deeply shocked by Bernstein's appeals to the Social Democrats to publicly renounce the revolutionary methods of struggle and transform itself into a democratic reform party. Russian "economism" (which was the term Lenin extended to all the groups that placed economic struggle above long-term political goals) was, in his opinion, more than a local version of Bernstein's "opportunism," meaning a return to the Populist "apolitically" that seemed to have been overcome by the *Narodnaia Volia*. *A History of Trade Unionism* (1894) by Sidney and Beatrice Webb convinced him that worker's movements, if left to themselves, tend to become politically indifferent trade unions, practically accepting the capitalist rules of the game. Therefore, the "economists" emphasis on the significance of trade unions was, to Lenin, an especially dangerous symptom.

He countered all those threats with his own conception of the party as a revolutionary vanguard motivated by a "leading theory." The theory – he

stressed – must not be a product of the spontaneous development of the proletariat, Socialism being a doctrine “grown out of those philosophical, historical and economic theories that have been worked out by educated representatives of the owner classes – by the intelligentsia.”<sup>89</sup> The theory of scientific Socialism focuses on the ultimate goal of the worker’s movement, so its priorities clash with the current goals of the economic struggle of the masses. True revolutionaries must therefore fight against the pressure of the opportunistic practicality of the trade unions, as well as against the mental anarchy of the intellectuals, their lack of discipline and love of endless discussions. The Party’s task is to put an end to “bowing down to spontaneity,” both in the worker’s movement and in the intellectual sphere. Unlike the old-fashioned “discussion circles,” the Party must not tolerate freedom of criticism, the slogan “freedom of criticism” meaning, in fact, “freedom of the opportunist trend in Social Democracy, freedom to convert Social Democracy into a democratic party of reform, freedom to introduce bourgeois ideas and bourgeois elements into Socialism.”<sup>90</sup>

To confirm his argument, Lenin quoted Kautsky’s theory holding that “Socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from outside [*von Aussen Hineingetragen*], and not something that arose within spontaneously.”<sup>91</sup> In fact, however, Lenin’s interpretation of that theory was completely awry of the intentions of the critic of the German Social Democracy. What Kautsky had in mind was to defend the autonomous status of Socialist science and the independence of the Social Democratic intellectuals who sought a fully objective recognition of historical necessities – while Lenin wished to justify the party elite’s right to steer from the outside the spontaneous movement of the masses. The defense of professionalism against a proletarian “classism” was, in Kautsky’s case, a defense of free theoretical thought – whereas Lenin defended the professionalism of the revolutionaries, i.e., the concept of a party as a hierarchy, an organized vanguard that need not obey the

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89 Lenin, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, p. 121.

90 *The Lenin Anthology*, ed. Robert Tucker, New York 1975, p. 14.

91 Karl Kautsky, *The Class Struggle (Erfurt Program)*, transl. W.E. Bohn, Chicago 1910, p. 118.

Neil Harding concludes from the argument that *What Is To Be Done?* was, in fact, a “reaffirmation of orthodoxy” and to see it otherwise is to question also Kautsky’s position as a guardian and arbiter of the orthodox Marxism (N. Harding, *Lenin’s Political Thought*, vol. 1, pp. 161-166, 169). See ad rem, A. Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom*, pp. 293-297).

will of the masses, being cemented by an “iron discipline” and empowered by a “uniform will.”

“Give us an organization of revolutionaries”, Lenin wrote, “and we will overturn Russia.” He specified that postulate, demanding that the revolutionary party outdo the tsarist system in its centralization and militarization, learning the fighting methods from the political police.<sup>92</sup> A dozen “professionally trained revolutionaries” ought to control the entire activity of the existing legal organizations of the workers’ movement, steering the press, coordinating the speeches, appointing leader squads “for each urban district, for each factory district, for each educational institution.”<sup>93</sup> Mutual relations within the revolutionary elite must be based on a better principle than democracy: on “complete comradely mutual confidence” stemming from ideological unanimity, unity of purpose and constant mutual control.”<sup>94</sup> The control will be incomparably more scrupulous than “general democratic control.” Any departure from revolutionary duties will be punished with “ruthless severity:” “An organization of real revolutionaries will stop at nothing to rid itself of an unworthy member.”<sup>95</sup> The author of *What Is To Be Done?* thereby declared a return to the methods that had once been advised by Nechaev. Even if he did not mention the physical elimination of “unworthy members,” he had no scruples about deliberately defaming them and treating them like enemies. He himself set an example (one of many) in 1906, calling the Mensheviks enemies of the working class and common traitors. When brought to trial for that accusation before the honorary court of the Russian Social Democrats, he used the occasion to challenge “conventional” visions of morality, explaining that he had not meant treason in the literal sense, but “objective treason,” i.e., a factual siding with the class enemy, while the vocabulary he had used was not meant to state the truth but to evoke “hatred, disgust and contempt.” The objective, after all, was not so much to convince the enemies as to “break their ranks, wipe their organization off the surface of earth.”<sup>96</sup>

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92 V.I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, Moscow 1958-65, vol. 3, p. 79.

93 *Ibid.*, p. 88.

94 *Ibid.*, p. 90.

95 *Ibid.*

96 V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 15, Moscow 1961, pp. 296-297.

Some years later, Lenin thus formulated the basic principle of his Marxist “Nechaevism”: “We reject any morality based on extra-human and extra-class concepts. We say that this is deception, dupery, stultification of the workers and the peasants in the interests of landowners and capitalists. We say that our morality is entirely subordinated to the interests of the proletariat’s class struggle.” (V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 31, p. 292).

At the time of the Second Congress, all the above implications of Lenin's view on the "organizational question" had not yet been quite clear. This may explain the mistake of Plekhanov who, for fear of "spontaneity" (associated with political opportunism), backed up Lenin on the question of "importing consciousness from outside" and even on that of "formal democracy." In an emotional tirade, dubbed "a Jacobinic speech," he admitted the possibility of opposing the people's will and of dispersing – in the interest of the revolution – a democratically elected parliament.<sup>97</sup> It was only after the Congress that, having carefully read *What Is To Be Done?*, Plekhanov realized that Lenin had, in fact, been preaching a revolutionary voluntarism, ignoring the "objective laws of development" which ought to be interpreted by theorists of "scientific Socialism," rather than by professional revolutionaries. As a result, he concluded that those who agreed with Lenin could not call themselves followers of Marx and Engels.<sup>98</sup> Since that moment, the Nestor of Russian Marxism entered the ranks of the Mensheviks.

Lenin's conception of the party indeed rehabilitated the role of the "subjective factor" in history, which was observed with satisfaction by Populist ideologists.<sup>99</sup> It must have led to questioning Plekhanov's thesis of two necessary, temporally separate phases of the revolutionary process: the bourgeois revolution and the Socialist revolution. Set on shortening the whole process, Lenin brought the two phases maximally close together (which Trotsky, in his theory of "permanent revolution," did even more radically) – while Plekhanov obviously defended his own orthodoxy.

Practical consequences of the differences between them surfaced dramatically during the first Russian revolution. Faithful to his own model, Plekhanov believed that its aim should be to transfer authority into the hands of a Europeanized liberal bourgeoisie. He was therefore prepared to offer consistent – albeit critical – support for the Constitutional Democrats (Kadet) Party – which placed him on the extreme right wing of the Russian Social Democrats. Lenin, on the other hand, represented a diametrically opposite attitude, considering the Kadet party his major rival and enemy. While he admitted that the revolution's tasks were of a bourgeois-democratic nature, he rejected all forms of alliance with the liberals and did his best to bar their way to power. He postulated the "revolutionary-democratic" road as opposed to the "Prussian road," i.e., an alliance of the new elites with the old ones at the cost of

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97 See G.V. Plekhanov, *Sochineniia*, vol. 12, Moscow 1925, pp. 418-419.

98 *Ibid.*, vol. 13 (1926), p. 124.

99 See N.E. Kudrin (N.S. Rusanow), "N.K. Mikhailovskij kak publicist-grazhdanin," *Russkoe bogatstvo*, No 1, 1905, pp. 177-179.

betraying the revolutionary masses. The fundamental social force of revolution was, in his opinion, the working class in alliance with small producers – which, in Russian conditions, meant largely the peasants – rather than the middle class *sensu stricto*. A revolution – he argued – must be headed by “the Jacobins of contemporary democracy,” i.e., the Bolsheviks.<sup>100</sup> Its goal was to establish a “revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasants” – a dictatorship holding back from installing the Socialist system, but wielding power in the name of the people’s majority and leaving the decisive vote to the proletarian party.

The rift between Plekhanov and Lenin became all the more striking when peasant deputies – to the astonishment of anti-Populist intellectuals – demanded abolition of private ownership of land and total expropriation of the gentry.<sup>101</sup> According to Plekhanov, it confirmed the thesis that the Russian peasantry was an “Asiatic,” anti-European force, reactionary even in its revolutionary manifestations. He therefore postulated support for both the Kadets and for Stolypin’s reforms aimed at eliminating communal ownership of land.<sup>102</sup> Lenin, on the other hand – in keeping with the priorities he had declared even in the 1890s – took the side of the peasant movement, calling the theory of that movement’s “reactionary” nature “monstrous, idiotic and renegade.”<sup>103</sup>

A detailed discussion of Lenin’s thoughts after the 1905 Revolution is beyond the chronological framework of the present book. On the other hand, however, the theory of the party avant-garde presented in *What Is To Be Done?* does not exhaust the content of Leninism as a separate trend of Marxist thought. The implications of that theory were, for some time, interpreted quite diversely, even by the activists calling themselves “Bolsheviks.”<sup>104</sup> Therefore, the comprehensive characteristic of Bolshevism in a stricter, specifically Leninist sense, requires at least a brief acknowledgment of those aspects of that theory which were later developed – or simply revealed – during the period initiated by the revolutionary crisis, the emergence of political parties and their fight for power.

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100 *The Lenin Anthology*, ed. R. Tucker, New York 1975, p. 132.

101 Cf., Francois Xavier Coquin, “Un aspect meconnu de la revolution de 1905: les ‘motions paysannes’,” in: *1905: La premiere revolution russe*, ed. F.X. Coquin and C. Gervais-Francelle, Paris 1986. See also, T. Shanin, *Russia, 1905-1907. Revolution as a Moment of Truth*, New Haven-London 1986, chapters 3-4.

102 See Plekhanov, *History of Russian Social Thought. Sochineniia*, vol. 20, pp. 112-115.

103 Cf. V.I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, vol. 2, Moscow 1977 [1963], pp. 33, 263.

104 The most prominent representative of the “other Bolsheviks” was certainly Aleksandr Bogdanov. See, R.C. Williams, *The Other Bolsheviks. Lenin and his Critics, 1904-1914*, Bloomington-Indianapolis 1986.



From Lenin's point of view, it was obvious that the revolutionaries' goal was not a fight for law in the state, but exclusively a fight for power. The ideal "state of law" [*pravovoe gosudarstvo*] preached by the liberals was, to Lenin, a piece of hypocrisy; therefore, he warned the Kadets that his own party would reject that hypocrisy, since the proletariat's authority must be dictatorial, or – as he put it – "unrestricted by any rules whatever and based directly on force."<sup>105</sup> The definition was novel to Marxism which, in its classical form, defined the dictatorship of the proletariat as a hegemony of the working class – modeled on that of the Paris Commune, distant as it was from a monopoly of power by a single, "truly Marxist" party – rather than a system of dictatorial authority.<sup>106</sup> Lenin's conception of the party, however, implied that the interest and historical mission of the proletariat were understood practically only by the party, and within the party – by the disciplined elite. Party dictatorship "unrestricted by any rules whatsoever"<sup>107</sup> was thus the only method of effective action – anything else would mean "bowing down to spontaneity."

And yet, it would be a mistake to identify Lenin's ideal with an authority based on purely *physical* violence. After all, the leader of the Bolsheviks defined the party vanguard as the monopolist interpreter of "true theory" – the depository of the saving wisdom of scientific Socialism that was absolutely necessary for a radical transformation of society. Lenin's attention was thus drawn to the idea of an *ideocratic* authority, interested not merely in controlling people's outward behavior, but also – and above all – in actively shaping their worldviews. That meant total moral-ideological control, which was to reshape resistant human material into full-blooded builders of Socialism.

The first shocking application of that concept of party mentality to the cultural sphere was Lenin's essay, *Party Organization and Party Literature* (November 1905). Lenin argued therein that the power of money excluded freedom, so the slogan demanding freedom of the arts expressed nothing but a chase after profit or a "lordly anarchism" of bourgeois individualists. True freedom consisted in aspiring to a grand collective goal defined by the leading party. Literature ought to become "a cog and a screw" of the great cause of the proletariat – an integral part of "organized, planned and integrated Social Democratic Party work."<sup>108</sup>

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105 V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 10, p. 246; see also *Ibid.*, vol. 31, p. 353.

106 See R.N. Hunt, *Marx and Engels, vol. II: Classical Marxism 1850-1895*, Pittsburg, Pa. 1984, pp. 193-211. Cf. also, A. Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap*, pp. 311-314.

107 V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 10, p. 246.

108 V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 10, p. 45.

Lenin's next step toward transforming the party into a tool of worldview authority was a new interpretation of the party mentality in philosophy. Initially, he limited himself to a sociology-oriented theory of knowledge, arguing that philosophical ideas had class roots and definite class content – without yet aspiring to establish ideological monopoly. At that stage, Lenin still treated Aleksandr Bogdanov as a Bolshevik, disregarding the differences in their strictly philosophical views. That limited and feebly grounded tolerance, however, did not stand the trial that reading Bogdanov's book *Empiriomonism* became for Lenin in 1906. Lenin's outrage upon reading it bordered on fury. His reaction was strengthened by the reading of other authors of Bogdanov's neo-Marxist group<sup>109</sup> and mobilized Lenin to undertake the task of furnishing Bolshevism with its own philosophy – one that would be obligatory the party members, while pretending to the status of an “objective truth.” That is how *Materialism and Empiricism* was conceived, to be acknowledged as the canonical text of “Marxism-Leninism” in the Soviet Union.

Lenin's philosophical opinions will be presented in the following part of the present chapter.<sup>110</sup> For the time being, let us be satisfied with an observation that they constituted a meaningful complement to the party conception developed in *What Is to Be Done?* The completion consisted in a firmly expressed claim that a nonparty philosophy is impossible, just as a party cannot be neutral about philosophical matters. Nonparty knowledge may be possible in empirical disciplines, but philosophy is entirely party-oriented. The progressive party in philosophy is materialism. It must be “utterly consistent” since any concession to idealism inexorably leads to fideism and clericalism, thus serving the exploiters and the oppressors. The most repulsive of all the philosophical parties is the “middle party” composed of “graduated flunkies of fideism.”<sup>111</sup> It was the followers of Bogdanov who, according to Lenin, represented that odious “party” trying to reconcile Marxism with empiriocriticism.

The concept that was Lenin's peculiar contribution to 20<sup>th</sup> century global political thought – the concept of a totalitarian-Communist revolutionary party, capable of indoctrinating the masses and urging them to fight for a completely new shape of social life – had thus been completed.

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109 Reading that book, Lenin “was simply mad with outrage.” He vented his feelings, writing: “No, no, this is no Marxism! [...] I would rather let myself be drawn and quartered than consent to collaborate in an organ or body that preaches such things” (V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 13, s. 450).

110 The views have been presented in my book *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom*, pp. 297-302.

111 V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 14, pp. 341-342.

The Menshevik opponents of Lenin – Plekhanov in particular – traced this party conception to the Jacobin-Blankist tradition of the Russian revolutionary movement that was fully represented by the ideologue of extreme egalitarianism, Petr Tkachev. Many modern researchers on the subject have adopted this diagnosis, making it the crowning argument for the thesis of specifically Russian sources on the nature of Leninism.<sup>112</sup> In fact, however, Tkachev’s possible influence on Lenin (indirect, let us add, for Tkachev was simply one of the elements of the *Narodnaia Volia* tradition for Lenin) does not necessarily lead to that conclusion. Tkachev was, indeed, a late disciple of Babeuf – the leader of the conspiratorial-Communist trend within the French Revolution who considered the Jacobin revolution an introduction to the Communist revolution, “greater, grander and final.” Just like Lenin, Babeuf had charged the revolutionary elite with the task of not only overthrowing the old regime, but also of organizing a revolutionary dictatorship that would radically change the economic system by eliminating private property and commerce and replacing it with entirely nationalized property and the planned distribution of goods. Tracing Lenin’s ideas directly to the Babeuf system, which had been the main disseminator of revolutionary Communism all over Europe, therefore seems fully justified. Such was the opinion of Kropotkin – an internationally recognized authority on the plebeian trend of the French Revolution. An excellent German expert on the Communist variant of totalitarianism, Richard Lowenthal, presented a similar view, writing:

To understand the roots of Communist totalitarianism, it is essential that we recognize that the Communists first took power in the name of a utopian goal of perfect equality having its origin in the radical wing of the Western Enlightenment of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and more particularly of the French Revolution.<sup>113</sup>

Other important sources of Lenin’s theory of the party were, nevertheless, the opinions of the Marxist classics. Lenin’s theory was, after all, a logical conclusion derived from the central thesis of Marx-Engels Communism – the thesis postulating a necessary replacement of spontaneous development dominated by the “blind forces” of the market with the consciously and rationally steered one. While Marx and Engels had repeatedly declared that “the liberation of the working class must be its own accomplishment,” Bakunin

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112 The thesis has been most categorically formulated by an influential American political scientist, R.C. Tucker, in his Introduction to *The Lenin Anthology*, New York 1975, p. XXIII.

113 R. Löwenthal, “Beyond the ‘Institutionalized Revolution’ in Russia and China,” in: *The Soviet Union and the Challenge of the Future*, ed. A. Shtromas and M.A. Kaplan, vol. 1, New York 1988, p. 14.

suspected them – not entirely without grounds – of wishing for an elitist management of the mass movement: for had they not preached the ideal of establishing rational control over the spontaneity of “human social forces” and of replacing the “anarchy of the market” with a rational organization, headed by those who had mastered the arcana of scientific Socialism? It is hard to deny that, from this point of view, Lenin reasoned logically, perceiving mass trade unions as an organic part of the bourgeois society – i.e., a force subject to the “blind forces of the market.” Striving to surrender that force to the conscious, organized will of the party wielding the “only true theory,” he was faithful to the Marxist ideal of transforming “the kingdom of necessity” into “the kingdom of freedom.”

Paradoxically, it was the same ideal that lay behind Lenin’s postulate to put an end to “mental anarchy,” or the free market of ideas. It was nothing but a radical version of Engels’ claim that the victory of Socialism depended on mastering the true knowledge of society, only provided by Marxism. Following that line of thought, Lenin concluded that the party could not afford intellectual pluralism, for “unity of the will” demanded a disciplined ideological unity. In order to gain social legitimacy, the party had to win the working class and its allies for its own ideas. Indoctrination campaigns amongst the masses were thus tantamount to preparations for freedom, which made them a necessary condition of social emancipation.

### *Philosophical Views*

Lenin’s strikingly controversial contribution to the theory of the revolutionary vanguard was the enormous significance he ascribed to philosophy. The stress on “proper philosophical views” and a total subjection of philosophy to party ideology made up the part of Leninism that proved especially effective in transforming Marx’s idea of the proletariat’s dictatorship – vague as it was and reconcilable with ideological pluralism – into a firm conception of party worldview dictatorship.

Lenin’s *Materialism and Empiriocriticism. Remarks on a Certain Reactionary Philosophy* (published in 1909 under the penname of V. Iliin) was to open a new phase in the relationship between Marxist theory and Marxist praxis. Lenin believed the book to be of enormous significance and wished to see it published as soon as possible – he is said to have given the printer a hundred-ruble bribe for speeding up his work.<sup>114</sup>

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114 See V. Valentinov, *Encounters with Lenin*, London 1966, pp. 248-249.

The book is easily summarized, being written simply, without philosophical nuance. It reduces the history of philosophy to a war of two parties: the materialist and the idealist. A compromise of the two is out of the question: any concession to idealism serves only the interests of the reactionary force. Materialism accepts no doubts about the possibility of cognizing the world. Agnosticism leads straight to subjective idealism, and hence to solipsism and reactionary fideism. From thegnoseological point of view, the only proper theory is that of reflection, according to which our sensations are “copies, photographs, images, mirror reflections of things.”<sup>115</sup> A material object and its reflection in the human mind are two sides of the same thing, namely, matter. Matter is “a philosophical category which is given to man in his sensations, and which is copied, photographed and reflected by our sensations, while existing independently of them.”<sup>116</sup> The two-millennia-long war between idealism and materialism – i.e., between Plato’s and Democritus’ systems – between denying the objective truth and recognizing it – will not stop being actual until the final victory of materialism.

Evidently, Lenin supported the concept of objective truth. “To recognize an objective truth” and “to represent the materialist theory of cognition” were to him “one and the same thing.” He therefore indignantly rejected Bogdanov’s opinion that truth was nothing but “a form of organized human experience.” Religion – Lenin argued – was also “a socially organized experience,” which, however, did not mean that it contained the truth. Bogdanov’s theory of truth blurred the distinction between science and religion, which made it “a purely clerical philosophy.”

Lenin subjected all forms of historical-sociological relativism to a similar criticism. While admitting that the dialectic method contained an element of a historical relativization of truth, he firmly denied that the fact cast any doubt on the existence of an absolute truth, maintaining that “the limits of approximation of our knowledge to objective truth are historically conditional” – yet, independent of conditions is the existence of that truth that we are unconditionally approaching.<sup>117</sup>

He went so far as to put an equation sign between materialism and absolute truth: “To be a materialist means to acknowledge objective truth [...]. To acknowledge truth as objective, i.e., independent from man and from mankind – means, anyway, to acknowledge absolute truth.”<sup>118</sup>

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115 V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 10, p. 232.

116 *Ibid.*, p. 130.

117 *Ibid.*, p. 137.

118 Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 14, pp. 136-137.

His attitude obviously followed from a fear that a relativization of truth might weaken faith in the absolute truth of “the only scientific theory,” thus undermining the concept of the all-competent party wielding a monopoly on the establishment of truth. Without an absolute truth there would be no absolute certainty, no unquestionable directives and no determined action.

The arguments supporting that reasoning were extremely naïve and simplistic. For example, criticizing epistemological “subjectivism,” Lenin summoned the authority of Paul Lafargue, praising the latter for an excellent understanding of Engels and a “left-wing criticism of Kant.”<sup>119</sup> He did not spare himself the pleasure of approvingly quoting the following passage from Marx’s son-in-law:

The working man who eats sausage and receives a hundred sous a day knows very well that he is robbed by the employee and is nourished by pork meat, that the employee is a robber and that the sausage is pleasant to the taste and nourishing to the body. Not at all, say the bourgeois sophists, whether they are called Pyrrho, Hume or Kant. His opinion is personal, en tirement subjective opinion; he might with equal reason maintain that the employer is a benefactor and that the sausage consists of chopped leather, for he cannot know *things-in-themselves*.<sup>120</sup>

Serious treatment of those kind of arguments was typical for the naïve materialism of Chernyshevsky – Lenin’s favorite philosophical master. In *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, Lenin presented Chernyshevsky as a great Russian philosopher, a follower of Feuerbach who, in his criticism of Kant, equaled Engels. He went on to conclude that the empiriocritical attitude was a step backwards as much from Marxism as from Chernyshevsky and the radicals of the 1860s.

In fact, however, Lenin’s reception of Chernyshevsky’s philosophy seriously wronged the author of *The Anthropological Principle in Philosophy*: Chernyshevsky’s anthropological materialism had been reduced to a dogmatic naturalism, while its most profound and interesting part – namely, its anthropology – had been misunderstood, if not disregarded.

Further evidence of Lenin remaining under the enormous influence of pre-Marxist materialism was his reverence for Feuerbach. Chernyshevsky’s master has been mentioned many times in *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* – each time in a favorable context, as a classic of materialism and an incomparable critic of Kant. Sometimes, Feuerbach is mentioned along with Marx, as if they represented a common philosophical standpoint – as in the following:

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119 Ibid., p. 203.

120 Ibid., p. 203.

This is what irrevocably divides the materialists Feuerbach, Marx and Engels from the agnostics [...] the entire *school* of Feuerbach, Marx and Engels turned from Kant to the left, to a complete rejection of all idealism and of all agnosticism.<sup>121</sup>

A striking fact is Lenin's complete ignorance of Marx's criticism of Feuerbach's system: the book *Theses on Feuerbach* in which Marx tried to distinguish his own standpoint from that of the entire theretofore materialism – Feuerbach's included – was never even mentioned by Lenin. It is astonishing especially because *Theses on Feuerbach* proved that Marx differed from Feuerbach precisely on the question of philosophical "subjectivism" – i.e., on the point where Lenin assumed their full compatibility. Lenin's silence becomes all the more surprising in view of the fact that *Theses on Feuerbach* were repeatedly quoted and competently exploited by Bogdanov.

According to Marx, reality should be conceived not only "in the form of the object of contemplation," but as "sensuous human activity," as practice – that is "subjectively." No previous materialism – not even Feuerbach's – had understood this point, which was why the *active* side had to be developed, although only in an abstract way, through idealism. Hence, "the question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth, i.e., the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice."<sup>122</sup>

It was from these maxims that Bogdanov concluded that the classical definition of truth must be rejected. Neither the search for "compatibility between the intellect and the thing" (*adequation intellectus atque rei*), nor the definition of cognition as a reflection of reality made sense with the assumption that all knowledge was a product of man's social practice. Man as an object of knowledge became, by that contention, his own product, which made it impossible for him to rise to a superhuman point of observation from which he might view reality "itself." Consequently, the unique criterion of truth was practice, while the truthfulness of thinking depended on its practical power – the question of truth separate from practice being, to quote Marx, "a purely scholastic problem."

Bogdanov believed that such a praxis-oriented theory of knowledge allowed for overpowering the stiff determinism of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International and laid the foundations for an activist interpretation of Marxism. Lenin, however – despite his own propensity for voluntarism in political action – preferred to stick to the old-fashioned contemplative theory holding that "the world is matter moving in

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121 Ibid., pp. 48, 159, 204.

122 K. Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, in: Karl Marks, F. Engels, *Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan, New York 1985, p. 156 [Thesis 1-2.]

conformity to law” and “our knowledge is in a position only to *reflect* this conformity to law.”<sup>123</sup> Moreover, he believed that option to be fully compatible with his own theory of political activity the culminating point of which was the concept of a “leading party.” In order to resist spontaneity and establish the proper consciousness for the worker’s movement, the Leninist party had to declare itself the sole possessor and irreplaceable instrument of “true knowledge” revealed in “scientific Socialism.” The notion of “objective truth” – or even “absolute truth” – was absolutely necessary to the party for a number of reasons: to justify its absolute self-assurance and intolerance toward its opponents, to legitimize its claims of controlling the workers’ movement, deciding about its ideology and political direction, as well as – once power had been gained – to serve as a “scientific” foundation for totalitarian dictatorship, unrestrained by any laws. Bogdanov’s philosophy – not even coupled with Sorel’s idea of the momentum-generating myth – could never have produced an equally strong involvement in the revolutionary cause.<sup>124</sup> Lenin’s party of professional revolutionaries preferred to treat its own ideology as “the only true, scientific theory,” rather than a form of “socially organized experience” or myth.

The authoritarian roots and consequences of Lenin’s defense of “objective truth” did not escape Bogdanov’s attention. In his intelligent criticism of *Marxism and Empiriocriticism*, Bogdanov pointed out that the use Lenin made of the notion of absolute truth was closely connected with the authoritarian thinking structure that was typical of Leninism and deeply rooted in pre-capitalist forms of social bonds, in many respects reminiscent of a clergy mentality. That, according to Bogdanov, explained Lenin’s typical fanatical intolerance, his belief in the absolute rightness of his own attitude and his arrogant ambition to impose his own ideas on the masses. Thus – despite all his sympathy for Bolshevism – Bogdanov perceived the Bolsheviks’ leader as a dangerous figure and compared his authoritarianism to a vampire sucking the workers’ blood and preventing them from attaining independence and cultural maturity.<sup>125</sup>

Of course, Bogdanov recognized Lenin’s great hatred of the clergy. At the same time, he understood that an ardent atheism could be combined with blind fanaticism, which was precisely Lenin’s case. Lenin’s hatred of religion was,

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123 V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 14, p. 169.

124 As R.C. Williams rightly observed, Lenin “understood best that relativist myth is most effective when disguised as orthodox truth” (R.C. Williams, *The Other Bolsheviks: Lenin and His Critics*, p. 189).

125 See A. Bogdanov, “Viera i nauka,” in: *Bogdanov, Padeniie velkogo fetishizma*, Moscow 1910, pp. 145-223.



indeed, boundless. He was appalled at the idea of “*bogotvorstvo*” [god-making] developed by Gorky, Lunacharsky and other ideologists from Bogdanov’s circle (Bogdanov himself being resistant to the temptation). In mid-November 1913, he wrote about it in a letter to Gorky:

God-seeking differs from god-building or god-creating or god-making, etc., no more than a yellow devil differs from a blue devil. To talk about god-seeking, not in order to declare against *all* devils and gods, against every ideological necrophilia (all worship of a divinity is necrophilia – be it the cleanest, most ideal, most sought-out but built-up divinity, it’s all the same), but to prefer a blue devil to a yellow one is a hundred times worse than to say nothing about it at all.

Any flirtation even with a god is the most inexpressible foulness, particularly tolerantly (and even favorably) accepted by the democratic bourgeoisie – for that very reason it is the most dangerous foulness, the most shameful “infection.”<sup>126</sup>

As the above quotation proves, Lenin’s hatred of religion was truly vicious. It had nothing in common with the attitude of Feuerbach who treated religion as an alienation of man’s generic nature and tried to positively overcome it, rather than simply destroy it. Feuerbach’s concept of a humanized religion and a divinized humanity was, in fact, the philosophical source of the “god-making” idea – which made Lenin’s attack on that idea an (unrealized) attack on Feuerbach. Against the rich and varied background of Russian receptions of Feuerbachism – including the anthropo-theism of the Petrashevsky group and Nesselrode’s theological anthropology – Lenin’s use of Feuerbach’s idea seems drastically simplistic and extremely biased.

And yet, Bogdanov rightly described Leninism as marked by a confessional – i.e. (in that sense) “religious” – authoritarianism. It was a simple consequence of the idea of a party being the sole and unquestionable authority on worldview matters to all its members. It was precisely for that reason that the Bolshevik party was so attractive to those who sought faith and were capable of acting like true believers. The secular religion of Leninism, however, largely differed from the great universalist religious systems – it was more like a chiliastic sect, tracing the triumph of evil everywhere and treating itself as the chosen instrument of earthly salvation. The quasi-religious dimension of the Leninist party made it fanatically intolerant toward authentic religion, as well as implacably hostile toward the entire “old world.”

The attitude echoed – as will be readily observed – the harsh criticism of the lay religiosity of the Russian radical intelligentsia by the *Signposts* almanac, published simultaneously with *Materialism and Empiricriticism*.

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126 V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 35, pp. 121-122.

Symptomatically, however, the authors of *Signposts* paid no attention to Lenin's book, nor did they undertake polemics with its author. Their silence was neither coincidental, nor deliberate, the simple fact being that Lenin's book lacked a general cultural significance and could not be considered a representative product of Marxist culture in Russia. The Russian intellectual elite read it as a document of sectarian quarrels within the Bolshevik party and thus, as a symptom of a marginal extremism. It did not occur to anyone that the book might one day become the obligatory catechism of the "first state of the victorious proletariat."

And yet, this is exactly what happened, albeit not immediately. At Lenin's personal request, *Materialism and Empiricriticism* had a second edition in 1920, during the Lenin-Bogdanov controversy over the autonomy of workers' organizations in a patriocratic state. A year later – following the end of the civil war and the opening of the New Economic Policy that reduced dictatorship in economic life – the book became the chief treasury of arguments for the unacceptability of worldview liberalization. A seriously ill Lenin followed with utmost anxiety the publications of idealist philosophers, finding the essay collection, *Oswald Spengler and the Twilight of Europe* (co-authored by Berdiaev) a "literary shield" for a White Guard conspiracy.<sup>127</sup> The affair ended – in August-September 1922 – with a forced expulsion of prominent non-Communist Russian philosophers (Berdiaev, Bulgakov, Karsavin, Lossky, Frank, I.A. Iliin, F.A. Stepun and others), sociologists (Pitrim Sorokin), historians and lawyers – about 160 scientists.<sup>128</sup> The banishment was preceded with an aggressive press campaign whose authors more than seldom demanded much harsher repression for "those thinking otherwise."

All that was a logical consequence of the thesis of an implacable party battle on the field of philosophy that would come to an end only after a total destruction of its opponent. Lenin's philosophical views thus turned out to have an enormous influence – albeit non-philosophical – becoming an important part of the ideological foundations of totalitarian Communism.

### *The Communist Utopia and Its Failure*

A comprehensive image of Leninist Marxism and its historical place demands reaching beyond the period when the Bolsheviks' leader had formulated his philosophical *credo*. We must at least briefly point out which contents of

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127 See V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 45.

128 See S.S. Khorouzhny, "Filosofsky parokhod," in: *Khorouzhny, Posle pereriva. Put'i russkoi filosofii*, Petersburg 1994, p. 200.

Leninism surfaced in the period when Lenin's own will and his iron determination decreed the fate of Russia and the entire world. The crucial year was, of course, 1917.

The German Socialists' vote – in 1914 – in favor of granting war credits to the German government was perceived by Lenin as a disgraceful betrayal of proletarian internationalism which totally compromised the former “German comrades.” Upon his return to Russia – in early April of 1917 – Lenin suggested that his own party abandon the disgraced and scientifically incorrect name (following Engels' opinion) of “Social Democracy” and embrace that of “Communist Party” (plus “Bolsheviks” in brackets).<sup>129</sup> The operation was tantamount to rejecting the dogma of the two-phase revolutionary process in Russia. To general astonishment – shared by the Bolsheviks – Lenin's *April Theses* broke with the opinion (held until recently by all Marxists) that Russia must go through a “capitalist phase:” theoretical scruples apart, *The April Theses* proclaimed a struggle for the “whole freedom” – i.e., a direct transition to Socialism and then to Communism.

Lenin thus resolved the conflict between the materialist theory of social development and the “final objective” in the shape of the Communist utopia – in favor of the latter. According to Plekhanov's interpretation (too easily accepted later on by many Western Marxologists), this put him outside the Marxist frame. In fact, the problem was more complex, since Marxism could not be reduced to historical materialism, while historical materialism – in Marx's own interpretation – did not exclude (contrary to Plekhanov's opinion) Russia's direct transition to Socialism. Beside historical materialism – i.e., the theory of objective laws governing “the kingdom of necessity” – there existed in Marxism an openly utopian (albeit pretending to scientific validity) vision of a Communist future, presented by Marx in his *Critique of the Gotha Program* and in his analyses of the experience of the Paris Commune and made popular amongst Marxists thanks to Engels' bold divagations on “a leap into the

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129 V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 24 (1952), pp. 69-70.

Lenin quoted Engels' opinion that the name “Social Democracy” was “unsuitable [...] for a party whose economic program is not merely Socialist in general but specifically Communist, and whose ultimate political aim is to overcome the entire state and consequently democracy as well.” (K. Marx, F. Engels, *Werke*, vol. 22, pp. 417-418).

The official renaming of Lenin's “Social Democratic” party to “Communist” became a fact only in March of 1918. Between April of 1917 and March of 1918, the party's name was “Social Democratic Labour Party” (plus “Bolsheviks” in brackets). It is worth noting that the word “Communism” was at the time associated with Kropotkin's anarchic Communism.

kingdom of freedom.”<sup>130</sup> Plekhanov had been interested only in historical materialism, while the German Social Democrats had for many years treated Marx’s vision of the future with all seriousness, accepting and developing it in their own Erfurt Program<sup>131</sup> – it was only after Engels’ death that they started abandoning it step by step, obviously in connection with the party’s de-radicalization. The revision of Marxism by Bernstein (and by Struve in Russia) pointed out the contradictions between the Marxist scientific method and the Marxist conception of “the final goal,” rejecting the latter as a relic of utopianism. Lenin, in 1917, did the exact opposite, accepting an absolute priority of “the final goal” which – he reminded – was not Socialism, but Communism bearing on its standards the slogan: “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.”<sup>132</sup> His decision – surprising even to his own party – was essentially concordant with the attitude expressed in Lenin’s early works, namely, that political choices should be determined by involvement in the class struggle, rather than by some theoretical reasons.<sup>133</sup>

130 As has been aptly observed, the Marxist version of Communism is not part of historical materialism and does not logically follow from its assumptions. On the contrary – the two are obviously contradictory. Historical materialism is a theory of “the kingdom of necessity”, i.e., a theory of unintended results of man’s actions in class societies leading to an increasing enslavement of man by alienated economic forces – while Communism is a theory of a classless “kingdom of freedom,” reversing the dependency between “consciousness” and “social condition” – a theory of a society endowed with a sovereign rule of its own fate and consciously constructing its own history on the basis of rational knowledge. Thus, emphasizing historical materialism weakens the Communist option – and the other way round.

The problem has been convincingly discussed by J.Y. Calvez, *La pensee de Karl Marx* (Paris 1956, p.533) and Stanley Moore, *Marx on the Choice Between Socialism and Communism* (Cambridge, Mass. 1988). See also, A Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap*, pp. 89-99.

131 Hungarian scholar Laszlo Szamuely observed, not without surprise, that the Erfurt program included a detailed conception of a Communist society, essentially compatible with the project that the Bolshevik party tried to realize in the years immediately following the Revolution. See. L. Szamuely, *First Models of the Social Economic Systems: Principles and Theories*, Budapest 1974 (Chapter 2: “The Ideology of War Communism”).

132 V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 27, p. 127.

133 The following part of this presentation of Lenin’s Marxism has been based on my book, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom*, Chapter 4, “Leninism: From ‘Scientific Socialism’ to Totalitarian Communism,” pp. 269-397. I have reduced it here to problems that are crucial for the understanding of the early period of Lenin’s activity that falls within the chronological framework of this outline of the history of Russian philosophy and social thought.

Contrary to the opinions that unilaterally stress Lenin's "Blankism," i.e., the idea of gaining power by a handful of professional revolutionaries, the leader of the Bolsheviks was fully aware of the fact that the success of his project depended on a revolutionary mobilization of the masses. An equally misguided interpretation presents Lenin as an unprincipled pragmatist cherishing authority as a goal in itself. The truth was exactly the opposite: while preparing himself to take power, Lenin focused on a most careful reconstruction of Marx and Engels' theory of the proletarian dictatorship as a way to realize the "final objective" of a Socialist revolution. He devoted an extensive essay to this problem, *The State and Revolution*, written just before the October Revolution, placing the accents differently than he had in *What Is To Be Done?* Rather than emphasize the theory of a party vanguard, he stressed the revolutionary participation of the masses – which might smack of a concession to anarchism.<sup>134</sup> In fact, however, it was nothing but a mere shift of emphases, rather than a fundamental change. The party – albeit shifted into the background – had kept its role of being the teacher, the guide, the leader of all the working and exploited people.<sup>135</sup> The widest possible participation of the masses, putting an end to "the corruptible and rotten parliamentarianism" and the rule of professional bureaucrats,<sup>136</sup> was not intended to have anything in common with spontaneity – on the contrary: the task of the proletariat's dictatorship was defined as "the strictest control" of the state and the community over all men's behaviors, individual consumption included. The fact that the control was to be executed by "armed workers" did not alter the principle that the proletarian state (which Lenin forcibly stressed) remained "a system of organized coercion."

A general participation – Lenin argued – would guarantee a general mutual control: an all-embracing control by the "people" from which nobody and nothing could hide.<sup>137</sup> A revolutionized collective would control everyday work, consumption and behaviors of individuals by means of labor cards, food tickets and personal files, while those who resisted would be punished without procedural formalities. That system of universal evidence and control, combined

134 While utterly despising the liberals, Lenin respected the anarchists whom he found to be more left-wing than was his own party.

135 *The Lenin Anthology*, p. 328.

Bertram D. Wolfe missed the point, observing that "In *State and Revolution* there is no party to command and centralize all direction and control" (B.D. Wolfe, *An Ideology of Power: Reflections on the Russian Revolution*, New York 1970, p. 29).

136 De-professionalization of authority whose functionaries could be readily dismissed by the "masses" was to result in "atrophy of the state" prognosticated by Lenin (following Marx and Engels).

137 *The Lenin Anthology*, p. 383.

with a total ban on private economic activities, would make possible the realization of the Marxist ideal of a life planned in all its aspects. The new, Socialist state would thus embody the classic Marxist concept of “a single great factory.” Lenin put it as follows:

All citizens become employees and workers of a *single* country-wide ‘syndicate,’ ...  
The whole society will become a single office and a single factory, with equality of labor and pay.<sup>138</sup>

Lenin realized the possibility of conflict between “the council authority” – i.e., the workers’ self-governing system that was to support the revolutionary mobilization of the masses – and central planning that was to secure a conscious control over the collective life that was of such a great importance to the Communist ideal of freedom. He proposed to solve those conflicts by a combination of ruthless coercion toward class-foreign elements and “demoralized” members of the working class, and ceaseless indoctrinating persuasion. The older, experienced and “class-conscious” workers were to educate the young, while all were to be steered (as inconspicuously as possible) by the party elite, equipped with the infallible doctrine of “scientific Socialism.” Thanks to intensive educational efforts, the principle of “iron discipline” that was necessary for the functioning of a centralized planned economy was to be progressively internalized, becoming a habit which would eventually make useless the external coercion. Until that time, however, the rule of the proletariat (or, rather, of its “vanguard”) had to be dictatorial, which – by Lenin’s definition – meant coercion and no legal restriction.

The essay *The State and Revolution* thus revealed an unexpectedly utopian aspect of Leninism, disclosing Lenin as an ideologist emphasizing above all the utopian-chiliastic dimension of Marxist thought.<sup>139</sup> In its strictly economic part, Lenin’s utopia was quite faithful to Marx and Engels’ directives, although it veered from them on two important questions. Firstly, it prohibited any political pluralism, denying legitimacy to political activity itself (much in the anarchist spirit), which contradicted the Paris Commune model admitting political pluralism within a broadly defined Socialism. Secondly, Lenin postulated a total collectivization of life, while Marx differentiated the time of labor (to be gradually shortened) and free time, the latter belonging to the individual and

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138 Ibid, p. 383.

139 This is what made Leninism a classically totalitarian ideology. Totalitarianism, in fact, is more than just the question of power: it must possess a legitimizing ideology containing “the chiliastic claim”, i.e., one demanding complete involvement in the construction of an entirely new world (cf. C.J. Friedrich and Z. Brzeziński, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, Cambridge, Mass. 1956, pp. 9-10).

devoted to self-realization, free of any control and coercion.<sup>140</sup> In other words, the authors of Marxism had but sketched a project of the economic foundations for the Leninist utopia; constructing a vision of a coherent collectivist-totalitarian system on those foundations was the personal contribution of the author of *The State and Revolution*. His task was, obviously, made easier thanks to Marx's discrediting of "bourgeois freedom," in both political and individual guises; nevertheless, the idea of subjecting one's own life to the all-embracing pressure of an ideologically mobilized collective expressed the spirit of "crude communism" that had been criticized by Marx for negating the personality of man at every step.<sup>141</sup>

Having gained power, Lenin was quick to part – for practical reasons – with the idea of participatory democracy in industrial management. At the same time, his attachment to other points of *The State and Revolution* program became all the more stubborn. In January of 1918, the Constitutional Assembly was dissolved – ostensibly in reaction to Plekhanov's "Jacobin speech" at the Second Part Congress. The party program of March that year proclaimed, for example, a replacement of commerce by planned distribution, the obligation to keep consumer's books, as well as forced organization of citizens into producer and consumer communes. This was accompanied by a campaign of class hatred whetted by expropriations and pogroms of the "speculators," as well as by appeals for "heroic" and unpaid labor for the workers. Sporadic tests of the "state capitalism" rules were conducted only in the sphere of the organization of production, while free market exchange was banned and treated as the greatest evil and the main obstacle in the struggle for a "new man."

The goal of that policy, practiced for the first three years immediately following the Revolution and erratically named "War Communism" was to make real "a direct passage to Communism."<sup>142</sup> The idea is well known to have

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140 See A. Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap*, pp. 86-87.

The humanistic significance of that conception, holding that "the true kingdom of freedom" began outside the sphere of material production, has been discussed by Julian Hochfeld in his essay, "Dwa modele humanizacji pracy," see: J. Hochfeld, *Studia o marksistowskiej teorii społeczeństwa*, Warsaw 1963, pp. 237-269).

141 K. Marx, *Selected Writings*, ed. D. McLellan, New York 1985, p. 88 (Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844).

142 The term "War Communism" suggests that the Bolsheviks' policy immediately after the Revolution was a pragmatic reaction to the civil war, the shortage of supplies, foreign intervention and other objective circumstances. In fact, however, it was an ideologically motivated choice that seriously hampered the termination of the civil war – a better name would thus be "Warring Communism."

ended in disaster. Elimination of the market did not make possible control of the economy – to the contrary: it created a state of total chaos and utter unpredictability. The political situation, too, slipped out of control, resulting in a growing number of peasant rebellions and, especially, in the Kronstad Uprising. The circumstances made Lenin decide to take a fundamental turn: in March 1921, he proclaimed the New Economic Policy (NEP), offering a considerably wide scope of freedom to the small market economy.

However, it is a gross misunderstanding – if not a conscious misinterpretation of the facts – to call the NEP a kind of “political testament” by Lenin. In Lenin’s eyes – as well as in those of all sworn Communists – the NEP was a temporary, humiliating retreat that was to be followed by a new offensive, as soon as possible. The NEP’s surprisingly fast economic success did not please Lenin, confirming the strengthening of the forces hostile to Socialism and the Communists’ inability to control economic competition. At the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Congress (March-April 1922), Lenin spoke of it with the utmost resentment, owning up to a historical failure. Alluding to Napoleon’s slogan of “forty centuries looking down from the pyramids,” he shamed his party comrades, saying: forty countries look upon us and see that the Communists who had made the greatest revolution in world history cannot manage their own victory and, rather than control the situation, are themselves being controlled now by the “cheats and rascals” acting behind their backs.<sup>143</sup>

That was tantamount to admitting that the Promethean project of gaining sovereign rule of collective life had ended in a victory for “blind forces,” i.e., a tragedy of unpredicted results – as usual.

Following Lenin’s death, Russian history continued in the rhythm of successive “offensives” and “retreats.” A new and major Communist offensive was obviously Stalin’s “revolution from above” (1929-1934), followed by a period of “great retreat” – a retreat from the point of view of the final goals of Communism, yet of a most peculiar nature, since it brought on a simultaneous reinforcement and offensive of totalitarian statehood. That post-Revolutionary statehood was concerned mostly with its own power and stability: while using

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The “pragmatic” interpretation of “War Communism” was sustained by Western scholars of a leftist orientation, like M. Dobb, E.H. Carr, Alec Nove, Stephen Cohen or Moshe Lewin. Their opinions were convincingly criticized by P.J. Boettke in his essay, “The Soviet Experiment with Pure Communism” (*Critical Review*, vol. 2, No 4, 1988) and in his book, *The Political Economy of Soviet Socialism: The Formative Years 1918-1928*, Boston 1990. See also, S. Malle, *The Economic Organization of War Communism*, New York 1985.

143 V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 31, pp. 280-281.



the legitimacy of Communist ideology, it was no longer willing to obey the Communist project of the future – that is why it deliberately exterminated the Leninist revolutionary elite who were still mindful of that project.

The fusion of Communism and totalitarianism had thus gone through three stages: the stage of a totalitarian revolutionary party; the stage of a totalitarian Communist movement that tried to transform the state it owned into a tool for realizing a chiliastic utopia; and, finally, the stage of totalitarian statehood eliminating all independence of the Communist movement as a dangerous source of ideological ferment and destabilization. Lenin's place in the history of Communism is thus defined by having been an unquestioned leader of Russian revolutionary Communism during the first and the second stages. The third, post-Revolutionary stage is already post-Leninist – even though it seems undeniable that, organically, it had grown out of dynamics and developments initiated by Lenin.<sup>144</sup>

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144 Let us note that, according to a popular opinion held in American Sovietology, there had been no continuity between Leninism and Stalinism. The view was represented by, for example, S.F. Cohen ("Bolshevism and Stalinism," in: *Stalinism, Essays in Historical Interpretation*, ed. R. Tucker, New York-London 1977) and R.C. Tucker ("Stalinism as Revolution from Above," *Ibid.*), Tucker brought the thesis of "non-continuity" to its extreme, arguing that the Stalinist revolution had radically broken off with Leninism in favor of a "neo-tsarist version of the state based on forced service." The most interesting presentation of Stalinism after 1934 as a "great retreat" (from the Communist ideals) has been offered by N.S. Timasheff in, *The Great Retreat. The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia*, New York 1946.



## Chapter 22

# The Crisis of Marxism and the Intellectual Genesis of the Religious-Philosophical Renaissance

The 1890s were a bad time – and not only for the Populist movement that had been pushed back on the defensive by the Marxists, suffering (in the eyes of general opinion) defeat upon defeat in their press battles. These were also bad times for the entire tradition of the “enlightener” radicalism and revolutionary egalitarianism, its idea of the unconditional primacy of “the good of the people” over “national welfare” (as Chernyshevsky had put it) having wavered under pressure from the principle of production’s priority over distribution that justified an uncontrolled growth of social inequalities. And – last but not least – it was a period of a complete shift of values in the cultural sphere that resulted in a definition of cultural values as autotelic, a retreat from utilitarianism and socially-minded realism toward individualism and metaphysical needs and, above all, in liberation of Russian literature from the social-civic duties that Belinsky had so effectively imposed on it.

Rebellion against a socially involved art has been named decadency. In the theory of art, as well as of philosophy and social sciences, the new intellectual trends have become known as “the anti-Positivist breakthrough.”<sup>1</sup>

The first decadent in Russian poetry was Nikolai Minsky (born Vilenkin, 1855-1937), son of a Jewish family of the Vilnius region. As a young man, he was greatly involved with revolutionary Populism: in order to symbolically

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1 The term “anti-Positivist breakthrough in literature” used in Polish literary studies is hardly applicable to Russian literature, since what is known as the period (or age) of Positivism in Poland, finds its equivalent in the Russian period of literary realism. The term “modernism,” on the other hand, is too easily associated with “modernization.” A proper term in reference to philosophy and social philosophy seems “the reorientation of European social thought 1890-1930” (cf. H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society. The Reorientation of European Social Thought 1890-1930*, New York 1958). In social sciences, the term “anti-naturalist breakthrough” is synonymous with “anti-Positivist breakthrough.”

confirm his bond with the Russian people, he converted from Judaism to the Orthodox Church in 1886. At the same time, he rejected populist literature, proclaiming it as early as 1884 in an essay entitled *The Old Controversy* where he declared that poetry should serve nothing but pure beauty. Several years later, he published the book *In the Light of Consciousness* (1890) that came to be considered the first programmatic manifesto of Russian decadency: the book developed the theory of “meonism” (i.e., that which does not exist, from the Greek *mé* – not, and *on* – being), declaring that poets should seek the unknown, the unimaginable, the non-existent and the impossible.

The next decadent manifesto echoing the ideas of Baudelaire and Verlaine was a book by Dmitri Merezhkovsky (1865-1941), *On the Causes of Decline and the New Trends in Modern Russian Literature* (1893).<sup>2</sup> It supported rebellion against the social “servility” of literature with a neo-Romantic theory of symbolism – a theory of art suffused with religious-metaphysical content that, thanks to symbols, penetrated the surface of phenomena to reach a mystical reality concealed beyond. The destructive part of the program was completed by Akim Volynsky (born Flexer, 1863-1926) in his book *The Russian Critics* (1896) where he attacked the entire Russian tradition of socially involved literary criticism, starting from Belinsky and Chernyshevsky. The constructive part, on the other hand, was later on imaginatively developed by Andrei Bely (Bugaev, 1880-1934) making use of Vladimir Soloviev’s ideas. As early as 1903, in his essay *On Theurgy*, Bely sketched the concept of theurgic art that – being a kind of mystical revelation – would also be a tool for changing the world.

Thanks to the generous patronage of railway magnate Savva Mamontov and Princess Maria Tenisheva, the community of Symbolists with their supporting philosophers and critics owned an illustrated periodical – *The World of Art* [*Mir iskusstva*] – published from 1898-1904 by Sergei Diaghilev and Dmitri Filosofov. Another magazine, published since 1902, was *The New Way* [*Novii Put’*] by Merezhkovsky and his poet-essayist wife Zinaida Hippus (1869-1945) – it combined a promotion of “new art” with a search for ways of a religious renaissance in Russia.

In professional philosophy, as has already been observed, the anti-Positivist opposition was initially a defense of classical philosophical content against the reductionism and anti-metaphysical orientation of Positivist scientism – rather than a symptom of the novel intellectual trends that had dominated European thought around the year 1890. A major victory in that battle was the

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2 Merezhkovsky emphasized, however, that “decadency” had an incomparably deeper and more philosophical significance in Russia than in France.

establishment of the journal *Problems of Philosophy and Psychology* that represented philosophical pluralism and encouraged overcoming Positivist unilateralism. This overcoming could take on the form of a gradual stepping out of Positivism through ethical idealism and inductive metaphysics – as exemplified by the philosophical evolution of Nikiolai Grot. The greatest change of the philosophical landscape, however, was due to the fact that *Problems of Philosophy and Psychology* opened wide its columns to representatives of a fully-fledged metaphysical idealism, such as Chicherin, Soloviev (who had attacked the Positivists even in his master's thesis of 1874), Soloviev's friend Lev Lopatin or Soloviev's direct pupil and father of "concrete idealism," Sergei Trubetskoi.

Of great importance from the methodological point of view was the increasingly radical criticism of Marxist orthodoxy by the "legal Marxists." The orthodox Marxism of the Second International period – treated as the highest achievement of Positivist-defined social sciences, as well as the final word of Western progressive thought – was considered by the "legal Marxists" to expressly combine "all the virtues and deficiencies of consistent Positivism."<sup>3</sup> The criticism of the Marxist theory of social development conducted from within – by outstanding Marxists and fathers of "New Westernism" – was therefore received as a powerful blow to the Positivist conception of science and progress.

With regards to the scope of social impact, the leaders were probably literary critics and journalists. The new intellectual climate in that domain was marked by the strikingly strong influence of Frederic Nietzsche's ideas, coupled with the discovery of new philosophical aspects of Dostoevsky's books. Vassily Rozanov (1856-1919) in his book *The Legend of the Great Inquisitor* (published in the journal *Russkii vestnik*, 1891; book edition published in 1894) convincingly revealed the philosophical depth of Dostoevsky's writings – albeit too strongly identifying Dostoevsky's own philosophy with the lay humanism of Ivan Karamazov. Lev Shestov (born Shvartsman, 1866-1938) went further still in his suggestive book *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche* (1903) where he identified Dostoevsky's own standpoint with the philosophy of the "underground man" Dostoevsky described, treated as an anticipation of Nietzsche. In his earlier book, *The Good in the Teachings of Count Tolstoy and F. Nietzsche* (1900), Shestov was very rough with Tolstoy, accusing him of hypocrisy and opposing his moralizing with Nietzsche's criticism of morality, treated as an expression of uncompromising intellectual honesty and disillusioned courage. Another

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3 See, S. Bulgakov, *Ot marksizma k idelizmu, Sbornik statei (1896-1903)*, Petersburg 1903, p. IX.

testimony of the influence of Nietzsche combined with fascination with Dostoevsky's thought and criticism of Tolstoyism that was typical of that time was, last but not least, Merezhkovsky's book *Tolstoy and Dostoevsky* (1901-1903).

Just like Rozanov and Shestov, Merezhkovsky focused on the ideas impersonated by the figures of individualist rebels – rather than on the Slavophile-oriented, Christian utopia of the author of *The Brothers Karamazov* – i.e., on those aspects of Dostoevsky's work which echoed Nietzsche's criticism of Christianity. He did not particularly admire Soloviev, unable to pardon the latter's break with the *World of Art* community which Soloviev had seen as a bunch of Christianity-threatening decadents – Nietzscheans.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the book *Tolstoy and Dostoevsky* surpassed the horizon of individualist decadency. It was meant to serve the same goal as the Petersburg "religious-philosophical meetings" organized by Merezhkovsky and Hippisus: to elaborate and propagate "a new religious consciousness" defined as a great renovation of Christianity. And it seemed obvious to everybody that the source of that idea was to be sought in Soloviev.

The turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century thus abounded in intellectual and cultural events testifying to a major acceleration of the ongoing transformation in Russian spiritual life. Alexandr Blok, using the proverbial poetic license, symbolically coupled the first day of the new century with the death of Soloviev whom he considered his own philosophical master. In the essay *Vladimir Soloviev and Our Days*, written on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the philosopher's death, Blok wrote:

We are still far from realizing the place and the role of Soloviev in the Russian society of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. That period had opened and prepared the age that followed immediately after his death – for Soloviev died in June 1900, that is, several months before the beginning of the new century that revealed at once an entirely new face, quite unlike that of the preceding century. I shall allow myself to say today – entirely dogmatically, without any kind of a critical analysis, as a witness not quite bereft of hearing and sight – that even January of 1901 stood under a completely different auspice than had December 1900, and that even the very beginning of the new century was full of entirely new signs of the times and new premonitions.<sup>5</sup>

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4 See *S.M. Soloviev, Vladimir Soloviev*, pp. 7, 28. Zinaida Hippisus observes (not without some surprise) that although the Merezhkovskys had been meeting Soloviev on various occasions, no personal friendship emerged (Z. Gippius-Merezhkovskaia, *Dmitri Merezhkovsky*, Paris 1951, pp. 74-75).

5 A. Blok, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomach*, vol. 2: *Ocherki, stat'ii i rechi*, Moscow 1955, pp. 341-342.

## Around Problems of *Idealism*

### *The Anti-Positivist Breakthrough and the Liberal Liberation Union*

Soloviev's influence, however, was not the direct cause of the anti-Positivist breakthrough in Russian philosophy – as explicitly proved by the fact that the first group manifesto of Russian neo-idealism – *The Problems of Idealism* – published at the end of 1902 under the auspices of the Moscow Psychological Society, did not contain a single article devoted especially to Soloviev (even though Soloviev's name was mentioned, along with Chicherin's, in the brief editor's introduction by Novgorodtsev). The emergence of *Problems of Idealism* had not resulted from a reception of Soloviev's philosophy. Indeed, it marked the closing phase of another process, disconnected from Soloviev: the process of the "legal Marxists'" departure from Marxism, politically manifested by stepping over to the liberal positions and philosophically manifested by neo-idealistic criticism of the Positivist model of social philosophy.

The process of that "closing phase" was important enough to necessitate recalling some of its crucial moments.

A Bernstein-style Marxist revisionism could not take root in a country whose conditions made impossible the existence of a mass, legal Social Democratic party. A common interest in political freedom (be it understood instrumentally, as in Lenin's case) blurred the fundamental differences between revolutionary and reformist Marxism. Lenin believed that Struve could be, despite all, his own ally in the war with autocracy – while Struve, convinced of his own central role in intellectual life, perceived Lenin as his own ally in the struggle against the "economic romanticism" of the Populists. Therefore, the leader of the "legal Marxists" willingly performed the role of a "literary agent" to the Marxist revolutionary, publishing Lenin's articles in periodicals, fighting for his royalties, proofreading and encouraging Lenin to keep on writing *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*.<sup>6</sup> Lenin, appreciative of his assistance,

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6 See R. Pipes, *Struve. Liberal on the Left*, p. 238.

Pipes rightly points out, too, that Struve and Lenin – the latter in a considerably comfortable Siberian exile at that time – maintained a friendly personal relationship, confirmed, for example, by the letter exchange between Struve's wife and Nadezhda Krupskaya, the wife of Lenin. In one of her letters, Nina Struve informed the Lenins about her baby son: "He can already hold up his little head, we show him every day the portraits of Darwin and Marx, saying – Bow to Uncle Darwin, bow to Uncle Marx, and he bows down ever so comically" (N. Krupskaya, *Wspomnienia o Leninie*, Warsaw 1958, p. 44).

According to Pipes (see *Ibid.*) the baby son had to be Gleb Struve, the future literary scholar (whom this author met in the flesh at the University of California in Berkeley –

defended Struve from Plekhanov who could not pardon Struve his distancing himself from philosophical materialism.

In spring of 1899, having read *Credo* by Prokopovich and Kuskova, Lenin got frightened by the possibility of a de-politicization of the workers' movement in Russia. In April 1900, he met Struve (and M.I. Tugan-Baranovsky) in Pskov, and obtained their promise that the "legal Marxists" would not give up the political fight and discussed the conditions of their collaboration with the orthodox Marxist *Spark* [*Iskra*]. The alliance, however, was opposed by Plekhanov who agreed to collaborate with Struve only if the latter abandoned his Social Democratic guise to represent nothing but "democratic opposition." The editors of *Spark* accepted Plekhanov's argument and accordingly altered (in October 1900) the Pskov contract, which was tantamount to defining "legal Marxism" as a trend opposing the existing political system, but non-Marxist and not representing Social Democracy. At the same time, Struve received Berdiaev's book on Mikhailovsky (its author then in exile for his activity in a Marxist circle) and wrote its introduction, radically breaking with Positivism and encouraging the young author to openly embrace idealistic metaphysics.

Soon afterward, in December of 1900, Lenin met Struve again, trying to learn whether the liberals (and Struve now counted among them) were ready to continue their oppositional activity under the leadership of the Social Democrats, or separately. The latter choice proved true. Here, however, Plekhanov protested again, claiming that co-operation with the liberals was conditional to the process of Europeanization. *Spark* then proposed that Struve's group (acting under the name of "Democratic Opposition Group 'Freedom'") co-publish with them the periodical *Contemporary Review* [*Sovremennoe obozreniie*]. The editor-in-chief would be Struve, while the Social Democrats were to take care of organization and distribution, in return for financial support of their own journals, *Spark* and *Aurora*. The contract was signed on January 30, 1901 – despite the protests of Lenin who disliked the idea of Struve being "the boss."

The plans were cut short, however, by a new joint initiative: to publish – in Germany, for the money supplied by Struve and with his introduction – Witte's secret memorial on the contradiction between autocracy and self-government by land assemblies.<sup>7</sup> The Social Democrats' intention was to compromise the tsarist minister by charging him with the plan to abolish the land assemblies. Struve's

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which only shows how close in time can be some facts separated by "historical epochs!").

7 Entitled by Struve *Samoderzhaviie i zemstvo* (Autocracy and Land Assembly), it was published in Stuttgart, 1901.



introduction, however, focused on suggesting to the government that the liberals – in return for some concessions to the land assemblies – would be prepared to break their collaboration with the Social Democrats.

This time, the entire editorial staff of *Spark* were outraged, while Lenin seethed with fury.<sup>8</sup> Once Struve had confessed to treating the Social Democrats instrumentally – as a pawn in his games with the government – any further form of collaboration became impossible. Struve himself had arrived at that conclusion somewhat earlier, choosing collaboration with a group of conservative-liberal land-assembly activists constituting the “Feast” [“*Beseda*”] circle founded in 1899 under the ideological leadership of the Slavophile-oriented Dmitri Shipov.<sup>9</sup>

December of 1901 opened the period of Struve’s activity in emigration, devoted to organizing a foreign center for the Russian liberal movement. To avoid antagonizing the land assembly activists who were critical of Western liberalism, the newly founded body was not a liberal party (against the wish of the future leader of the Constitutional Democrats, Pavel Milukov), but an internally varied movement called the “Liberation Union.” The first issue of its organ, *Liberation* [*Osvobozhdeniie*] was published as early as June / July of 1902. The following year saw a congress of Liberation Union activists at Schaffhausen (Switzerland) where crucial program decisions were made.

From the very beginning, Liberation Union contained two trends: the rightist-agrarian one followed by land-assembly activists under the leadership of Shipov that contradicted Western constitutionalism with the idea of a representative counseling body modeled on the Land Councils of old – and the Westernizing one supporting constitutionalism and represented by intelligentsia activists centered around Struve. Apart from former “legal Marxists,” an important figure in the latter was Pavel Novgorodtsev, deeply involved in the fight against legal Positivism in the name of the rebirth of the idea of the natural law. He was entrusted with the task of convincing the Moscow Psychological Society to publish *Problems of Idealism* – the book that was to serve as a

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8 According to N.K. Tatarev (see, Pipes, *Struve*, p. 279), Lenin declared that Struve deserved to be killed. Pipes admits that Struve’s Introduction was “exceptionally inappropriate” and represented “Realpolitik in the most pejorative sense of the word.” (R. Pipes, *Struve*, pp. 275-276).

9 See T. Emmons, “The Beseda Circle, 1899-1905,” *Slavic Review*, September 1973. The role of the “Beseda” Circle in the genesis of the Liberation Union has been discussed by Randall Poole in his Introduction to the English translation of *Problems of Idealism*, translation and introduction by R.A. Poole, New Haven-London 2003, pp. 6-9.

philosophical justification of the liberal political movement that had been taking shape in emigration. He, too, accepted the role of its editor.

The twelve authors of the book fall into two categories: the “legal Marxists” of the Struve circle -and the academic philosophers, most of them connected with the Moscow Psychological Society.<sup>10</sup> Their selection became an object of discussion between the volume’s editor (Novgorodtsev) and its initiator (Struve). When Novgorodtsev recommended Petrażycki, Struve rejected his candidacy arguing that, to him, Petrażycki was but a “critical Positivist” who – in case of a conflict between the natural law and coded law – would have defended the latter. Novgorodtsev, in turn, was doubtful about Frank’s candidacy, arguing that Frank’s contribution might have blurred the neo-idealistic clarity of the volume. The decisive vote was always Struve’s. The ex-Marxists (who were still being called Marxists) decided about the book’s final shape, transforming it into a manifesto of a new line (and thus, formally, violating the contract signed with the Psychological Society who wished to keep the book strictly academic). In public reception, *Problems of Idealism* have been forever associated with the transition of an important intellectual group from Marxism to idealism.<sup>11</sup> And that was indeed the historical role of that important book.

The above statement allows for limiting my presentation of *Problems of Idealism* to its most representative essays, namely, those by Struve, Novgorodtsev and the three thinkers who had come out of the “legal Marxist” school. The latter three, however, will be presented in an order different from that of the respective chapters in the book – starting from Frank, the least engaged at the time in the cause of the idealist breakthrough, and ending with Bulgakov who reached beyond philosophical idealism into an openly religious

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10 The making of *Problems of Idealism* has been reconstructed in great detail by M.A. Kudrinsky (M.A. Kolerov) in his essay, “Arkhivnaia istoriia sbornika ‘Problemy idealizma’,” *Voprosy Filosofii*, No 4/1993, pp. 157-165. Initially, the book had been intended as a collection of texts on the theory, history and contemporary functioning of the principle of the freedom of consciousness. Struve had proposed three fundamental authors: S.N. Trubetskoi (the philosophical question), Novgorodtsev (the historical-legal question) and E.N. Trubetskoi (the philosophical-legal question). In the final version, the authors were: S.N. Bulgakov, E.N. Trubetskoi, Struve (under the cryptonym P.S.), N.A. Berdiaev, S.L. Frank, S.A. Askoldov, S.N. Trubetskoi, P.I. Novgorodtsev, B.A. Kistiakovskiy, A.S. Lappo-Danilevskiy, S.F. Oldenburg and D.E. Zhukovskiy. The book was published on November 16, 1902.

11 See, L. Augustyn, “Zagadnienie etyczne w ewolucji ‘od marksizmu do idealizmu.’ Siemion. L. Frank – przykład nie tylko indywidualny,” in: *Między reformą a rewolucją*, pp. 81-98.

philosophy, consciously aspiring to the revitalization and modernization of religious faith.

*Petr Struve*

The philosophical program of *Problems of Idealism* had been signaled – as Frank rightly observed – by Struve’s introduction to Berdiaev’s book on Mikhailovsky. A former spokesman of extreme “objectivism” in social sciences, treating the individual as *quantite negligeeable* and pointedly opposing the dualism of “being” and “obligation,” turned therein into an advocate of the absolute rights of the individual and a consistent critic of all forms of Positivism and naturalism as trends embodying the capitulation of moral consciousness to mere factuality of the given. While praising Berdiaev for restoring Kantian transcendental idealism, Struve proposed a more radical turn, namely, a resuscitation of an openly metaphysical transcendent idealism of great post-Kantian philosophers. He considered it to be a step toward reactivating the natural law that proclaimed the rights of the individual independent from changeable historical circumstances and the state’s arbitrariness. He argued, too, that the autotelic value of the human person was threatened as much by authoritarian heteronomous ethics, as by the moral relativism of middle-class utilitarianism and eudemonism. Criticizing eudemonism, he summoned both Kant’s ethics of duty and (in keeping with the spirit of the times) Nietzsche’s ethos of ceaseless aspiration to “super humanity.”

Novgorodtsev’s introduction to *Problems of idealism* echoed that program by declaring that a return to idealism expressed a striving to a metaphysical grounding of the absolute value of personality. The authors of the book – Novgorodtsev wrote – were united by a search for

Absolute commandments and principles; new forms of life now appear not as demands of mere practicality but, rather, as categorical commands of morality which is most attentive about the principle of unconditional significance of personality.<sup>12</sup>

Struve’s contribution to *Problems of Idealism* (published anonymously, Struve being a political émigré at the time of the book’s publication) was entitled *An Adjunct to the Characteristics of Our Philosophical Development*. Struve defined the main idea of Positivism (including Marxism) – that was also its main mistake – as “subjection of that which should be to that which is (existence) and deriving obligation from existence.”<sup>13</sup> “Subjective sociologists” of the Populist

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12 *Problemy idealizma. Sbornik statii*, ed. P.I. Novgorodtsev, Moscow 1902, pp. VIII-IX.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 79.

movement, Lavrov and Mikhailovsky, had been right to rebel against that attitude within the Positivist formation, yet they proved unable to clearly express their vaguely felt metaphysical needs in an adequate philosophical language. Plekhanov had made things even worse, coupling Positivism with materialism, Hegelianism and a dogmatic contempt for a reflection on the theory of cognition. The impasse had been broken by the critical (neo-Kantian) trend within Marxism that restored Kant's dualism of facts and values, rehabilitating an axiological, normative treatment of social life. The trend, however, had nothing in common with "subjective sociology," the latter being – along with "class approach" of the orthodox Marxists – a form of relativism, while neo-idealism considered values to be objective and universally obtaining.

The main role in the process of overcoming Positivism belonged to Struve. He claimed it openly, writing of himself "in the third person." While admitting that Marxism had offered a "historical justification of capitalism,"<sup>14</sup> he rejected the charge of "bourgeois," arguing that the capitalist system was not tantamount to a bourgeois rule, nor did support of capitalist modernization necessarily entail propagation of a middle-class mentality. In his opinion, the "Achilles' heel" of Marxism was its philosophy: in Plekhanov's case, it was a mere return to Chernyshevsky's materialism which, in Struve's opinion, had been the crudest form of Russian Positivism.

And how about Struve himself of the *Critical Remarks* period? Had not his own manifest "objectivism" been a Positivism, as radical as that of Plekhanov?

The answer to that question proved interesting in the autobiographical sense – albeit surprising, rather than philosophically satisfying. Struve's principal concern was to defend himself against the charge of a Plekhanov-like naivety. Not being naïve, he decided to cut the Gordian knot by forcing himself to dogmatically reduce obligation to the empirically given "being." It was a conscious decision that, nevertheless, left him with "an inner uncertainty about the rightness of the discovered solution, nagging, though not fully realized and thwarted."<sup>15</sup>

Following that personal confession was Struve's declaration of breaking off with Marxism and any forms of Positivism – as the only solution of the author's nagging problems turned out to be metaphysical idealism. Struve declared, however, that the fact did not undermine the scientific value of his Marxist works, nor did it alter the results of his Marxist polemics with the Populist movement.

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14 Ibid., p. 88.

15 Ibid., p. 89-90.

A more detailed review of the evolution of Struve's opinions at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is enabled by a collection of his essays entitled *On Various Subjects*, published the same year as *Problems of Idealism*. Considering Struve's contribution to establishing ties between neo-idealism and liberalism, two motives of the book seem especially important: (1) looking for predecessors, and (2) exposing connections between philosophical idealism and the modern idea of statehood.

Tracing the first motive, we find that, on the eve of his idealist breakthrough, Struve had sought inspiration in Chicherin and Soloviev – yet was rather disillusioned by them. Chicherin seemed to him an anachronistic thinker combining a dogmatic idealism with an equally dogmatic “bourgeois-doctrinaire” version of liberalism. Writing his essay on Chicherin (1897), Struve believed himself to be a democrat – hence his unsurprising emphasis on the wrongness of identifying liberalism as such with the conservative and implacably anti-Socialist liberalism of Chicherin. Equally wrong must have seemed to him the opinion of Chicherin as a model Westernizer. He duly pointed out that the tradition of Russian Westernism derived from Belinsky and Turgenev, i.e., from writers who – while understanding the necessity of the capitalist way, never identified with the “bourgeois” and acknowledged the Socialist tradition.<sup>16</sup>

Struve's attitude to Soloviev was equally distanced. In 1897, he accused Soloviev of economic ignorance, classifying him amongst “our utopians” and writing that the bourgeois traits of Soloviev's opinions on economic matters were obvious to the point of making them repulsive to “morally sensitive men,” transforming Soloviev's “apology of the ideal good” into an “apology of the real evil.”<sup>17</sup> He tempered his judgment in 1900, writing an essay on the occasion of Soloviev's death in which he called him an “eminent thinker and outstanding writer.” That, however, did not amount to acknowledging Soloviev's greatness as an idealist philosopher, let alone including him in Struve's own philosophical genealogy. On the contrary – Struve openly declared that Soloviev the publicist in all respects surpassed Soloviev the philosopher and that his greatest achievement had been the criticism of Slavophilism which justified the thinker's access to the Westernizer camp.<sup>18</sup>

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16 See *G. Chicherin i evo obrashcheniie k proshlomu* (1897) in: *P. Struve, Na raznie t'emy*, Petersburg 1902, pp. 84-120.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 61 (*Nashi utopisti*, 1897) and pp. 189-197 (*Filosofia idealnovo dobra ili apologiia realnovo zla?*, 1897).

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 198-202 (*Pamiati Vladimira Solovieva*, 1900).

The second motive of Struve's thought that has been named above is illustrated by his criticism of Engels and his approval for the Social Democratic reform system of Ferdinand Lassalle. In an article written on the occasion of the International Congress for Legal Defense of Workers (Zurich 1897), Struve quoted Engels' opinion that a ten-hour labor day was a reactionary idea, hampering the development of the middle class and expressing the conservatives' desire to blunt the edge of class antagonism.<sup>19</sup> From the point of view of Marxist orthodoxy which assumed the impossibility of reforming capitalism and the necessity of a revolutionary "crash," Engels' standpoint seemed internally coherent – though, luckily, utterly discredited by further development of the social question in Marx and Engels' home country. The main figure to steer the German workers' movement toward reforms within the existing statehood was Lassalle – a leader who did not hesitate to conduct personal negotiations with Bismarck. According to Struve, Lassalle owed his success to his idealistic vision of the state shaped by classical German idealism. Struve shared Lassalle's opinion that only an enlightened state authority motivated by the general social interest was capable of securing the workers' interests within the framework of the capitalist system. In 1900, he therefore proclaimed the slogan of "return to Lassalle."<sup>20</sup> Specifying that slogan, he explained that the traditions to return to were those of Fichte and Hegel, which meant abandoning Marx and Engels' materialism that radically falsified ("turned upside down") Hegel's dialectics.

The final essay in the volume is *What Is True Nationalism?* written in memory of Soloviev. First published in 1901, in *Problems of Philosophy and Psychology*, the essay was of exceptional importance to Struve himself who later called it his farewell to the motherland before going on a voluntary exile.<sup>21</sup> Struve's biographer, R. Pipes, described the text as "the most ambitious attempt in the history of Russian political thought to formulate a consistent doctrine of democratic and national liberalism."<sup>22</sup>

The national feeling, Struve argued, is ancient and deeply rooted; it feeds on tradition and hope, thus combining the elements of memory and prophecy. The idea of a separate "national spirit" was born considerably late: in France – from the Great Revolution and in England – from the anti-Jacobin reaction. A truly modern nationalism, however, is not a mere collective emotion – it has been

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19 Ibid, pp. 416-417 (the article on the Zurich Congress, 1897).

20 Ibid, p. 266 (*F. Lassalle*, 1900).

21 See *P.B. Struve, Patriotica. Politika, kultura, religiia, Socialism*, Moscow 1997, p. 71 (first published in *Rech'*, Feb. 24, 1908).

22 See R. Pipes, *Struve*, p. 301.

shaped in the process of the individual's emancipation, along with the liberal idea of inalienable human rights. Its theoretical foundation was, in fact, the Kant-elaborated principle of autonomy – i.e., free self-identification – applied to social life.<sup>23</sup>

The thesis – extremely modern-sounding at the time – coupled “true nationalism” with liberalism: not with democracy as a way of establishing and organizing the government, but with liberalism which declared absolute rights of the individual, sanctioned by the natural law. It pointed to the indigenously liberal idea of freedom of consciousness generated in religious nonconformist communities as the font of modern nationalism, declaring that the classical model of modern national development had been and still was the United States.<sup>24</sup> Struve postulated that Russia follow precisely that model – which was in keeping with his own vision of the development of the Russian economy presented in *Critical Remarks*. At the same time, he stressed that national ambition could not be reduced to multiplication of national riches. The crown of modern nationalism, he argued, must be the wealth of national culture, emerging as a result of free spiritual self-identification of all the members of the national community.<sup>25</sup>

Writing about national ideologies in Russia, Struve warmly remembered Ivan Aksakov whom he perceived as a thinker contradicting legal Positivism from a natural-legal standpoint.<sup>26</sup> This, however, did not alter the manifestly anti-Slavophile character of his dissertation, additionally emphasized by its being dedicated to Soloviev.

Following the 1905-1907 Revolution, Struve evolved toward conservative liberalism, coming close to Chicherin whom he had criticized before. He, nevertheless, retained his view on the close connection between “true nationalism” and liberal Westernism. In 1908, in a polemic with Merezhkovsky, he put it as follows:

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23 P. Struve, *Na raznye t'emy*, pp. 535-536.

The opinion that Kant's theory of autonomy was one of the sources of modern nationalism was developed several decades later by E. Kedourie (*Nationalism*, London 1960). A famous researcher of nationalism, Anthony D. Smith, devoted to that thesis an entire chapter of his book *Theories of Nationalism* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, New York 1983), entitled “The Imitation of Kant.”

24 *Problemy idealizma*, pp. 528-529.

25 *Ibid.*, pp. 552-555.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 543.

I am a Westernizer – and therefore a nationalist,  
 I am a Westernizer – and therefore am I a statist.<sup>27</sup>

*Pavel Novgorodtsev*

Unlike Struve, Pavel Novgorodtsev had no misgivings about referring to the works of Chicherin and Soloviev. He appreciated both as philosophers of law and tried to combine their ideas with his own program of the rebirth of the natural law. He also stressed the seminal significance of Petrażycki’s criticism of legal Positivism.

Novgorodtsev beautifully summoned his predecessors’ heritage in his lecture *The Idea of Law in the Philosophy of V.S. Soloviev*, given in the beginning of 1901 at the Moscow Psychological Society. The lecture was a homage to the late Soloviev, extolled as one of the most prominent defenders of “the idea of law” in 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophy. Novgorodtsev praised Soloviev for his persistent struggle against the Slavophiles’ depreciation of law and Tolstoy’s open legal nihilism, fully approving of the Soloviev-declared necessity of “a minimum of socially organized morality” – i.e., an order securing the individual’s freedom and dignity with legal measures; he also recalled the importance of Soloviev’s criticism of nationalism, as well as the philosopher’s involvement in the struggle for liberal values. And, most importantly, from the very beginning of his lecture, he emphasized the actuality of Soloviev’s philosophy of law in the context of the ongoing crisis of legal consciousness – the crisis that had been unanimously announced in the works of Chicherin and Petrażycki, i.e., of “the greatest representative of the elder generation of Russian lawyers” and “the most outstanding representative of the young generation.”<sup>28</sup>

The crisis was an *obvious* consequence of the degraded idea of law brought on by decades of dominating legal Positivism that had reduced it to positive law, i.e., orders of the state authority. Novgorodtsev perceived it as stripping law of its moral content – and thus diminishing its attractiveness for advocates of social progress, while paving the way for legal nihilism that treated law as the product of force and intense calculation. He wished to restore “the idea of law” to its former splendor, coupling it with the cause of freedom – which, of course, required rehabilitation of the idea of the natural law that had been discredited by all kinds of Positivist “lawyers’ law.”

27 P.B. Struve, *Patriotica*, p. 74.

28 See *P.I. Novgorodtsev, Ob obshchestvennom ideale*, selected works, ed. A.V. Sobolev, Moscow 1991, p. 526. Cf. the chapter on Novgorodtsev in the book by W. Goerd, *Russische Philosophie. Zugänge und Durchblicke*, Munchen 1984.



Such a program had already been in social demand – as proved by the weekly *Law* that had been founded in late 1898 by Josif Hessen, his cousin Vladimir Hessen and *privat-dozent* A.I. Kaminka, and devoted to the struggle for a legal culture in the Russian Empire. The Russian word “law” [*pravo*] was “a particle of the soul” of the journal’s editors and authors, signifying (unlike the words *zakon*, *zakonnost’*) not only “that which is legal,” but also “that which is just.”<sup>29</sup> Unsurprisingly, then, Novgorodtsev’s ideas were met with understanding and sympathy. The feelings were manifest in Vladimir Hessen’s dissertation *Rebirth of The Natural Law* (first published in *Law*) bringing a detailed analysis of all the symptoms of the rebirth of the natural law in Germany and in Russia – while stressing that the mainstream of that phenomenon was connected with the renaissance of philosophical idealism represented by men like Novgorodtsev or Struve. The tone of the dissertation was optimistic and elated. Philosophical idealism and a return to a moral, normative concept of law were perceived by the author as symptoms of a major, progressive transformation of social-political life.<sup>30</sup>

Novgorodtsev’s essay *Ethical Idealism in the Philosophy of Law*, published in *Problems of Idealism*, opened with a reference to Petrażycki’s “policy of law” – to end in giving Petrażycki the merit of transforming the theory of the natural law into “an exact discipline founded on a broad scientific basis.”<sup>31</sup> At the same time, however, the author realized the difference in his own and Petrazhitytsky’s attitudes to the heritage of German idealism that defined their fundamentally diverse methodological approaches. While Petrażycki treated law as a fact of individual and social psychology, the new-idealist approach to law was a supra-empirical and non-causal one. Their common element was the criticism of legal Positivism and rehabilitation of the normative principle that restored the category of “that which should be” [*Sollen*] to the theory of law. Novgorodtsev, however, wanted to follow much further in that direction than had the father of “the policy of law.” He postulated “a rebirth of the natural law with it’s *a priori* method, idealistic aspirations, recognition of moral autonomy and normative

29 See I.V. Gessen, *V dwukh vekakh: zhiznennii otchet*, Berlin 1937, p. 152 (Josif Hessen was the father of Sergei Hessen, the father of “pedagogy of culture.” See, A. Walicki, *Legal Philosophies of Russian Liberalism*, Ch. VII).

The founders of *Law* – who were soon to join the Kadet Party – were of Jewish origin, the Jews being a minority especially affected by the lack of civil liberties and legal equality in the Russia of the time.

30 V.M. Gessen, *Vozrozhdeniie estvennovo prava*. Petersburg 1902. The author emphasized the relationship of the “rebirth of the natural law” with both philosophical neo-idealism and symbolism in poetry.

31 *Problemy idealizma*, pp. 236, 295.

approach”<sup>32</sup> – adding that the realization of that postulate demanded a radical overcoming of relativism, necessitating “an aureole of the absolute ‘obligation.’”<sup>33</sup> Obviously, Petrażycki’s psychological theory, tightly correlated with sociological evolutionism, could not supply appropriate models.

And yet, there remained the problem of introducing the necessary changes of legal norms in accordance with the needs of social development. Novgorodtsev solved it by accepting Stammler’s formula of “the natural law with an alterable content” – he also approvingly quoted V. Hessen’s term “evolutional the natural law.”<sup>34</sup> He emphasized that the issue was not to leave unaltered the existing laws, but to subject jurisdiction to “the idea of law” that had to be secured in an increasingly broad scope of absolute personal rights. The optimal formula reconciling moral absolutism with the idea of infinite development was, in his opinion, Kant’s categorical imperative, excluding both ethical conservatism and the threat of radicalism set on realizing a utopian vision of paradise on earth.<sup>35</sup>

Readers of the essay could have no doubt that the idea of a rebirth of the natural law was to serve the defense of the individual’s freedom against state absolutism. Further evolution of Novgorodtsev’s thoughts brought, too, an explanation of progress within the framework of liberalism – as a transition from the negative concept of individual freedom (defended by Chicherin) to the positive concept proclaimed by Soloviev’s “right to a respectable existence.”<sup>36</sup> As co-founder of the “Liberation Union” and then a member of the Central Committee of Constitutional Democrats, Novgorodtsev accepted Soloviev’s formula as valid for the “new” socialized liberalism.

### *Semen Frank*

Unlike Struve, Novgorodtsev did not proclaim metaphysical idealism, satisfying himself with an ethical idealism of neo-Kantian provenance. To the former “legal Marxists” grouped around Struve, on the other hand, metaphysical

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32 Ibid., p. 250.

33 Ibid., p. 260.

34 Ibid., p. 253.

35 Ibid., p. 288.

36 A comprehensive characteristic of Novgorodtsev’s legal-philosophical thoughts, focusing particularly on his book *Krizis sovremennovo pravosoznaniia* (Moscow 1909) and the series of essays entitled “Ob obshchestvennom ideale” (*Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii*, 1910-1916), is contained in Chapter V of this author’s *Legal Philosophies of Russian Liberalism*.

idealism turned out to be but a stop on the way to *religious* idealism with its declared continuation of Christian thought. But the arrival points for those following the common road were diverse. Semen Frank (1877-1950) proved to be the most reserved – perhaps owing to his Jewish upbringing<sup>37</sup> – while referring to the Christian Neo-Platonic tradition of Nicholas of Cusa, he stuck to professional philosophy, maintaining a distance from religious controversies. Berdiaev (as we shall see) went much further, coupling the rebirth of philosophical idealism with a “new religious consciousness” involved in the cause of a Christian transformation of the world. The most extreme, however, was Bulgakov who evolved from philosophy to theology, trying to make the latter specifically Orthodox. In 1918, Bulgakov was ordained.

The above distinction – to be specified soon – has been necessary as a warning against treating the thinkers surrounding Struve as a homogeneous group. Paradoxically, it was Struve himself who proved the most apart in the former “legal Marxist” community, refusing altogether to become a religious philosopher of any kind. Bridges to connect philosophy and religion were built – albeit in different styles – by Berdiaev and Bulgakov. As for Frank, he joined the project of shaping the culture of the Russian religious-philosophical renaissance from the supra-denominational standpoint of professional philosophy (much like Nikolai Lossky), deliberately supporting the dominating Neo-Platonic tendency of Russian idealism.<sup>38</sup> His starting point on the road “from Marxism to idealism” had been much different, however, from those of the other co-authors of *Problems of Idealism*. To put it briefly, he had been interested in a Promethian “ethics of progress,” rather than in the personalistic values defended by neo-Kantian ethical idealism.

Frank’s essay was entitled *Frederic Nietzsche and the Ethics of “Love of the Distant.”* It praised Nietzsche’s Zarathustra for replacing the Christian love of one’s neighbor and all that was near [*Nachstenliebe*] with love of the distant and the “distant descendant” [*Fernstenliebe*] – love of the wonderful “future man” that was prepared to sacrifice its contemporary generation for the sake of the flourishing of humankind in a future “supermanhood.” Frank stressed that

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37 Converted (on marrying) to the Orthodox Church, Frank interpreted that act as a step forward, rather than a renouncement of Judaism, arguing that Christianity had emerged upon the foundation of the New Testament. (Cf. Ph. Boobbyer, *S.L. Frank. The Life and Work of a Russian Philosopher, 1877-1950*, Ohio Univ. Press, Athens 1955, p. 77.) He obviously identified with a broadly defined Judeo-Christianity, tactfully abstaining from manifesting an Orthodox zeal.

38 Cf. A.G. Tikholaz, *Platon i Platonism v russkoi religioznoi filosofii vtoroi poloviny XIX-nachala XX vekov*, Kiev 2003.

progress was made possible only by “love of the distant” which inspired human powers with intensive creativity – while “love of one’s neighbor” hampered progress by compassion. He called Nietzsche a genius for having definitively overcome the false alternative of egoism vs altruism – after all, *Fernstenliebe*, or “the third kind of the moral feeling,” rejected both egoism and a compassionate love of one’s neighbor, submitting all to the cause of progress, i.e., to the maximum intensity of man’s creative powers.<sup>39</sup>

Preaching these ethics, Frank opposed the Populist ideologists who spoke of the exorbitant “social price” of capitalist progress. He argued that the dynamics of progress must not be hampered in order to spare people’s suffering. It is uncertain, however, whether he realized that an “ethics of progress” thus conceived could also justify a ruthless realization of a revolutionary program. When *Problems of Idealism* was published, the circles of the Russian Marxist intelligentsia had already seen the birth of a “Nietzschean” trend that emphasized the analogy between Marx and Nietzsche as two visionaries of the Promethean type, prepared to sacrifice their contemporary contemptible humanity for the sake of a great, powerful and creative “superman” of the future.<sup>40</sup> The most prominent figure of that trend was Anatoly Lunacharsky. But the temptation to “Nietzscheanize” affected also Trotsky in his youth: one of his earliest essays (published in December 1900) was entitled *A Little Something on the Philosophy of the “Superman.”*<sup>41</sup>

However, a closer view reveals a fundamental difference between the “Nietzscheanizing” liberalism of Frank and the “Nietzscheanizing” Bolshevism of Lunacharsky. Frank criticized the Populist intelligentsia for their idea of sacrifice for the people, blaming their instrumental self-approach and their underrating of individualist values due to the utilitarian idea of preference for the “good of the majority” – Nietzsche supplied him with arguments for an elitist, “aristocratic” culture as the one being closest to the ideal of a liberated and creative future man.<sup>42</sup> Lunacharsky, on the other hand – as befitted a revolutionary Socialist – believed that the flourishing of human creative power depended on the prior victory of the proletarian revolution. His “ethics of progress” thus demanded a total subjection to the interests of the revolution –

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39 *Problemy idealizma*, pp. 163-165

40 The term “Nietzschean Marxism” has been introduced by G. Kline. See, G.L. Kline, “Nietzschean Marxism” in Russia.” *The Boston College Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 2, 1968, and Kline, *Religious Thought in Russia*, Chicago-London 1968.

41 See B. Knei-Paz, *The Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky*, Oxford 1978, p. 476.

42 *Problemy idealizma*, pp. 182-191.

which, indeed, was more reminiscent of the cultural asceticism of revolutionary Populists than of the spiritual elitism of the Populist-free liberal intelligentsia.

*Nikolai Berdiaev*

Nietzsche was devoted considerable attention also by Nikolai Berdiaev in his program essay *The Ethical Problem in the Light of Philosophical idealism*. While sharing Frank's conviction of a possible religious-metaphysical interpretation of the idea of superman, Berdiaev strongly emphasized that Nietzsche himself had given that idea a biological sense in accordance with Darwin's theory of evolution. That was because Nietzsche's "idealist soul" had been "poisoned by naturalism" – the master critic of all the positive moral systems had not been able to break off with naturalist Positivism.<sup>43</sup>

Writing *The Ethical Problem*, Berdiaev himself had already broken with Positivism. He did it in his essay *The Struggle for Idealism*, published in mid-1901<sup>44</sup> – i.e., simultaneously with his own book on Mikhailovsky. In keeping with Struve's postulate formulated in his introduction for the book, Berdiaev called all compromise with Positivism a thing of the past, embracing "the timeless right of metaphysical creation."<sup>45</sup> He accepted the idea of the natural law as declaring the individual's superiority to the democratic principle of the majority and a practically conceived "good of the people." At the same time, he distanced himself from Bernstein's revisionism, expressing concern that it might infect Social Democracy with the middle-class spirit that was utterly hostile (no less than Positivism) to the emancipating aspirations of the personality.

One of the main themes of *The Ethical Problem* was the criticism of the evolutionary idea of development by adjustment and adaptation to external circumstances that offered the "adapted" all kinds of profits and was therefore considered to be an instrument of progress. Berdiaev firmly rejected both the Positivist identification of natural evolution with progress, and the measuring of progress with utilitarian-eudemonic criteria. According to him, progress was an ethical category, while morality was defined as the matter of a relationship between the empirical "self" and the ideal (spiritual, "normative") "self" – as the triumph of the normative consciousness over the empirical one, called "personality development" in the common language. Ethical individualism – he

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43 Ibid, p. 124.

44 In the periodical *Mir Bozhii*, June 1901. For Berdiaev's biography, see: D.A. Lovrie, *Rebelious Prophet. A Life of Nicolai Berdyayev*, New York 1960.

45 N. Berdiaev, *Sub specie aeternitatis. Opyty filosofskii, socialniie i literaturniie (1900-1906)*, Moscow 2002 (first published 1907), p. 11.

argued – cannot be empirically justified, while individuation without ethical foundations may lead only to a hedonistic immorality. Therefore – he concluded – “the idea of personality and the moral problem whose subject is personality are possible only on the grounds of spiritualism.”<sup>46</sup>

The solution was obviously Kantian. The Russian thinker, however, deemed it necessary to oppose Kant’s metaphysical reduction to “postulates of practical reason” by expressing his conviction concerning a possible and lawful idealism of an openly metaphysical kind, free of any agnostic misgivings. He stressed, however, that it was Kant who had provided the starting point for the personalistic ethics (identified by Berdiaev with ethics itself) – namely, by defining the notion of personality and accepting personality as an absolute value that must always be the end, and never the means. Berdiaev also shared Kant’s understanding of freedom as a creative self-definition, i.e., a positive freedom, rather than the negative “bourgeois” freedom reduced to the absence of external restrictions.<sup>47</sup>

The greatest achievement of post-Kantian idealism was, in Berdiaev’s opinion, its development of the idea of social progress. He conceived of progress as measured by new conditions for personal development, i.e., respecting axiological primacy of the individual over society. While emphasizing the role of creative actions enhancing the intensity of life, Berdiaev stressed that they must agree with the moral law, i.e., with “God’s voice in man.”<sup>48</sup> Having made those restrictions, he admitted that Nietzsche’s criticism of the altruist morality of compassion was basically right<sup>49</sup> and sketched a vision of replacing the morality of the weak with that of the strong, the latter focused on promoting the divine dignity of man. Summing up his argument, he described his own ethical attitude as a “synthesis of the idea of ‘God-Man’ with the idea of ‘Man-God’.”<sup>50</sup> The context made it clear that what he meant was a synthesis of traditional Christianity with Nietzschean values.

Translating his own ideas into political language, Berdiaev declared the superiority of the “inalienable rights of the individual” over the principle of national sovereignty.<sup>51</sup> Considering “the struggle for the natural law” to be the categorical imperative of progress, he specified on it as follows:

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46 *Problemy idealizma*, pp. 106-107.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 132.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 104.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 122.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 127, footnote.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 118.

From the ethical point of view, all efforts aimed at obtaining such a minimum of rights as will make possible a respectable existence of man are justified; from the ethical point of view, it is disgraceful not to defend those proper rights that constitute a necessary condition of an ideal self-realization.<sup>52</sup>

The essay ends with Berdiaev's claim that the attitude is shared by all the representatives of the new-idealistic trend, being an expression of the "spiritual starvation of the intelligent soul."<sup>53</sup>

Berdiaev's essay of October 1903 – *A Criticism of Historical Materialism*<sup>54</sup> – bears a close connection to the problems discussed in *The Ethical Problem*. The philosopher declared in the essay that, while not negating the methodological usefulness of historical materialism, he found it repulsive as a materialist system of the philosophy of history, bringing all the sins of Positivist evolutionism to their extreme. He put it bluntly: "To a philosopher of history and the metaphysical theory of progress, Vladimir Soloviev is far more important than all the economic materialists taken together."<sup>55</sup>

Berdiaev found "a grain of truth" in economic determinism, as well as in the theory of class struggle (which he utterly rejected as a worldview). Nevertheless, he emphasized the independence of legal-political ideas – and of the natural law in particular – pointing out that their genesis and development were impossible to explain by levels of production forces or class interests of any kind. The bearer of "the ideal legal principle" and its ensuing political ideal was, in his opinion, the intellectual elite, i.e., "the developed intelligent soul," capable of liberating itself from particularistic restrictions of a group interest. The same was true of liberalism: while economic liberalism was an obviously bourgeois ideology, the "moral essence" of liberalism could not be reduced to "the bourgeois."<sup>56</sup>

The task of a reborn Russian liberalism represented by the "supra-class intelligentsia" was defined by Berdiaev as uniting various social groups in the struggle for a common all-national goal: to secure "the right to a respectable existence" for all the citizens of the state.<sup>57</sup> Undoubtedly, it meant chiefly political freedom, which had to be camouflaged in view of censorship. The use of Soloviev's term "the right to a respectable existence" had yet another, deeper

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52 Ibid., p. 134.

53 Ibid., p. 135.

54 First published in *Mir Bozhii*, October 1903.

55 N. Berdiaev, *Sub specie aeternitatis*, p. 133.

56 Ibid., p. 147.

57 Ibid., p. 147-148.

sense: it implied that “new liberalism” would not neglect the question of the *social* conditions of human dignity.

Possible doubts about that were dispersed by Berdiaev’s essay *N.K. Mikhailovsky and B.N. Chicherin* (1904) in which the author – then already close to the Liberation Union – openly declared that he found Chicherin closer than Mikhailovsky in the philosophical aspect, but not in the political one. Chicherin’s “original sin,” he argued, was his economic liberalism classifying private property as a natural law – which Berdiaev believed to be a fundamental misunderstanding of the “true essence” of liberalism. An analogous nominal confusion was observed by the philosopher in his contemporary Germany where the Social Democrats fighting against reactionary forces for general social freedom were, in fact, a liberal party, while the so-called Liberals representing the bourgeois interests were by no means worthy of their self-imposed label.<sup>58</sup>

### *Sergei Bulgakov*

We may now approach Bulgakov’s essay *Basic Problems of the Theory of Progress*,<sup>59</sup> opening the volume *Problems of Idealism*.

The theory of progress – Bulgakov argued – testified to the fact that people cannot live without a feeling of a sense and a purpose in life. Science had refused to answer “the why and the wherefore?” but it had not managed to thwart the natural, religious and metaphysical needs of man. Consequently, it had been forced to smuggle the answer to the question about the sense of life in the shape of an apparently all-scientific theory of progress. Even the advocates of the mechanistic vision of society had not escaped the teleological bite in the shape of a temptation to present social evolution as an ever growing triumph of reason in its conquest of irrational causality. The ostensibly scientific theory of progress, thus conceived, tried to derive value from facts. It was supposed to

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58 Ibid., pp. 237-238.

In another article of 1904 (“O novom russkom idealizmie”), Berdiaev named Chicherin and Soloviev as “two outstanding philosophers who, by the scope of their ideas, the breadth of their horizons and the depth of penetrating the history of philosophical thought, stood much higher than the contemporary German philosophers” (Ibid., pp. 185-186). He found Chicherin excessively doctrinarian and rationalistic, and thus not as close to contemporary Russian philosophers as was Soloviev. And yet, in a footnote, he added: “The merits of Chicherin’s Philosophy of law and his determined defence of the natural law, that fundamental idea of ours, deserves a separate discussion” (Ibid.).

59 *Problemy idealizma*, p. 17.



eliminate the need of transcendence, substituting faith in otherworldly salvation with the certainty of an earthly salvation attainable in a historical future.<sup>60</sup>

The most perfect version of that kind of a religious surrogate was, in Bulgakov's opinion, Marxism. The Marxist concept of the laws of social development – as entirely “objective,” yet driving history in a desired direction, i.e., guaranteeing progress – satisfied the need for certainty. The sophisticated intellectuals' dream of a free, personal creativity, found an expression in “esoteric Marxism” with its vision of a future “kingdom of freedom” where the human mind has gained full control of the social conditions, enabling free and comprehensive personal development of each individual.

Bulgakov was correct to treat this “esoteric wisdom of Marx” – altogether ignored by the Positivist Marxists – as a remnant of Hegelian idealism.<sup>61</sup> He also pointed out the connections between Marx and Feuerbach's “religion of Humanity” that ascribed divine attributes to humankind. He obviously focused on the popular, Positivist interpretation of Marxism that defined it as “scientific Socialism” and believed it to smoothly combine Positivist scientism with the Socialist ideal identified with “general happiness.” While not denying that Marxism had thereby become the most potent “religion of progress,” Bulgakov questioned Marxism's – or any other “scientific-theory-of-progress” – capability to satisfy *authentic* religious needs. He accepted the concept of progress as a moral task in the Fichtean sense, while firmly rejecting the notion of progress as an objective law of history. History – he repeatedly argued – was ruled predominantly by coincidence and blind forces, human actions thus bringing unintentional and usually unwelcome results.

The strongest point of Bulgakov's argument was, however, his development of the thesis of the inner contradiction and moral insufficiency of “religion of progress” itself – even had there existed scientific grounds for capturing history in a formula of progress.<sup>62</sup>

Religion of progress – the thinker argued – promised, at best, a historical immortality that could never make a satisfactory substitute for personal

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60 Ibid., pp. 8-9.

Bulgakov's criticism of the Positivist theory of progress was accepted and developed by Stanisław Brzozowski in his essays “Etyka Spencera” (Spencer's Ethics) and “Monistyczne pojmowanie dziejów i filozofia krytyczna” (The Monistic Concept of History and Critical Philosophy), in the volume *Kultura i życie*. Brzozowski referred to *Problems of Idealism* as an “immeasurably significant” book (*Kultura i życie*, Warsaw 1973, p. 263) and to Bulgakov's essay in particular, declaring openly: “To that work I owe much” (Ibid., p. 263).

61 Ibid., pp. 27-28.

62 Ibid., p. 26.

immortality. Demanding sacrifice of individuals for the good of an abstract humanity and justifying their sufferings with an idea, it performed the function of a historical theodicy, while simultaneously falling into the trap of a vicious circle of an “evil infinity” in which the present generation must always sacrifice itself for the sake of future generations, the imaginary “descendants” acting as “vampires,” sucking the blood of the living, really existing men. An idolatry of progress is thus deeply immoral in its very essence, being contradictory to the idea of the absolute importance of each human individual. It rules out the hope for personal immortality, without offering anything in return – not even a collective perfection. Its highest value “smuggled” into the scientific theories of progress is the mere “happiness of a future generation” – a relative notion without a significant moral content, unable to give sense to the long train of atrocities that is history.

Bulgakov’s criticism of the “scientific theories of progress” led him to the conclusion that it was necessary to “render unto Caesar the things which be Caesar’s, and unto God the things which be God’s.”<sup>63</sup> Science must not take on the task of solving metaphysical and religious problems since it is incapable of meeting that task. The sense of history, theodicy and moral evil were problems belonging to speculative metaphysics whose lawfulness and fruitfulness had been proved by Soloviev’s philosophy – that “final world of the world’s philosophical thought and its ultimate synthesis.”<sup>64</sup> The tasks of metaphysical idealism, however, should not be limited to the cognitive sphere: a rebirth of philosophical idealism ought to result in restoring to people “the living God they had lost,” and thereby also “moral strength and religious enthusiasm.”<sup>65</sup>

Bulgakov’s *Fundamental Problems of the Theory of Progress* is significantly completed by his collected essays, *From Marxism to Idealism*.

His lecture on Ivan Karamazov (given in November 1901 and published soon afterward in *Problems of Philosophy and Psychology*) makes an excellent introduction to the ethical issue of the theory of progress. In fact, Bulgakov identified the theory of progress with Socialism, treated as the central worldview of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Any criticism of the fundamental idea of the theory of progress – the idea of future generations’ happiness justifying the undeserved sufferings of the past and the present – thus became a criticism of Socialism, directly or indirectly. Dostoyevsky’s protagonist who could not accept a future “harmony” paid for with children’s sufferings was, in that perspective, a “skeptical son of the age of Socialism,” embodying the spiritual doubts of a 19<sup>th</sup>

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63 Ibid., p. 32.

64 Ibid., p. 44.

65 Ibid., p. 46.

century Russian intellectual.<sup>66</sup> The lecturer openly declared that the issue of “Ivan Karamazov’s rebellion” expressed his own moral doubts about the theory of progress as a Socialist theodicy.<sup>67</sup>

Published at the same time, Bulgakov’s dissertation *On Herzen’s Spiritual Drama* proved that the author also perfectly understood and morally supported Herzen’s rebellion against the Hegelian idea of “rational historical necessity.” And yet – in spite of all – his decisive argument for rejecting the Socialist theory of progress was not a moral protest against the very principle of justifying evil with the greatness of a historical objective but, rather, a reverse tendency – to diminish and relativize that objective – which he anxiously observed in Bernstein’s revisionism. In the introduction, Bulgakov confessed to a spiritual kinship with “religious atheists” who were attracted to Marxism by precisely those things that made it a secularized religion: an eschatological aspect and “a hot spring of social utopianism” hidden beneath the surface of Positivist scientism.<sup>68</sup> The German Socialists’ departure from involvement in the cause of the “the final goal” – openly proclaimed by the revisionists – was, to Bulgakov, a degradation of Marxism and a clipping of its wings: stripped of eschatology and its visionary “leap into the kingdom of freedom,” Marxism became a dead doctrine in Bulgakov’s eyes, incapable of explaining the sense of life – and thus undeserving of loyalty.<sup>69</sup> This diagnosis led Bulgakov to the conclusion that Marxism’s capability to satisfy religious needs had been exhausted and faith in the sense of life could be saved only by separating religion from science.

In other words, the genesis of Bulgakov’s religious philosophy seems to result not so much from his moral criticism of “the religion of Socialism,” as from his negative reaction to that religion’s erosion in Germany. Ivan Karamazov’s “rebellion” had been important to Bulgakov even in his Marxist period – then, however, he had seen it as a mere “rebellion” – a psychological state, rather than a positive solution to the problem of relations between the ideal and the necessity that he himself was still trying to find in Marxism.<sup>70</sup> The Russian thinker’s break with the Marxist theory of progress became a fact not due to that “rebellion,” but due to Bernstein’s precise separation of Marxist science from Marxist utopia.

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66 S. Bulgakov, *Ot marksizma k idealizmu*, pp. 108-109. Nietzsche, too, was – in Bulgakov’s opinion – a “bastard son” of Socialism.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

68 *Ibid.*, pp. IX-X.

69 *Ibid.*, p. XIV.

70 *Ibid.*, p. 48.

Bulgakov's break with Marxism as a comprehensive worldview – i.e., a substitute of religion – did not imply abandoning the achievements of “legal Marxism” in empirical social sciences, albeit it did mean a complete loss of Positivist faith in “scientific” justifications of ideals and in values derived from facts. A transitory phase in the process of overcoming the naturalistic dogmas of Positivism was for Bulgakov (as for Struve) the theoretical-cognitive criticism of the neo-Kantians. In the final phase – i.e., when he definitively abandoned the “scientific worldview” – Bulgakov was strongly influenced by Kant's ethical idealism and its continuation in Fichte's system. He did not, however (unlike Berdiaev), even momentarily stop at that stage. Intrigued by the relationship between the ethical issue and ontology, cosmology and the metaphysical philosophy of history, he discovered them in an idealism different from Kant's – namely, in the one initiated by Plato.<sup>71</sup> His thesis (echoing P. Yurkevich's view proclaimed back in the 1860s) was that the choice between Plato's and Kant's tradition was of fundamental importance in philosophy – Bulgakov himself having chosen the former. The greatest representative of Platonism in contemporary philosophy was, in his opinion, Soloviev.<sup>72</sup>

Bulgakov's dissertation *What Does Vladimir Soloviev's Philosophy Offer to the Contemporary Consciousness?* (1903) became the first manifesto of Russian religious philosophy, summoning Soloviev and (unlike Kantianism) was deliberately “ontological.” Having paid due homage to Kant's philosophical merits, Bulgakov opposed the Kantians' and the critical Positivists' excessive focus on theoretical-cognitive problems (defining the latter as “the Pilate issue”), accusing Kant himself of “breaking the real unity of the cognizing one and the cognized, of the subject – or form of knowledge – and the matter of knowledge.”<sup>73</sup> It was precisely that, he argued – echoing Soloviev – that had led, on the one hand, to Hegel's “panlogism” dissolving the world in pure thought (which Schelling blamed rational idealism for in his “positive philosophy”) and, on the other hand, to the Positivist phenomenalism (of J.S. Mill) reducing reality to sensory perceptions and thereby resurrecting Hume's skepticism.<sup>74</sup> Echoing Soloviev again, Bulgakov believed that the way to restore the world to an ontological reality was to overcome the unilateralism of rationalism and

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71 Ibid., pp. XIX-XX.

72 Bulgakov believed that the literary equivalent of Soloviev's philosophical-religious views was the literary work of Dostoevsky (Ibid., p. XX).

73 Ibid., pp. 198-199.

74 A very similar diagnosis of the state of contemporary philosophy had been proposed by Soloviev in *The Crisis of Western Philosophy*, as well as by Sergei Trubetskoi in his dissertation *On the Nature of Human Consciousness*.

empiricism by a third cognitive power, namely, intellectual intuition that was faith.<sup>75</sup> It was owing to that most perfect cognitive instrument that Soloviev had discovered the difference between the abstract being [*byt'ie*] and the being containing an irreducible element of the real, positive existence [*sushchee*] – which, in turn, had led him to discover the living source of reality in Plotinus' “absolute proto-principle.”<sup>76</sup> As a result, Soloviev managed to overcome the fatal unilateralism of both the major trends of modern Western philosophy, namely, rationalism and empiricism. He opposed their unavoidably deontologized vision of the world with a “philosophy of positive All-Unity” and its ensuing ideal of integrity: integral knowledge, integral life and integral creativeness.<sup>77</sup>

The central concept and joint of this theory was the idea of a personal God – a God in three persons, different from the God of traditional theism whom an abyss separated from the world. Bulgakov also opposed the Protestant (and Tolstoy's) reduction of Christianity to an evangelic morality, calling it a “Kantianization” of the Christian doctrine.<sup>78</sup> The idea of Godmanhood – realized, in a Trinitarian rhythm, both in the Cosmic process and in human history – was, according to him, pivotal to Christianity.<sup>79</sup> He conceived Christ as the divine Logos, or creative unity: following Soloviev, he strengthened the ties between the transcendent Absolute and the world by introducing the notion of a unity created, or Sophia – defined as the “ideal manhood,” i.e., Plato's “soul of the world.”<sup>80</sup> This allowed him to explain the contradiction between God's perfection and the world's obvious imperfection – i.e., to answer the fundamental question of theodicy. Evil, in this perspective, became the price paid for the autonomy of the created world, i.e. for moral freedom that man was endowed with.<sup>81</sup>

Bulgakov's solution of the theodicy problem differed from the classical approach in that he stressed the unacceptability of justifying empirical manifestations of evil: understanding the metaphysical necessity of evil – he argued – must not lead to conceding to individual manifestations of evil that

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75 Ibid., p. 203.

76 Ibid., p. 205. (On the term “sushchee,” see the essay by J. Dobieszewski, “Byt i sushchee w filozofii Włodzimierza Sołowjowa,” *Przegląd Filozoficzno-Literacki*, No 2, 2002. Cf. also the same author's monograph of Soloviev, *Włodzimierz Sołowjow. Studium osobowości filozoficznej*, Warsaw 2002.

77 Ibid., pp. 195-196.

78 Ibid., p. 220.

79 Ibid., p. 238.

80 Ibid., pp. 221-223.

81 Ibid., p. 227.

man is witness to. While we can understand why evil itself must exist, believing in the future triumph of good, we must not tolerate any concrete manifestations of evil, let alone justify their rationality. Bulgakov admitted that his interpretation confirmed the moral rebellion of Ivan Karamazov.<sup>82</sup>

Bulgakov offered thereby an extensive and complex answer to the title question of his dissertation. He justified the treatment of Soloviev's "philosophy of All-Unity" as the highest achievement of modern philosophy on the global scale, pointing out that the strength of Soloviev's system lay in its organic ties with Christianity. It is Christianity – he concluded – that ought to make the basis for the reborn natural law, while Christian politics realize the ideal of "free theocracy" implying the supremacy of God's laws over man's ones. Introducing a Slavophile accent – particularly different from the implacable Westernism of the "legal Marxists" – Bulgakov observed that Soloviev had been an universalist, rather than a Westernizer, and – as a critic of Populism – represented, in fact, the attitude of the "Slavophile left."<sup>83</sup> The essay ends in a description of Soloviev's philosophy as a prophetic forecast of "the great synthesis" that would liberate Russia and the entire of humanity from the oppression of alienated "abstract principles." The closing sentence appealed: "Let's follow him!"<sup>84</sup>

As we shall observe, the Russian religious-philosophical renaissance – for all its inner diversity – accepted and developed all the main ideas of Bulgakov's program.

## **New Marxism and the Birth of "Godmaking"**

Beside the evolution of philosophical neo-idealism, another important source of the religious-philosophical renaissance was Dmitri Merezhkovsky's idea of a "new religious consciousness" that provoked animated discussions with clerical representatives at Petersburg religious-philosophical meetings. It seems worthwhile, however, to precede its presentation with a review of the attempted philosophical modernization of Marxism by the circle of Aleksandr Bogdanov

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82 Ibid., pp. 227-228.

83 Even more curiously, Bulgakov also classified Ivan Aksakov and Dostoyevsky as "the Slavophile left" (Ibid., p. 257).

It is worth noting that, in the same essay, Bulgakov deplored Soloviev's idealization of the Russian imperial idea (p. 254), rejecting the pro-Catholic concept of ecumenism in the introduction (Ibid., p. XX, footnote).

84 Ibid., p. 262.

(1873-1929). Bogdanov's philosophy allowed for a criticism of the Positivist Marxism of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International from positions diametrically opposed to those that guided the intellectual evolution of the "legal Marxists." It was a criticism that radically questioned Plekhanov's materialism and rejected the old-fashioned Positivism of the progress-oriented intelligentsia, while manifesting a determined hostility toward ethical idealism and especially to metaphysical idealism.

The Bogdanov group of philosophers have been called "Nietzschean Marxists," which emphasizes an important aspect of their worldview: the ethos of a heroic activism, deliberate iconoclasm and contempt for middle-class morality, even to the point of manifest "a-moralism."<sup>85</sup> In truth, however, the term seems inadequate: playing down Bogdanov's philosophical originality, it befits more Anatoly Lunacharsky (1875-1933) who was active among the men of letters, never trying to compete with professional philosophers. Lunacharsky's specific "Nietzscheanism" inspired by Feuerbach's "religion of Manhood" was so distant from Bogdanov's theory that to place the two thinkers too close together might be misleading.

A much more fitting term, used by Polish scholars examining the philosophical output of Stanisław Brzozowski, is "Marxism in the age of Modernism" or "Marxism in the age of the anti-Positivist breakthrough."<sup>86</sup> When employing that term (used by its author, B. Baczeko, also in reference to both the Russian thinkers), we must remember, however, that Bogdanov had

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85 One of those classified as Bogdanov's "Nietzschean Marxists" was Zenovii Sokhor; see "A.A. Bogdanov: In Search of Cultural Liberation" (in: *Nietzsche in Russia*, ed. B. Rosenthal, Princeton 1986, pp. 293-311. Including also M.L. Loe's essay "Gorky and Nietzsche" and A.L. Tait's, "Lunacharsky: A Nietzschean Marxist?")

86 See B. Baczeko, "Absolut moralny i faktyczność istnienia (Brzozowski w kręgu antropologii Marksa)," in the collective volume *Wokół myśli Stanisława Brzozowskiego*, ed. A. Walicki and R. Zimand, Krakow 1974, pp. 161-163. Baczeko's proposed terminology (and typology) was accepted by M. Styczyński in his monograph *Filozofia społeczna Aleksandra Bogdanowa*, Lodz 1990, pp. 10-13.

Popular in the Works by the so-called Western post-War Marxists is the view that the activist (praxis) trend of Marxism – critical toward the dogmatic Marxism of Engels – comes from G. Lukacs and A. Gramsci, described as "*fons et origo* of the specifically Western Marxist thought" (J.G. Merquior, *Western Marxism*, London 1986, p. 87). In fact, however, that type of Marxism had been present even in the works by Brzozowski (which I discuss in my introduction to the book *Stanisław Brzozowski and the Polish Beginnings of "Western Marxism"*, Oxford 1989, pp. 12-24, quoting Baczeko). See also the chapter "The Problem of 'Engelsian Marxism'" in my book *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom* (pp. 111-124).

never been involved in the battle against naturalist scientism, trying instead to reconstruct naturalism in the spirit of historicism and sociology and thus referring to the program activism of Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*.

Symptomatically, Bogdanov's earliest philosophical works bore the adjective "historical" in their titles. The first one, *The Basic Elements of a Historical View of Nature* (1898), was an attempt at overcoming the "subject-object" dualism by coupling Marxist historicism with Ostwald's energetics. The second one, *Cognition from the Historical Point of View* (1901) interpreted knowledge as a product of social practice and a "tool of organization." In both, Bogdanov argued that cognition depended on historical action, thus following the "praxis" theory of knowledge which rejected the a-historical concepts of the receptive "cognitive subject" and the complete "cognitive object." It was tantamount to rejecting dogmatic Positivism – with its faith in the objective truth of science – for the sake of critical Positivism that relegated "objective truth," along with the metaphysical "being" and "the thing itself," to the philosophical storeroom. Bogdanov's deconstruction of the concept of "objective truth" largely followed Ernst Mach's and Richard Avenarius' – differing from them, however, by accentuating the social-historical relativization, rather than the biological one. It is worth remembering, however, that the instrumentalist theory of knowledge – deconstructing the classical definition of truth along with the classical questions of metaphysics – was traced by Bulgakov also in the Nietzschean "philosophy of life."

Mach's empiriocriticism impressed Bogdanov with its intellectual rigor that allowed for treating the "objectivist" interpretation of Marxism as a symptom of philosophical naivety – while his axiological inspiration was Nietzsche's aphoristic, literary philosophy that allowed for replacing the evolutionist ethos of "adjustment" – which dominated in empiriocriticism – with a vision of "life" as a dynamic "will to power" – i.e., the ethos of heroic activism. The Nietzschean "philosophy of life" thus harmonized with the Promethean tropes of Marxism, becoming transformable in the spirit of man's self-creation through labor.

Both Bogdanov and Lunacharsky knew Berdiaev personally, the three of them having been sent in exile to Vologda, following the wave of arrests that succeeded the First Congress of Social Democrats. That is probably why they initially treated him with a certain dose of compassion that they refused Bulgakov. The vast volume of *Sketches on the Realist Worldview* (1904), intended by Bogdanov as a collective reply to *Problems of Idealism*, was rather reticent about formulating ideological intentions. In the introduction, the authors described themselves as "realists," i.e., advocates of cognition dependent on life and the primary importance of man's struggle with nature – defined as a combat



against a real and resistant non-human force.<sup>87</sup> Publicist accents emerged mainly in a dissertation by Vladimir Bazarov (born Rudniev, 1874-1939), entitled *An Authoritarian Metaphysics and the Autonomous Individual*. The essay portrayed Berdiaev as a thinker ridden with contradictions and “stormy and passionate sways” who – while declaring “absolute values” and “absolute duty” – did not accept the authoritarian bridle or feel a real contempt for the empirical “self.”<sup>88</sup> That, according to Bazarov, made Berdiaev’s case altogether different from “Bulgakov’s austere authoritarian type of absolute”<sup>89</sup> that – in Bazarov’s opinion – expressed the slave-type psychology.

As the group’s leading theorist and ideologist, Bogdanov fully shared that opinion – especially after reading Bulgakov’s book *From Marxism to Idealism*. Having discovered its favorable review in the periodical *Zhurnal dla vsekh* [*Journal for All*] – published in one issue with Maxim Gorky and Leonid Andreev’s letter of approval for the editors – he wrote a letter to Gorky demanding an explanation: How could a writer considered to be a representative of “the revolution-liberation idea” feature in a journal that praised a believer in a personal absolute, that is, a preacher of man’s slavish dependence on a supramundane ruler?<sup>90</sup>

Gorky replied instantly, explaining that he had not known the incriminating review of Bulgakov’s book and assuring Bogdanov that any misunderstanding would be definitively resolved by his own prose poem *Man*. Indeed, the poem expressed a Promethean faith in the power and strength of the collective Man, striding proudly ahead, rejecting ancient superstitions and capable of establishing harmony between himself and the world.

Indignation was not the only reaction of Bogdanov to *Problems of Idealism*; the book had made him aware of the necessity of abandoning the language of rigorous scholarly philosophy for the sake of speaking openly about the sense and objective of life – matters that had been so dramatically discussed by the New Idealists. Even in 1903, *Problems of Philosophy and Psychology* – the

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87 *Ocherki realisticheskogo mirovozzreniia. Sbornik statiei po filosofii, obshchestvennoi nauke i zhizni*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Petersburg 1905, pp. IV-V. (Other critical comments on *Problems of Idealism* have been discussed by A.A. Yermichev in his essay “*Problemy idealizma i Ocherki realisticheskogo mirovozzreniia – polemika o socialnom ideale*,” in: *Filosofia i osvoboditelnoe dvizheniie*, ed. A.A. Yermichev and S.N. Saveliev, Leningrad 1989.)

88 *Ibid.*, p. 253.

89 *Ibid.*, pp. 253-276.

90 See M. Gor’kii, *Neizdannaiia pierepiska s Bogdanovym, Leninyim, Stalinym, Zinovievym, Kamenevym, Korolenko*, Moscow 1998, pp. 32-34 (Bogdanov’s letter was written in Vologda that December).

same Psychological Society periodical that had published *Problems of Idealism* – published Bogdanov’s long dissertation, *The Ideal of Cognition*, outlining theoretical foundations for his own “empirio-monism,” as well as a prophetic vision of an integral knowledge and an integral life in the society of the future. A year later, Bogdanov wrote three articles presenting an outline of a comprehensive collectivist worldview, intended as an answer to the “damned problems” brought forth by the New Idealists. The first of the articles, *Putting Man Together* [*Sobiraniie cheloveka*], had three carefully selected mottos: from the Bible (on creating man in the image and after the likeness of God), from Marx (on the social condition determining man’s consciousness) and from Nietzsche (on man as “the bridge to superman”).<sup>91</sup>

Bogdanov’s “empiriomonism” was theoretically founded on an attempted reinterpretation of Mach and Avenarius’ empiriocriticism. Bogdanov valued empiriocriticism for its elimination of the question of an “objective” superhuman truth and its declared anti-ontologism that rejected the issue of an ostensible “being” concealed beyond the world of “phenomena.” He claimed that empiriocriticism thus contradicted both naïve realism and the two forms of idealism, namely, the objective (transcendent) one that acknowledged the existence of a higher reality, and the subjective one that ignored the distinction between the psychological and the physical. Bogdanov accepted the thesis of action being primary to cognition, as well as the theory of knowledge being a biological-economic adjustment to the environment and an instrument of environmental orientation. Echoing the empiriocritics, he defined truth as “an organizing form of experience,” reducing the distinction between the psychological (“subjective”) and the physical (“objective”) to the difference between individually organized and collectively organized experience.

And yet, Bogdanov was entirely right to protest against the label of “Machism” being pinned on his philosophy. To him, empiriocriticism was, above all, a tool for enacting a thorough reform of Marxism. Having allowed him to shake off Engels’ and Plekhanov’s metaphysical materialism, the system

91 See A.A. Bogdanov, “Sobiraniie cheloveka,” in: Bogdanov, *Voprosy Socialism. Raboty raznykh let*, Moscow 1990, p. 28.

Bogdanov’s philosophical views have been presented by L. Kolakowski in *Main Currents of Marxism*. See also, A. Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom*, pp. 311-317.

The most important English-language book on Bogdanov is the monograph by R.C. Williams, *The Other Bolsheviks. Lenin and His Critics 1904-1914*, Bloomington-Indianapolis 1986. The book *Revolution and Culture. The Bogdanov-Lenin Controversy* by Zenovia A. Sochor (Ithaca-London 1988) predominantly discusses Bogdanov’s views and activities following the 1917 Revolution.

helped Bogdanov find a deep sense in Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* where he discovered the postulate of conceiving reality as "human sensory activity, practice," while "objective" truth was being rejected as a "purely scholastic question."<sup>92</sup> Transformed by Marxism, however, empiriocriticism was altered beyond recognition, becoming a philosophy of social practice that explained knowledge as forms of co-operation in the working process; biologism gave way in it to historicism and sociology, while the idea of "adjustment" was reshaped into a program of struggle for power over nature suffused with the ethos of Promethean heroism. The existing world – i.e., the world within the frame of human experience – became a product of social practice, while the content of the term "nature" repeatedly turned out to signify a product of human history.<sup>93</sup> In this way, Marxism – interpreted before as a philosophy of objective necessity – became, in Bogdanov's interpretation, a philosophy of the collective subject, self-created in the process of labor. A similar tendency to deliberately break with the Positivist Marxism of the Second International period was followed in Poland Stanisław Brzozowski, to become associated some years later with the names of Lukács and Gramsci.<sup>94</sup> Leszek Kołakowski has called it "historical subjectivism."<sup>95</sup>

A close connection between cognition and social practice obviously implied that cognitive problems could be solved only as a result of resolving social problems. A divided, inwardly torn society makes impossible the harmonious consciousness that unites all men. Bogdanov's philosophy prognosticated, however, that the consciousness uniting the divided world of human experience into a harmonious, *monistic* whole, would emerge as a result of the victorious class struggle of the proletariat. That is why it was called "empirio-monism."

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92 Cf., K. Marx, F. Engels, *Dziela*, vol. 3, pp. 5-8.

93 It was typical of the "praxis" trend in Marxism that – rejecting the Marxism of Engels – made historical dialectics part of the "Cosmic dialectics" (cf. A. Walicki, "The Problem of 'Engelsian Marxism,'" in: *Marxism and the Leap*, pp. 111-124).

94 See A. Walicki, *Stanisław Brzozowski and the Polish Beginnings of "Western Marxism"*, Oxford 1989, pp. 13-17, 19, 244-247, 315-322.

Brzozowski observed and pointed out the analogies between his own "philosophy of work" and Bogdanov's and Lunacharsky's views. The analogies were observed also by Lunacharsky who talked to Brzozowski in Florence in 1907 and later, having read his essay on historical materialism in *Die neue Zeit*, suggested that Brzozowski participate in the program collection of works by the Bogdanov group "New Marxists" (the volume was published in 1909, entitled *Ocherki filosofii kolektivizma* and including dissertations by Bogdanov, Bazarov, Lunacharsky and Gorky).

95 See L. Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism* (Kołakowski used the term in the chapter devoted to Brzozowski's views).

The abovementioned Bogdanov essays of 1904 – later published as the book entitled *A New World* – thus offered a philosophical, as well as a social program.

The first one of those essays, *Putting Man Together*, was, in fact an outline of mankind's history described as a process of self-enriching alienation. The original family society had been an integral, homogeneous whole, innocently free of the "self" as "a separate center of interests and aspirations."<sup>96</sup> The price of that integrity, however, was man's helplessness against the forces of nature. The process of overcoming this humiliating dependency was, at the same time, the process of breaking up the original whole, marked by a diminishing sense of unity and growing social antagonism, which made it a process of disharmony and alienation. The initial step in that direction was the separation of intellectual work from manual labor – of the "head" from the "hands" – the organizers from the producers – which, in the cognitive sphere, brought on the authoritarian dualism of "spirit" and "matter." The next, long-term phase of man's "breaking up" was the increasing division of labor, confining men to narrow specialties that allowed for mutual understanding and mutual adjustment – the result of that process of social atomization being an individuated consciousness, i.e., the emergence of independent "selves." The growing non-adjustment that was the constitutive feature of the individualist consciousness, produced "damned problems" of the worldview, testifying to loneliness and helplessness of separate individuals in an environment of social disharmony.

The situation began to change with the emergence of the great-industrial working class that – owing to identical working conditions – represented a homogenized experience, as well as a technical ability to subject nature. Mechanization of labor in large production units marked the beginning of overcoming specialization and, thereby, restoring the "broken-up" mankind to its unity. Abolition of class divisions that was the historical mission of the proletariat would create the conditions for man's reintegration, while maintaining all human achievements in the struggle with non-human nature. The fraction man would become the whole man, thus putting an end to both the authoritarian domination of one man over another, and the rule of blind economic forces over society. Thanks to man's organizational skills acquired in the great industry school, spontaneous development would give way to a consciously driven one. Only then would human nature achieve its fully developed stage. The essay ends with a Nietzschean tone: "Man has not yet arrived, but he is near, his silhouette beginning to take shape on the horizon."<sup>97</sup>

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96 A.A. Bogdanov, *Voprosy sotsyalizma*, p. 31.

97 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

The following essay, *Objectives and Norms*, traced the genesis of “absolute moral norms” and “absolute duty” back to the “original sin” that had been the division and fragmentation of the ancient human communion of experience. The process of increasing social disintegration – Bogdanov argued – entailed the growth of external authority, as well as forced moral and legal norms that were supposed to bring order to a disharmonious life. In the feudal society, the separation of the organizer function from the producer one had been secured by a system of authoritarian personal dependencies, furnished with an absolute moral sanction included in the notion of a transcendent God, the lord and ruler of the world. In a capitalist society, the indispensable frame of market anarchy was the alienated legal order based on coercion. The experience of the working class proved, however, that forced moral and legal norms could be replaced with technical-scientific norms of effective labor. For that reason, the emancipation ideology of the proletariat was solidary with *amorality* as an expression of rebellion against the hypocrisy of the middle-class world<sup>98</sup> (which obviously justified the Marxists’ approval of Nietzsche).

Bogdanov’s other texts elaborate on that distinction between two types of causality: the “authoritarian” versus the “abstract.”<sup>99</sup> The authoritarian concept of causality, typical of the slave and the feudal societies, conceived of the rules governing social life as external and transcendent to the world. In the society of market exchange, authoritarian causality becomes (partially) replaced by “abstract causality,” defining laws of phenomena as immanent and impersonal forces, independent of man’s will – hence, for example, the theory of “objective laws of development” deforming Marxism in the spirit of Positivist evolutionism. The fetishism of that idea is evident also in the assumed existence of abstract forces that govern the world from beyond, as well as of “value” regulating market exchange, of pure “truth” independent of man and constituting the goal of cognition, of absolute morality, etc. A new dualism thus obtained is that of “noumena” and “phenomena,” enhanced by relics of authoritarian dualism.

The genesis of “abstract causality” and its entailed social fetishism were derived by Bogdanov from the lack of man’s control of the social-economic processes set in motion by industrial production. He pointed to the development of proletarian thinking as the chance to overcome both the authoritarian and the fetishist (“abstract”) concepts of causality by replacing them with the “causality of labor” – a general projection of machine production technology, resulting in a

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98 Ibid., p. 53.

99 The ideas were developed into a sociology of knowledge that received a systematic discussion in Bogdanov’s book *Nauka od obshchestvennom soznanii*, Moscow 1914.

systematic and programmed transformation of reality. Such an interpretation of the principle of causality was meant to express the idea of man's command of nature and his own social forces.

In the final part of *A New World*, entitled *The Damned Philosophical Problems*, Bogdanov indirectly referred to the topics discussed in *Problems of Idealism*. Unlike Plekhanov or Lenin, he did not try to "unmask the class face" of the volume's authors. He declared, however, that an intensely experienced problem of the sense of life was a thing of the past – evidence of non-adjustment of the individualist consciousness to the disharmonious social world, rather than an inalienable part of the human condition. Summoning "the cause of causes," i.e., God, signaled – in Bogdanov's opinion – the individualist's helplessness in a strange and illegible social world.<sup>100</sup>

In *The Ideal of Cognition* – a dissertation addressed to professional philosophers – Bogdanov elaborated, systematically and in great detail, on his concept of action-cognition, deriving all the "adjustment organizing forces" – both cognitive and normative – from the process of labor and the *technology* of collective work. He defined a concept as an "abbreviated form of a technological element" and a conceptual system – as a "plan of social experience of work." The Kantian categories of time, space and causality became, in Bogdanov's system, "basic forms in which socially organized experience is expressed."<sup>101</sup> He concluded the dissertation, however, with a prophetic tone, presenting "empirio-monism" as a kind of cognitive Socialism – the worldview of the reborn future man. The ideal of cognition – he declared – is "the monistic organization of experience," neutralizing the difference between an individually organized experience and a collectively organized one. Such an overcoming of "individuation" is not only possible in the absence of consciousness, but also in the moments of its extreme tension – moments of aesthetic ecstasy, intensive creation or (first of all!) a total identification with a strained and heroic collective will. Having overcome divisions and antagonisms, the future collective society will harmonize human experience and magnify the human will. People will break free from the tight cages of individualism, simultaneously ceasing to experience social life and the natural reality as a domain of foreign, reified and hostile forces. The results will be a unified man, the liberation of human creative resources and the culmination of mankind's power.<sup>102</sup>

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100 A.A. Bogdanov, *Voprosy sotsializma*, p. 87.

101 A.A. Bogdanov, "Ideal poznania," in: *Empiriomonizm. Statii po filosofii*, vol. 1, Moscow 1905, pp. 35-41.

102 *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

The Russian thinker thus rediscovered the main idea of the yet unknown *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts* by the young Marx – the idea of an ultimate reconciliation of human existence with its essence, which would solve “the riddle of history” (incredibly!) eliminating philosophy as a “neutral domain” – had lasted throughout the 1905 Revolution period. In 1906, however, Lenin (as has already been mentioned) read *Empiriomonizm* and stormed in indignation.<sup>103</sup> He responded, insultingly, with *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, setting an exceptionally crude canon of philosophical orthodoxy, including “objective truth,” a receptive idea of the subject and a materialist theory of cognition defined as a “mirror reflection.”<sup>104</sup>

But was it possible at all, in 1904-05, to consider Bogdanov a “political Leninist” sharing the views of the author of *What Is To Be Done?* on the role of the party as the “conscious vanguard”? Apparently, it was – as far as the “organizational question” was concerned – since Bogdanov, fascinated as he was even then with the problem of rational organization, supported the Bolsheviks against the Mensheviks. A closer look at the two Marxists, however, reveals fundamental differences. Lenin’s theory of shaping the workers’ minds “from the outside,” by professional revolutionaries motivated by “the only true theory of scientific Socialism,” assumed the possibility of summoning the “objective truth” of Marx’s theory and a greater accessibility of that truth to educated men. Bogdanov’s philosophy, on the other hand, contradicted both those assumptions, acknowledging neither “objective truth,” nor a privileged cognitive position of intellectual workers. Bogdanov’s deep faith in the creative potential of the workers, coupled with his firm rejection of both Kautsky’s “scientism” and Lenin’s “vanguardism,” was the emblem of his anti-authoritarian collectivism.

In this sense, Bogdanov was closer to Sorel’s syndicalism than to “scientific Socialism” – both in its Social Democratic and Jacobin versions.

On the other hand, despite emphasizing the purity and authenticity of the proletarian consciousness, Bogdanov was far from Sorel’s hostility toward the intelligentsia – let alone the “Mach-ism.” He neither accused the intelligentsia of

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103 See A. Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap*, pp. 312-313.

104 Bogdanov did not remain silent: in his criticism of Lenin’s *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, he observed that the book was marked by an authoritarian thinking structure, much akin to a clerical mentality. Feigning not to realize the identity of the man concealed under the pen-name “V. Iiin”, he accused Lenin of fanatical intolerance, comparing his authoritarianism to a vampire sucking the worker movement’s blood – which made his attaining independence and maturity impossible. (A. Bogdanov, “Vera i nauka,” in: *Bogdanov, Padeniie velikovo fetishizma, Moscow 1910*, pp. 145-223).

deliberately cheating the workers, nor demanded their relegation from the workers' movement. On the contrary: he admitted that the workers lacked a "formal intellectual discipline" and so the intellectuals could perform amongst them a pedagogical-catalyzing role – to quicken the crystallization of the working class consciousness, while not altering its content.<sup>105</sup> Following the 1917 Revolution, Bogdanov thus became the leading ideologist of the "Proletkult" – the mass educational-cultural organization aimed at spreading the authentic "proletarian culture." He tried to make it anti-traditional and anti-authoritarian, entirely independent from party leadership. The result was his dismissal (1921) from the ranks of "Proletkult," followed by political marginalization.

Anatoly Lunacharsky, Bogdanov's brother-in-law, was a philosophizing publicist, closely connected with the literary and artistic culture of the modernist era. Amongst the Russian Marxists, he was the one most fascinated with Nietzscheanism. He saw Nietzsche as a philosopher of an intensified life and of progress defined as the culmination of creative forces – an inspired preacher of "a powerful future life" whose vision ought to make "the individual heroic even in the present."<sup>106</sup>

"The will to power" – the creative will – was contrasted by Lunacharsky with the moralizing asceticism of the Populist intelligentsia whose love of the suffering brethren was criticized and opposed with the "love of the distant," while the "wonderful dream of the Superman" was being extolled.<sup>107</sup> Lunacharsky approvingly quoted the author of Zarathustra declaring that good is all that which enhances man's will to power, while happiness is the feeling of a growing power and resistance being overcome. He was fascinated by Nietzsche's apotheosis of life's voracious nature – he did not hesitate to even approve of the idea that "all the weak and unfit must perish."<sup>108</sup> He found a common denominator of Nietzscheanism and Marxism in their ideal of "living for the future" and their Promethean ethos of heroic struggle. The Marxist philosophy of labor as a "forced humanization of nature" – for its acknowledgment of the supreme power of the human genius – seemed to him a

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105 Bogdanov's views on the role of the intelligentsia in the worker movement have been devoted a special issue of the Americal periodical *The Russian Review* (vol 49, No 3, June 1990), including essays by J.E. Marot, J. Biggart, Zenovia Sochor, A. Walicki and Aileen M. Kelly.

106 A. Lunacharsky, *Pisma wybrane*, Introduction and Footnotes by L. Turek, vol. 3, Warsaw 1969, p. 473. [All quotations from Lunacharsky translated from Polish by J.K.]

107 *Ibid.*, p. 461.

108 *Ibid.*, p. 473.



philosophy of Promethean self-creation,<sup>109</sup> aimed at transforming the poor substance of present humanity into a wonderful new man.

Nearly all those ideas of Lunacharsky come from his extensive dissertation *On "The Problems of Idealism"* published in 1903.<sup>110</sup> It offers a considerably systematic (albeit excessively verbose and rhetorical) criticism of the New Idealists' standpoint on the theory of cognition and moral philosophy. (Lunacharsky continued his polemic in the essay *The Idealist and the Positivist as Psychological Types*, 1904.) Predictably, the one to receive his mildest treatment was Frank – Lunacharsky even praised him for embracing Nietzsche's "love of the distant," observing that "Mr. Frank needed to make literally one more step to become an active realist."<sup>111</sup> Unfortunately, Mr. Frank was hampered by a cardinal error, namely, his own conviction that the moral doctrine could not do without the category of duty and the imperative – hence his ensuing ambition to couple Nietzscheanism with Kant's imperative ethics. Lunacharsky opposed that attitude with the "doctrine of amorality." While forcibly emphasizing the ethical contents of "the will to power" and the Superman ideal, he called them "the morality of amoralists."<sup>112</sup>

Just like Bogdanov, Lunacharsky was most severe on Bulgakov. Having read his book *From Marxism to Idealism*, he devoted a separate critical dissertation to Bulgakov, entitled *A Metamorphosis of a Thinker* (1904). He argued therein that since a Marxist – just as a Nietzschean – despised "slaves bound by Kantian morality," he needed no metaphysical guarantees.<sup>113</sup> Marxist eschatology was an earthly eschatology:

In Marxist paradise, a tribe of men who equal gods in a concordant and happy family conquers the elements, forever expanding the limits of the kingdom of reason and making the world serve the satiation of the ever growing needs of its ruler and conqueror – man.<sup>114</sup>

The need of metaphysics that had not vanished altogether remained only with men of poor spirits who doubted the value of man himself and wished to "close their eyes to the tragic situation of rational creatures in the vast universe" – for that reason, they sought "supernatural protectors and helpers."<sup>115</sup> "Active Positivists" (or "realists") could never come to terms with men of that kind.

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109 Ibid., p. 509.

110 In the periodical *Obrazovaniie*, No 2, 1903.

111 Ibid., s. 473.

112 Ibid., pp. 457-458.

113 Ibid., p. 585 (first printed in the journal *Pravda*, No 3,5 and 6, 1904).

114 Ibid.

115 Ibid., p. 589.

Lunacharsky's response to Bulgakov's ideas was not limited to drawing the demarcation line. Bulgakov's Kiev lecture on Ivan Karamazov (discussed by Lunacharsky in a separate essay in 1902) became another positive impulse to Lunacharsky, strengthening his conviction that Socialism demanded a "religious sway" that could not be supplied by materialism and Positivism.<sup>116</sup>

In the introduction to his two-volume work, *Religion and Socialism* (1908), Lunacharsky confessed that the idea of furnishing Socialism with a religious dimension had occurred to him even back in the 1890s. He had drawn its initial outline in his lecture *Idealism and Marxism*, given (also in Kiev) in 1898. One of the disputants was Berdiaev whose reaction to the lecturer's ideas was most favorable. Soon afterward, however, the two Social Democrats parted ways, Berdiaev becoming (to Lunacharsky's obvious chagrin) totally "Bulgakovized."<sup>117</sup>

Still, there had been a certain initial affinity of ideas, undoubtedly owed to the climate of the anti-Positivist breakthrough in literature. And if men of similar biographies (Ukrainian connections, Social Democratic sympathies, exile to Vologda) later on parted ways, it was not because of the opposition between traditional faith and old-fashioned "nihilistic" atheism. Even Bulgakov had then been writing of the need for a "new religion" and a "new source of moral enthusiasm." And Lunacharsky – despite all his resistance to resurrecting the idea of a personal God – had been using the term "religion" in a positive sense, learning to discover the great historical religious systems as irreplaceable and limitless sources of mankind's spiritual life.

The difference between Berdiaev and Lunacharsky was well illustrated by the verbal opposition of *bogoiskat'elstvo* – "God-seeking" – versus *bogostroit'elstvo* – "God-building" or "God-making." The New Idealists of the Berdiaev circle sought God, trying to prove his indispensability – yet they were far from using a language of absolute certainty. Lunacharsky, on the other hand, and his surrounding writers (most importantly Maxim Gorky), called themselves "god-makers," claiming – echoing Feuerbach's philosophy – that humankind, despite its present degradation, was endowed with divine attributes that needed to be liberated, developed and magnified<sup>118</sup> – God-created man should aspire to

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116 Cf. A.L. Tait, "Lunacharsky: A 'Nietzschean Marxist'?" in: *Nietzsche in Russia*, p. 278.

117 See A. Lunacharsky, "Introduction to Religion and Socialism," in: *Pisma wybrane*, vol. 3, pp. 837-838.

118 See G.I. Kline, "The 'God-Builders': Gorky and Lunacharsky," in: Kline, *Religious and Anti-Religious Thought in Russia*, pp. 103-126. See also: M.L. Loe, "Gorky and Nietzsche: The Quest for a Russian Superman" (*Nietzsche in Russia*, pp. 251-273) and

divinity and become a divine creature. A God-like life (as Lunacharsky wrote in his criticism of Berdiaev) was “the highest existing ideal of life” and a “natural sprout of man’s needs.”<sup>119</sup>

During the 1905 Revolution, the “God-maker” ideas were favorably received by the communities of Social Democratic workers. While Bogdanov distanced himself from that tendency, Lunacharsky – supported ideologically by Gorky – systematized “God-making” in *Religion and Socialism*. In 1909, a school teaching a “god-maker” interpretation of Marxism to worker activists was founded on the island Capri, under the patronage of Gorky, a Capri resident. Lenin was appalled, writing in a letter to Gorky of November 1913:

God-seeking differs from god-building or god-creating or god-making, etc., no more than a yellow devil differs from a blue devil. To talk about god-seeking, not in order to declare against *all* devils and gods, against every ideological necrophilia (all worship of a divinity is necrophilia – be it the cleanest, most ideal, most sought-out but built-up divinity, it’s all the same), but to prefer a blue devil to a yellow one is a hundred times worse than to say nothing about it at all [...].

Any flirtation even with a god is the most inexpressible foulness, particularly tolerantly (and even favorably) accepted by the democratic bourgeoisie – for that very reason it is the most dangerous foulness, the most shameful “infection.”<sup>120</sup>

Lenin’s words illustrate the abyss between the authoritative version of Bolshevism and the then views of the man who was to become the Bolshevik Commissar for Education. At the same time, they show Lunacharsky’s vulnerability to the intellectual trends of the Russian Silver Age culture, as well as his willingness to join in its mainstream – as an oppositionist, to be sure, but within a common denominator of an intense, positive interest in the phenomenon of religion.

Lunacharsky’s declared decade of work<sup>121</sup> on *Religion and Socialism* justifies a brief discussion of its theses in the present book.

The author described his objective as follows: “To define the place of Socialism amongst other religious systems.”<sup>122</sup> Socialism – he claimed – is a major religious synthesis, rather than just a necessary phase of historical development. Religion is inalienable from mankind’s life – unnecessary only to

M. Agursky, “Velikii yeretik (Gor’kii kak religioznii myslitel),” *Voprosy Filosofii*, No 8, 1991, pp. 54-74).

119 A. Lunacharsky, *Pisma wybrane*, vol. 3, p. 590.

120 V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 35, pp. 121-122.

121 Lunacharsky, *Pisma wybrane*, vol. 3, p. 836.

122 A. Lunacharsky, *Religiia i sotsializm*, vol. 1, Petersburg 1908, p. 8.

a Philistine or to God.<sup>123</sup> In its essence – rather than be a way of explaining phenomena (i.e., a faltering kind of theory) – religion is a practical, psychological solution to the problems of man’s place in the world and sense of life. The truth was not understood by the narrow-minded rationalist Plekhanov, but it was perfectly captured by Feuerbach who killed “the religion of God” to make room for “the religion of man.”<sup>124</sup> Within the worker movement, the need of a Socialist religion has been preached by the talented, self-educated man, Joseph Dietzgen. A great advocate of the “generic religion” was Nietzsche – which by no means contradicted his criticism of Christian religiosity. Rejecting the belief in a ready-made, actual sense of the world that just needed to be “rediscovered,” Nietzsche believed in an active creation of sense through subjecting the world to man’s goals.<sup>125</sup>

Human history so far had been an area of controversy between the idea of justice and the will to power. The former was the principle of God, the latter – the principle of Satan who whispered to men: “Be as the gods.” Under the banner of God and the idea of justice featured the weak, the slaves and the oppressed classes, while the will to power was represented by the lords and the ruling classes – producers of wealth, power, science and beauty.<sup>126</sup> Amongst God’s prophets were Tolstoy and the Populist ideologists who tried to defend small producers against the dynamics of capitalist development. Karl Marx, however, stood on Satan’s side: “He rejected justice, having concluded that, without wealth, it was neither an ideal, nor a real program. He regarded the economic development of mankind as the primary thing, the unique and all-justifying way.”<sup>127</sup>

At the same time, however, Marx – unlike Nietzsche – refused to sanction the division into masters and slaves. On the contrary: he was the one who pointed out the real possibility of eliminating the conflict between the will to power and justice – between progress and solidarity. The conflict terminates with the emergence of the proletariat – an oppressed class that is, nevertheless, powerful, representing the highest level of production forces’ development and therefore endowed with “characteristics of the past masters, proud, striding ahead toward the victory of the human mind over the helpless element.”<sup>128</sup> In

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123 Ibid., p. 42.

124 Ibid., p. 31.

125 Ibid., p. 46.

126 Ibid., pp. 186-187.

127 Ibid., p. 188.

128 A. Lunacharsky, *Pisma wybrane*, vol. 3, p. 728-729.

this way – Lunacharsky augured – the greatest, most significant, joyful and hopeful historical synthesis will become a fact.

The above argument was importantly completed by Lunacharsky's discussions of "economism" (*aka* "anthropologism") and "cosmism," first sketched in reference to Brzozowski's essay, *Historical Materialism as a Philosophy of Culture* (published in *Die Neue Zeit*, 1907).<sup>129</sup>

Lunacharsky defined "economism" as a Promethean striving to subdue nature to man, rather than a theory of an automatic economic development – while "cosmism" meant to him a sense of communion with nature and submission to its laws. In the history of mankind, "economism" – he argued – expressed the spirit of Judaism, while "cosmism" expressed the Hellenic spirit. Marxism thus seemed to him a wonderful synthesis of Judaism and Hellenism – a synthesis of the lofty idea of freedom and power of the human spirit with the idea of primary nature and consciousness dependent on existence.

However, the synthesis – much like that of the will to power and justice – was not balanced, its two parts not being endowed with equal rights. Lunacharsky strongly emphasized that the dominating part in Marx's synthesis was "Judaism" – there was no doubt about the moral superiority of anthropocentrism to cosmo-centrism.<sup>130</sup>

Another crucial component of Marxist religion was its revolutionary Messianism. Lunacharsky portrayed Marx as the prophet of a new Messiah who would be the proletariat, emphatically drawing a vision of the saving breakthrough:

Here is the new Messiah mounting the Golgotha, his blood was shed when he was being nailed to the cross. And they said unto him, jeering: "Liberator of the world, liberate thou thyself from the prisons and graves to which we have confined you for your excesses." And Labor will not be killed, it shall rise from the dead to continue its apostolate, its hard struggle, again will it carry its cross, from one Golgotha to another, along the road marked with crucifixes – for, verily, it is not just once that the Savior of the world must die.

But the day will come. Michelangelo, that genius of vengeance, had painted its raging beauty on the wall of the Sistine Chapel. Do you expect Parousia? Do you wish for a mild Christ in white robes, his hair parted evenly in the middle, his beard that of a young Pope, his delicate body that of a weakling idealist? No! He will not

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129 The article, published in Polish as Chapter I of Brzozowski's *Ideas*, was summarized by Lunacharsky in his dissertation "The Future of Religion" (*Obrazovaniie*, No 10, 1907). Lunacharsky accused Brzozowski of an extreme "anthropologism," while approving of his general tendency. Brzozowski, in turn, took a stand on the Russian "New Marxism" in both of his major works: *Idee and Legenda Młodej Polski*, as well as in his letters.

130 A. Lunacharsky, *Religiia i Socialism*, vol. 1, pp. 138-158.

be like that – shouts at you Buonarroti with his somber colors – he shall arrive as a lightning-wielding Hercules, as a young, armed and vengeful destructor of worlds, capable of destroying everything and raising it again in three days. And the proud rulers, liars, exploiters and hypocrites shall tumble into the abyss, the air trembling with the copper clangor of the Archangels’ awesome trumpets. And the great day’s predecessors shall rise from their graves to be judged before the renewed mankind.<sup>131</sup>

Lunacharsky was not a religious Messianist in the literal sense of the term. He shared, however, Sorel’s view of the history-making role of myths. He conceived the Millenarian-Messianic pattern of earthly salvation as the living “soul of history” – an expression of man’s supreme ambitions. He was ironical about the “religious revolutionism” of Merezhkovsky, calling it a belated imitation of the Polish Messianism,<sup>132</sup> while Berdiaev’s attempts at coupling the Messianic motives with liberalism seemed to him lacking in seriousness and self-contradictory. Yet, he treated the very problem of “a new religious consciousness” as a real one that posed an important challenge to Marxists.<sup>133</sup>

Bogdanov’s and Lunacharsky’s systems were, undoubtedly, expressions of a deep crisis of classical Marxism. At the same time, however, they were the Russian Marxists’ response to the deconstruction of Marxism by the New Idealist philosophers. In comparison with Kautsky’s and Plekhanov’s orthodoxy, the responses were deeply revisionist – their revisionism, however, contradicted – both in its intention and its content – Bernstein’s de-ideologization and deschatologization of Marxism. In many ways, they made an attempt at reconstructing the early ideas of Marx summarized in his *Theses on Feuerbach*. That is what Lunacharsky meant by describing Bogdanov as “the only Marxist

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131 Ibid., pp. 101-102.

132 Ibid., vol 2, p. 151.

133 We must observe that Volume 2 of *Religion and Socialism* was a work of great erudition. It discussed the themes of Judaism and the birth of Christianity, of Millenarianism, Gnosticism, the shaping of Church orthodoxy, Christian Socialism and liberal Christianity. Separate chapters were devoted to modern “religious philosophy” (from Spinoza, through classical idealism to Feuerbach), utopian Socialism and “scientific Socialism” (with separate chapters on Dietzgen and Bogdanov). Lunacharsky also touched on the subject of “Sophia,” tracing its sources back to Ancient Gnosis. His discussion of “Sophia” was completed with a comment that makes an interesting interpretive suggestion: “Schelling, Hartmann, Soloviev and other philosophers will fantasize on this topic. Schopenhauer’s Will, Hartmann’s “Unconscious” and Nietasche’s Suffering Self of the World, are all variations on the theme of Sophia.” (Ibid., p. 87).

philosopher who in his works continues Marx's purely philosophical tradition."<sup>134</sup>

The author of *Religion and Socialism* himself went far beyond that ambition. He loosened the thinking discipline and changed the language of philosophical discourse. What he borrowed from Marxism, however, was the activist philosophy of work, close (as he admitted it himself) to Brzozowski's ideas.

It may seem paradoxical that the deep revision of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International version of Marxism – questioning the dogma of “objective laws of development” and anticipating the manifestly anti-Positivist interpretation of Marxism by Lukács and Gramsci – featured in Russia under the “Positivist” banner. It was an obvious consequence of the hasty domination and monopolization of the anti-Positivist breakthrough in Russian thought by religious-metaphysical idealism. Even Nietzscheanism, considered in other countries (Poland included) as the flagship philosophy of “Modernism,” became, under Russian circumstances, a version of “Positivism” with its firm rejection of “metaphysical consolation” and search for the transcendent Absolute. The program of irrationalism of the “philosophy of life” fitted (by that optics) within “Positivism,” as long as it entailed (as Nietzsche's system did) an implacable “anti-metaphysics.” Lunacharsky was ready to present Nietzscheanism as a philosophy of “tragic realism,” i.e., an ally in the battle against the New Idealist fictions.

The demarcation line thus drawn was, obviously, too arbitrary, introducing a certain interpretational chaos. In fact, both the “empirio-monists” and the “god-makers” undoubtedly belonged to a post-Positivist intellectual formation that rebelled against the dictate of the ostensibly objective “science” and the ostensibly objective “facts.” The choice of transcendent metaphysics was not a necessary condition of actively participating in the worldview revolt against the naturalistic determinism and intellectualism of the Positivist-scientist era.

## “New Religious Consciousness”

*Dmitri Merezhkovsky*

Lunacharsky's “god-making” provoked no spectacular reaction from the Russian religious thinkers who did not seem inclined to discuss it. To former Marxists, on the other hand, who (like Bulgakov) had gone through a period of profound identification with the quasi-religious experience of Marxism, it

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134 Ibid., p. 371.

seemed like an absurd call to retreat, turning back the direction of spiritual evolution. Especially hostile to “god-making” was the response of Dmitri Merezhkovsky, the first preacher of the idea of a “new religious consciousness” who saw “god-making” as one of the threatening faces of “the brute of the future.”<sup>135</sup>

The idea of a “new religious consciousness” that was to reconcile the Christian “truth of Heaven” with the pagan “truth of earth” had emerged in Merezhkovsky’s worldview as a result of his deeply experienced criticism of Christianity by Nietzsche. Merezhkovsky’s novel *Julian Apostate* (1815; the first part of his trilogy, *Christ and Antichrist*) suggestively portrayed the moral and aesthetic motivations of the Roman Emperor who tried to restore the pagan religion of beauty, sensuality, strength and earthly happiness to the Empire. The following novel in the series, *Leonardo da Vinci* (first published in the journal *Mir Bozhii*, 1900), described the resurrection of the Greek gods in the Renaissance culture and the attempt at a synthesis of Christian and pagan values epitomized in the figure of the great Leonardo. In the author’s opinion, the attempt had remained unfinished and, ultimately, failed. A successful – albeit unconsciously obtained – synthesis of Christianity and paganism could be found, Merezhkovsky declared, in Pushkin’s writings (the essay *Pushkin*, 1896) – and yet, he emphasized, there was the need for a consciously obtained synthesis in the shape of a “new religious consciousness.” His ideas on the subject made the contents of the three-volume work *Tolstoy and Dostoevsky*, first published in Diaghilev’s periodical *The World of Art*, in the years 1900-1901.<sup>136</sup>

The work seems to be composed of two separate books – one being an interpretation of the two major Russian writers’ creative outputs, while the other is a treatise on a “new religious consciousness.” The former presents Tolstoy’s literature – clearly distinguished from Tolstoy’s religion that condemns it – as a “clairvoyance of the body,” a wonderful completion to the vision of Christianity, yet diametrically opposed to Nietzscheanism in its vision of the world.

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135 See S.N. Soloviev, “Vospominaniia o budushchem (Ideologiia kulta i ego kritiki),” in: *Filosofiiia i osvoboditelnoe dvizheniie*, pp. 213-217.

136 Z. Hippus recalled that Merezhkovsky had been finishing the last volume of that work in winter 1899-1900. (Z. Gippius-Merezhkovskaya, *Dmitri Merezhkovsky*, Paris 1951, p. 77.) His introduction to Volume 3, devoted to the religious views of the two writers, must have been written later, since it mentions Tolstoy’s “separation” from the Orthodox Church, announced by the Synod in February 1901.



“Clairvoyance of the spirit” in Dostoevsky’s work.<sup>137</sup> The latter, apart from Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, also treats Nietzscheanism defined as the rebirth of the spirit of the ancient civilization. Tolstoy’s doctrine – reducing the content of Christ’s religion to an extremely moralistic, ascetic negation of the sensual world – was portrayed as wholly concordant with Nietzsche in its vision of Christianity, yet diametrically opposed to Nietzscheanism in its vision of the world, with Tolstoy advocating exactly the things that Nietzsche condemned and rejected. In this perspective, Dostoevsky featured as a great Christian thinker – albeit entirely different from Tolstoy: one characterized by an affirmation of life and an inner understanding of the problems posed by Nietzsche, and thereby paving the ways for a new religious synthesis.

In Merezhkovsky’s opinion, Dostoevsky’s literary work testified to the integral ties between the histories of Russia and Europe, as well as to the exceptional importance of Nietzsche’s ideas to the Russian intelligentsia. The two Olympian gods – Apollo and Dionysus – resurrected in Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy*, were the same pair that Pushkin adored. The gods were united in the unusual and mysterious phenomenon of Zarathustra – whom the Russian readers instantly recognized as bearing the traits of the great “willful” individualists of Dostoevsky’s novels.<sup>138</sup> It seemed obvious that Nietzsche’s “Superman” was the ultimate incarnation of the “Man-God” idea that Dostoevsky warned against, contradicting it with the Christ-like idea of “God-Man.” The two thinkers – the German and the Russian – approached one and the same problem from two sides

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137 Merezhkovsky found proof of Tolstoy-the-artist’s spontaneous “paganism” (repressed by the rigorous asceticism of Tolstoy-the-thinker) in the figure of “Uncle Yeroshka” from Tolstoy’s short story, “The Cossacks” (1863) – a lover of his surrounding nature which he finds suffused with the divine element. Dostoevsky, in Merezhkovsky’s opinion, showed the possibility of reconciling Christian spirituality with love of the natural world – as evidenced in the figure of Old Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov*.

The present book does not allow for presenting the literary-critical and psychological analyses of Merezhkovsky. Still, it seems proper to oppose the tendency to treat them as mere documents of their times, thereby diminishing their universal value. Let us note that Thomas Mann – who considered Merezhkovsky a great critic and the greatest psychologist since Nietzsche’s time – fully approved of Merezhkovsky’s “Tolstoy-Dostoevsky” dichotomy, making use of it in his own interpretation of Goethe and Schiller in his essay, “Goethe and Tolstoy.” See, F. Kaufmann, *Thomas Mann. The World as Will and Representation*, Boston 1957, pp. 27, 150, 155. Cf. also B.G. Rosenthal, *Dmitri Sergeevich Merezhkovsky and the Silver Age: The Development of a Revolutionary Mentality*, The Hague 1975, p. 9.

138 D.S. Merezhkovsky, “L. Tolstoy i Dostoevskii. Zhizn’, tvorchestvo i religiia,” part I, in: *Merezhkovsky, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 7, Moscow 1912, pp. 6-7.

to arrive at the edge of the same abyss. In the Superman idea, Europe's individualist culture reached its climax and the end of its development. A step further meant either tumbling down into the chasm – or soaring above into a new religion.<sup>139</sup>

In Merezhkovsky's interpretation, the diagnosis was valid for Christianity as a whole, both Western and Eastern. The present crisis of all the values – Merezhkovsky argued – had its original roots in the tragic one-sidedness of the past Christianity, aspiring to "sainthood of the spirit" at the cost of "sainthood of the body" – i.e., at the cost of turning back on earthly life and repressing sexuality. According to the author, it followed from a particular dialectics of development, rather than from the inner nature of Christianity. The significant content of Christ's teaching was not a spiritualist asceticism negating man's carnality, but the idea of an inspired body – a "mystical unity of Spirit and Sex," as well as bodily resurrection. This, however, required an initial abandon of the pagan world through a firm negation of materiality and sensuality: man had to "die" in order to be "revived." That "dying" process of carnal mortification – which occasionally met resistance and withdrew – had continued, in fact, for two thousand years. As a result, Christianity suffered a major defeat: having developed an ascetic hatred for the body, it no longer tried to inspire and enlighten the material world, thereby abandoning the "live, real body" of Christian mankind to fall prey of sin and evil. Presently, however, the power of negation has been extinguished, while the power of reintegration begins to act, initiating the process of transition from the "dark face" of Christianity to its "bright face" – from dying to living. An invisible cosmic breakthrough is under way even now, heralding the Parousia of Christ.<sup>140</sup>

Merezhkovsky sided with the protest against the Synod's decision to "divorce" Tolstoy from the Church, which made him even more emphatic in his declared non-acceptance of Tolstoy's criticism of Church Christianity. Tolstoy, in fact, had spoken from the position of a spiritualistic moralizer, more implacable in his disgust with all carnality than was the official Christian attitude – in his ambition to reject all hypocritical compromise, he had transformed Christianity into "a Buddhist nihilism, a religion of non-existence, a Nirvana."<sup>141</sup> The opposite trend – preaching an affirmation of life and proclaiming "the sainthood of flesh and blood" – had been represented by Nietzsche and, in Russia, by Vassily Rozanov. Merezhkovsky unhesitatingly declared that Rozanov was "an equal genius" with Nietzsche and as self-made in

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139 Ibid., p. 7.

140 Ibid., Introduction to Part III (*Polnoe sobraniie sochinenii*, vol. 8, pp. 12-14).

141 Ibid., pp. 15-16.

his “anti-Christian essence.” Once he became properly understood, he would become more dangerous to the Church than Tolstoy.<sup>142</sup>

Merezhkovsky himself, however, did not choose to stand outside Christianity, declaring that he refused the heresy of “Astartism” (from “Astarte,” the Phoenician goddess of fertility) and was “confessing,” rather than “teaching.” He wished to interpret Nietzscheanism as a symptom of the imminent renewal of Christendom, rather than an announcement of the real “death of God.” Indeed, he foretold the exceptionally important role of the Russian Orthodox Church in the historical breakthrough he was describing. Historically passive in the past – unlike the Catholic Church – the Orthodox Church had not exploited its resources, remaining a reserve force of Christianity: did it not mean that now was its turn, its historical time? Peter the Great – the ever greatest epitome of a titanic, “superhuman” will<sup>143</sup> – had “paralyzed” the Orthodox Church by brutally subjecting it to state authority – and yet, was it not an unconscious fulfillment of the Higher Will that sought to prevent the Patriarchate from being transformed into a “Russian Papacy,” thereby conserving the Orthodox Church for the future? Theretofore, the Orthodox Church had not been active in history, remaining “suspended” between St. Peter (i.e., the Catholic tendency, represented in its history by the line extending from Josef Volotsky to Stepan Yavorsky) and St. Paul (i.e., the Protestant tendency, represented by Teophan Prokopovych).<sup>144</sup> In the coming future of Parousia, however, the Orthodox Church could stand forth as the Church of St. John, uniting all the Christian denominations in a universal Western-Eastern Church.

The argument culminated in the following prophetic vision:

The time is coming; the mystery is being revealed; once the Parousia has begun (which is under way even now), once the force of rejection, negation, mortification of the flesh will surrender to the force of attraction, affirmation and resurrection of the flesh – then shall the *future* Western-Eastern Church rediscover its historical name and its mission, emerging as the Church of John alongside the Churches of Peter and Paul; and then, finished shall be Peter’s apostasy, [as] Peter shall join John, and John shall reconcile Peter with Paul; the Orthodox Church – freedom in Christ – shall reconcile in love Catholicism with Protestantism, faith with reason. The bedrock of Peter, the bedrock of tradition shall be struck with the thunder of revelation, and a font of live water shall spring from that bedrock. And in that final union of the Churches, of the three highest apostles – Peter, Paul and John; in their

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142 Ibid., p. 17.

143 In this sense, Peter the Great epitomized – in Merezhkovsky’s opinion – the idea of Superman, so his being identified with the Antichrist by followers of the Old Rite had not quite been ungrounded.

144 Ibid., vol. 8, p. 25.

uniting into one, common, apostolic and this time truly *universal* Church of St. Sophia the Wisdom of God, whose head and supreme priest is Christ Himself – the final destiny of the Christian world shall be fulfilled.<sup>145</sup>

Despite some obvious – albeit polemical – references to Soloviev, it would be erratic to label the above prophecy an example of a specifically Russian religious thought. The idea of resurrection proceeding by stages was deeply rooted in heterodox Christianity traditions that were of such a great interest to the European Romantics. Christendom’s division into the Church of Peter (that of the Romance peoples), the Church of Paul (Christian Protestantism) and the future, truly universal Church of John – the apostle of the Holy Ghost – had been described by Schelling in his *Philosophy of Revelation*.<sup>146</sup> Various versions of that theme are to be found in the texts of the Polish Messianists. The French Romantic Socialists combined the Millenarian soteriological pattern with a firm stress on “rehabilitation of the flesh” – *rehabilitation de la chair*.<sup>147</sup> Being a declared neo-Romantic, Merezhkovsky thus could – and did – make use of numerous sources.

The very next paragraph of the discussed text, however, points to his principal source of inspiration, namely, Nietzsche’s apotheosis of pre-Socratic Greece – that of the Olympian gods and the Dionysian spirit, as opposed to the repressive asceticism of Christianity. Contrary to the Slavophile tradition treating Renaissance culture as an explicit testimony of Catholicism being contaminated with the pagan heritage of the ancient civilization, the author of *Leonardo* extolled the European Renaissance, finding it a wonderful attempt at revitalizing Christendom. He called it “the initial, preparatory rebirth,” considered “pagan” because of its great representatives – from Rafael to Goethe and Nietzsche – had sought the sanctification of sex [*Sviataya Plot’*] in ancient paganism, having failed to find it in the “sexless sainthood” of Western Christianity. He also hoped that the East would host “the second and final Rebirth” – no longer pagan, but Christian, finding approval of the sainthood of sex in Christianity itself. This “second rebirth” – or second Renaissance – he

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145 Ibid., p. 26.

146 An excellent review of those ideas is Adam Krasiński’s extensive (and certainly deserving re-edition) dissertation, “Dzień Ducha Świętego. Z powodu wydania ‘Traktatu o Trójcy’ Zygmunta Krasińskiego” (The Day of the Holy Ghost. Occasioned by the Publication of Zygmunt Krasiński’s “Treatise on the Trinity”), *Biblioteka Warszawska*, vol. 2, 1903, pp. 205-243, 464-492. See especially his presentation of the idea of “gradation of powers in Church”- the Church of Peter, the Church of Paul and the future Church of John in Schelling’s “philosophy of revelation” (pp. 240-242).

147 See A. Walicki, *Między filozofią, religią i polityką*, Warsaw 1983, pp. 66-68, 77-95.

suggested – was already beginning *close* to the Russian Church, namely, in Russian literature permeated with “breezes of the new, mysterious Christianity of John” with an intensity unknown before in universal literature.<sup>148</sup>

The program of “new religious consciousness” that was to emerge in Russia was thus coupled by Merezhkovsky with the idea of a culture revitalized by “the second Renaissance” – a Russian and Christian one this time, even if descended from the Italian Renaissance, Goethe’s “classicism” and Nietzsche’s apotheosis of Dionysus. The idea was soon embraced by a professional classicist, outstanding poet and Soloviev-inspired religious thinker, *Viacheslav Ivanov* (1866-1949) – it also won the support of Petersburg University professor Thaddeus Zieliński – an excellent philologist and expert on ancient civilization – who transformed it into the idea of a “Slavic Renaissance.”<sup>149</sup> Still, the original idea had been that of Merezhkovsky.

That, however, does not amount to stating that Ivanov was, on this question, a disciple of the author of *Tolstoy and Dostoevsky*. The coincidence of their ideas can be explained by the fact that both had been struggling with the same problem – one that haunted the Symbolist poets’ community – namely, the problem of reconciling Nietzscheanism with Christianity.<sup>150</sup> Just like

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148 D.S. Merezhkovsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 8 (Introduction to Part III of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky), p. 26.

149 S.S. Khorouzhny, in his most interesting essay, “Transformatsia slavianofilskoi idei v XX veke” (*Voprosy filosofii*, No 11/1994, pp. 52-62), argues that the original idea of the Russian Renaissance – the third one in the “Renaissance” series, following the Italian and the 18<sup>th</sup> century German ones – had belonged to Thaddeus Zieliński who had included it in his introduction to the second edition of his own Petersburg lectures of 1901, “The Ancient World and Us,” dated March 6, 1905. Khorouzhny quotes that date as “the day the idea was born.” Indeed, Zieliński had written of a “Slavic Rebirth,” his only motivation being the fact that he was a Pole and believed in the cultural unity of Slavdom (p. 54). It was from Zielinski that Viacheslav Ivanov borrowed the idea (replacing the adjective “Slavic” with “Russian”) followed by a group of enthusiastic disciples of “Faddei Frantsevich” (Zieliński) who called themselves “The Third Renaissance Alliance.” Their prominent member was Nikolai Bakhtin, elder brother of the famous Mikhail Bakhtin. The latter (also a student of Zieliński’s) accepted the idea of a Slavic religious “Third Renaissance,” believing it to be one of the main ideas of the Russian cultural Silver Age (p. 55).

While the value of those findings is undoubted – making them worthy of entering the horizon of the Russian Silver Age scholars – we need to point out an error committed by the excellent expert on Russian religious philosophy: the idea of “New Renaissance” did not emerge in 1905, but several years earlier, its author being Merezhkovsky.

150 Viacheslav Ivanov had met Soloviev even in 1895, as a student at Berlin University. Even at their first meeting, they discussed Nietzsche’s philosophy. Their following

Merezhkovsky, Ivanov dreamed of overcoming the Christ-Dionysus schism of Christianity *versus* pagan Antiquity, the revelation of spirit *versus* the revelation of flesh. He tried to do it by means of Soloviev's concept of the Sophia, disclosing – in his opinion – the spirituality of matter, and thus proving that Christianity – a religion of incarnation and bodily resurrection – was not, in spite of all appearances, an a-Cosmic spiritualism, but instead, a religious sanctification of the material world. He also borrowed Soloviev's concept of the theurgic role of poetry that transforms the world. The ideas became popular with the younger generation of Symbolist poets – the so-called Religious Symbolists – who readily accepted Ivanov as their ideological guide. One of them was Soloviev's nephew, Sergei Soloviev, others including the generation's greatest poets, Aleksandr Blok and Andrei Bely. In their worldview, the dream of a deified world in which the discord between culture and religion has been overcome, was combined with erotic motives expressed in their interpretation of Soloviev's Sophia as "eternal womanhood" capable of being incarnated in concrete figures. Consequently, they discovered Sophia in the ideal love of a woman described in Petrarch's sonnets, in the figure of Beatrix from Dante's *Divine Comedy*, as well as in the Catholic cult of the beautiful Madonna.<sup>151</sup> In Blok's *Verses on the Lovely Lady* [*Stikhi o Prekrasnoi Dame*, 1904], the eroticism was sublime. Yet, it could also border on the vulgar, portraying Sophia in a fallen state.

Let us return, however, to Merezhkovsky at the moment when his book *Tolstoy and Dostoevsky* was published.

Merezhkovsky believed that the birth of "new religious consciousness" depended on the reconciliation of the Russian radical intelligentsia with the Church. The initial aspect of that reconciliation – he argued – ought to be the intelligentsia's rejection of anti-religious attitudes and their break with materialist and Positivist ideas; the next aspect – conditioning a successful accomplishment of the first one – must be the Orthodox Church's opening to contemporary culture, as well as the Church authorities' acceptance of the necessity to adjust to social and intellectual progress. The converted intelligentsia was to remain the salt of the Russian soil – the Russian "Logos."

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meetings strengthened Ivanov's sense of communion with Soloviev. Upon the latter's death, Ivanov thus summarized his debt to him: "He was both the patron of my Muse and the confessor of my heart." (Quoted after P. Davidson, *The Poetic Imagination of Vyacheslav Ivanov. A Russian Symbolist's Perception of Dante*, Cambridge 1989, p. 91).

151 See P. Davidson, *The Poetic Imagination*, Ch. 3: "The Symbolist View of Dante as a Poet of Sophia."

Realization of that program was to be helped by the Petersburg religious-philosophical meetings organized by Merezhkovsky and his wife, Zinaida Hippus, in contact with Petersburg Metropolitan Anthony. On October 8<sup>th</sup>, 1901, the five founding fathers – Merezhkovsky, Filosofov, Rozanov, V.S. Mirolubov and a talented theologian and Synod clerk, Valentin Ternavtsev – arrived before the Synod’s severe High Prosecutor, Konstantin Pobedonostsev, and received his conditional permission to open activity. The meetings were to be kept within safe limits owing to their semi-closed character, as well as the patronage of Bishop Sergius, Head of the Petersburg Spiritual Academy.<sup>152</sup>

At the first meeting, held on November 29<sup>th</sup>, 1901, representatives of the clergy and the intelligentsia listened to a passionate speech by Ternavtsev, *The Russian Church Facing Its Great Mission*, in which the validity of Millenarian hopes for an earthly salvation was justified.<sup>153</sup> Both parties – the intellectual and the clerical – agreed that a time of a great transformation was approaching to unveil the “truth about the Earth” embedded in Christianity. During the subsequent meetings, the clergy tried to emanate with good will, while the intelligentsia’s turn toward religion made spectacular progress. Following Diaghilev’s refusal to publish reports of the meetings in *The World of Art*, Merezhkovsky, Hippus and Filosofov (aided by P.P. Pertsov) founded – in 1902 – their own periodical called *The New Way* which, practically, became the organ of the Religious-Philosophical Society. Its publication of reports from meetings increased the authorities’ anxiety, the ideas under discussion surpassing both the frame of Church orthodoxy and that of political “correctness.” Eventually, the meetings were banned. The last one – the twenty-second – was held in April 1903. The participants unanimously admitted that they were still a long way from their objective – i.e., the alliance of the Orthodox Church with the “God-seeking” intelligentsia.

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152 See N. Zernov, *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century*, New York – Evanston 1963, pp. 86-97. A member of the Orthodox Renaissance Movement, Zernov saw Merezhkovsky’s book on Tostoy and Dostoevsky as the “turning point” in Russian culture – a publication that had “closed the times of stubborn prejudice against Christianity in the minds of the leftist intellectuals” (Ibid., p. 87)

153 See Z. Gippius-Merezhkovskaya, *Dmitri Merezhkovsky*, pp. 92-105. Ternavtsev’s speech and its entailed discussion are also described by Florovsky in *Puti russkovo bogoslaviia* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Paris 1983), pp. 470-474.

*Vasilii Rozanov*

Besides Merezhkovsky, the most important figure in the Religious-Philosophical Society was, doubtlessly, *Vasilii Rozanov* (1856-1919). The once fascinating influence of his texts may now be difficult to understand – which makes it all the more worthy of remembering, considering the enthusiasm of such diverse personages as the Symbolist poets and Gorky, the radical individualist Lev Shestov and Orthodox Platonist theologian Father Pavel Florensky.<sup>154</sup> On the other hand, however, Rozanov was a highly controversial and contradictory figure: an enthusiast of Judaism whose occasional declarations supported vulgar anti-Semitism; a publicist who did not mind writing (albeit under different pen-names) to periodicals representing opposing political trends; an extremely severe critic of Christianity, himself deeply attached to the most banal version of Orthodox religiousness.

His contemporaries – even Merezhkovsky – compared Rozanov to Nietzsche, although the only common characteristic of the two thinkers was their radical criticism of Christian asceticism. That, however – a rehabilitation of carnal needs in opposition to the ascetic repression of sexual life – was exactly the great need of the times. And yet, all its various interpretations reached beyond Chernyshevsky-style rational sexual freedom. In the neo-Romantic version represented by the Merezhkovskys, love was ascribed an utterly individualistic status that separated it from the family-procreation sphere – it was also endowed with the aspiration to an intellectual communion that would bring about the desired union of “sexuality” and spirituality.<sup>155</sup> In a more extreme version, it meant the liberation of the orgiastic Dionysian element – the subject of Viacheslav Ivanov’s numerous texts. Rozanov, on the other hand, attacked Christian asceticism in the name of carnal love within the family union,

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154 E.V. Barabanov, who wrote the introduction to Rozanov’s selected works, made the following list of Rozanov’s enthusiasts: D. Merezhkovsky, V. Ivanov, V. Briusov, A. Bely, A. Chekhov, M. Gorky, A. Remizov, F. Sollogub, M. Tsvetaeva, Father Pavel Florensky, M. Gershenzon, O. Mandelstam, L. Shestov, V. Shklovsky, M. Bakhtin, D.H. Lawrence, A. Gide, J. Stevens and Ernst Jünger (V.V. Rozanov, *Religiia i kultura*, Moscow 1990, pp. 8-9).

Russian opinions on Rozanov have been published in the two-volume anthology, V.V. Rozanov. *Pro et contra*, Sankt Petersburg 1995.

155 B.G. Rosenthal has devoted much attention to the relationship between the Merezhkovskys and D. Filosofov. Within the “new religious consciousness,” the three considered themselves to constitute an “inner Church,” having taken vows to become one person, to live, work and pray together, sharing experience and thoughts. In the author’s opinion, they made, in fact, a *ménage en trois* (B.G. Rosenthal, *D.S. Merezhkovsky*, p. 98).



inalienably connected with procreation and the idea of immortality incarnated in biological offspring. His was not, however, a usual, traditionalist praise of family life. Unlike the traditionalists, Rozanov treated Christianity as most unfriendly toward the family – tolerating it at most – and hostile, in fact, to all lay values; he accused it of a repressive deformation of the natural male-female relationship that was harmful to social life. At the same time, he embraced the neo-Romantic pan-eroticism of his times, preaching vivacious pantheism and the idea of “holy sex” which made him define the sexual sphere as the area of man’s supreme contact with God – more obvious than the God-anchored human mind.

All that made Rozanov as a thinker highly attractive from the point of view of the ideal of the “new religious consciousness” – while he remained interesting also to those concerned with the most “mundane” and utterly lay matters, such as liberating the state jurisdiction from the Church dictate, facilitation of divorces, putting an end to discrimination of illegitimate children, etc. That is why he was so esteemed by the great critic of hypocritical Victorian morality, D.H. Lawrence.<sup>156</sup> Many of Rozanov’s ideas harmonized with those of the “new-leftist” moral revolution of the 1960s that took place in English-speaking countries. Thus, it was no coincidence that G.F. Putnam in his pioneering study *Vasilii V. Rozanov: Sex, Marriage and Christianity* refused to classify the Russian thinker as “reactionary,” considering him to represent “the emancipation trend of thought” and express “a deeply humanistic point of view” on matters that had not lost actuality.<sup>157</sup>

Rozanov’s ideas concerning a profound reform of Russian jurisdiction on the family resulted directly from his own biography.

Rozanov’s first powerful fascination was with Dostoevsky. His desire to identify with the adored author was so great that, in 1880 – while still a student of Moscow University – he married Apolinaria Suslova, a former lover of Dostoevsky, portrayed by him as Pauline of *The Gambler* and as the passionate Grushenka of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Sixteen years his senior, she made an unbearably despotic wife to, six years later, abandon her husband – refusing,

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156 Lawrence believed that Rozanov would become “the greatest revelation of the Russian mind in the West” (D.H. Lawrence, *Solitaria, The Calendar of Modern Letters, April-July 1927*, pp. 159-161. Lawrence’s extensive comment on Rozanov is quoted by Spencer E. Roberts in the introduction to his anthology, *Four Faces of Rozanov. Christianity, Sex, Jews and the Russian Revolution*, New York 1978, pp. 13-14.

157 G.F. Putnam, “Vasilii V. Rozanov: Sex, Marriage and Christianity,” *Canadian Slavic Studies*, vol. 3, Fall 1971, pp. 301-302.

however, to grant him divorce.<sup>158</sup> His next relationship – with a gentle, tender woman named Varia – proved a happy one, and yet, their marriage could not be legalized, the writer not being divorced; in order to secure the legal status of his five children, Rozanov had to adopt them – as if they were not his own, which he found absurd and humiliating. He therefore felt inclined to take a closer look at the legal and social situation of the family in Russia, which he subsequently summarized in the book *Semieinyi vopros v Rossii* (1901). The book described the somber results of legal and moral coercion justified by the Church's teachings: the drama of illegal children who were either killed upon birth, or condemned to social ostracism; the drama of young girls who, feeling “shamed,” committed suicide or resorted to prostitution; the brutality of family relationships, enhanced by the impossibility of divorce and many other associated problems.

Rozanov's philosophical debut, *On Understanding* (1886)<sup>159</sup> was a critique of the Positivist scientism from a position close to Hegel's idealist rationalism. The book having been completely ignored, Rozanov gave up his intended series of philosophical monographs. Instead, he started writing essays and publicist articles that he later composed into book publications. But it was, above all, the broken marriage with Suslova (which collapsed at the same time) that had quickened the writer's worldview evolution. No longer satisfied with a rational ordering of his own ideas, he focused on religious reflection on the irreducible irrationality of life.

Rozanov provided for his new family working as a teacher in various provincial high schools and continuing his publicist activity. His texts in the conservative press caught the attention of Konstantin Leontiev and Nikolai Strakhov. Thanks to Strakhov's protection, in 1893, he was employed as a clerk in the State Control Department and moved to Petersburg. The following year saw the book publication of Rozanov's *Legend of the Great Inquisitor*. The book (first published in the periodical *Russkii vestnik*, 1891) cemented the author's reputation in the conservative circles. He was then considered to be a conservative – also by himself. From the conservatives' point of view, identifying Dostoevsky with his rebellious protagonist, Ivan Karamazov, was an obviously controversial decision – they were satisfied, however, with the explanation that “the Great Inquisitor's system” revealed the pernicious

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158 Rozanov's life with Suslova was additionally traumatized by her being a militant atheist, prone to psychological sadism (see J. Czapski's introduction to *V. Rozanov, La face sombre du Christ*, Gallimard, Paris 1964, pp. 19-20).

159 *O ponimanii. Opyt issledovaniia prirody, granits i vnutrennyevo stroeniia nauki kak tsel'no znanii*, Moscow 1886, republished: Sankt Petersburg 1995.

consequences of Catholicism's errors that the Russian Orthodox Church was ostensibly immune to. Consequently, Rozanov won the reputation of a conservative defender of the Orthodox Church who reminds the disoriented intelligentsia that the true meaning of Dostoevsky's work was the idea of a "return to the native soil." The reputation was enhanced by Rozanov's essays presenting the Orthodox religion as a truly "New Testament" Christianity, free of the legalist, "Old Testament" deformations. The Orthodox Church was portrayed as an expression of the Slavic spirit of joy and affirmation of life, as well as approval of family life and love of the created world, incarnated by the author of *The Brothers Karamazov* in the figure of the "bird-loving" Old Zosima.

And yet, in a later (1901) comment on his own book, Rozanov ruined that reputation completely. He declared that Dostoevsky had been greatly mistaken in opposing Catholicism with "true" Christianity, ostensibly represented by the deepest stratum of Orthodoxy. The principle of authority that he rebelled against, deriving from it the "Great Inquisitor's system," was, in fact, a radically Christian principle, obtaining both in the West and in the East – and represented, indeed, by Christ himself when he ordered the apostles to "pasture his sheep" and "follow him." Christianity everywhere believes the earthly world to be sinful and evil, requiring a strict, authoritarian control. It has nothing in common with taking root in the "native soil," being manifestly un-earthly, un-national and, indeed, un-family. A Christian is not supposed to be a Greek, a Jew or a family member, but to follow the Savior, "having abandoned his father and mother." Dostoevsky's nostalgia for a free, spontaneous religiousness was, in fact, nostalgia for the paganism of old that had been eliminated in the West, but was still present in Russia in the form of the Slavonic religion of Dadzbog and Veles.<sup>160</sup>

Evidently, Rozanov's worldview had undergone a profound transformation in the course of a few years. As the author himself later admitted, he had been pushed into it by his own family situation – the pain of his *de facto* marriage being disapproved of in the light of Christian laws and Christian morality.<sup>161</sup>

The shift of Rozanov's view on Christianity proceeded gradually and consistently in one direction. Departing from his original idealization of the Orthodox Church, he tried to reconcile himself to Christianity by contrasting its two opposing lines: the Bethlehem Christianity – that of Nativity, Family, the manger complete with the donkey and the ox, the gift-bearing shepherds –

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160 V.V. Rozanov, *Legenda o Velikom Inkvizitore F.M. Dostoevskovo. Literaturniie ocherki. O pisat'elstve i pisat'elakh*, Moscwo 1996, pp. 131-132.

161 See E.V. Barabanov's introduction to V.V. Rozanov, *Religiia i kultura*, p. 11.

versus the Calvary Christianity – that of suffering and death. Accepting the former, he was terrified with the latter. Deeper studies, however, convinced him that Christianity could never become a religion of conception, birth and sensual contact with God – indeed, it had to be “bloodless” and sexless, Christ’s mission having been to sever the ties between religion and sexuality, to cut man off from his biological, “animal” nature. Therefore, the triumph of Cartesian rationalism in philosophy made the equivalent and the consequence of the “bloodless spiritualism” of Christianity.<sup>162</sup> Another consequence of Christian spiritualism – he argued – was the contempt for the non-Christian peoples as those who still belonged to the natural world, which excluded them from true mankind.<sup>163</sup>

A much deeper understanding of human nature, as well as of the man-God and man-Cosmos relations could be found, according to Rozanov, in Judaism. He saw it as a religion that sanctified sex and blood ties, perceiving sexual intercourse as the living pulse of existence and being capable of soaring to the apotheosis of carnal love in the *Song of Salomon*.<sup>164</sup> Rozanov found a deep significance in the duty of circumcision – the relic of the blood sacrifices of old, reminding man of the organic ties between religion and life and the commandment to confirm those ties with the ritual of sacrifice. He also became increasingly interested in various versions of the pantheist “fertility cults,” especially the religions of ancient Babylon and Egypt. All those meditations brought him to the conclusion that the world’s self-destruction could be averted only through a profound transformation of religious morality.

Understandably, Rozanov’s criticism of Christianity aroused a vivid interest in the Merezhkovsky group “decadents.” By approaching them, Rozanov gained access to the Modernist periodical, *The World of Art*. By 1900, the author who had until recently been associated with the conservative press, hateful of any cultural novelty, changed into one who won the interest and admiration of the artistic intellectual vanguard.<sup>165</sup>

He played an important, leading role at the religious-philosophical meetings. The role was thoroughly rehearsed. Intending to impose a certain line of discussion on the disputants, Rozanov even prepared a detailed *Table of religious-philosophical questions*.<sup>166</sup> He gave up reading it aloud, however,

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162 V.V. Rozanov, *V mire neynasnogo i nereshonnogo*, Petersburg 1901, pp. 42-43; also: *Religiia i kultura*, op. cit., p. 222.

163 Cf. G.F. Putnam, *Vasilii V. Rozanov*, p. 322.

164 See V.V. Rozanov, “Nechto iz sedoi drevnosti,” in: *Rozanov, Religiia i kultura* (1899), reprinted in: *Religiia i kultura*, op. cit, pp. 247-286.

165 Cf. J. Czapski’s introduction to V.V. Rozanov, *La face sombre du Christ*, p. 9.

166 See V.V. Rozanov, *Okolo tserkovnikh st’en*, Moscow 1995, pp. 489-495.

when the discussion following Ternavtsev's lecture had become heated and laden with ideas. At the very next meeting, however, he himself gave a lecture, formulating – as the spokesman of the intelligentsia – a series of questions and accusations addressed to the clergy,<sup>167</sup> the main ones being:

Why is the Russian clergy socially inactive, failing to pose examples of heroism in a good cause; why, for that matter, has it not rushed in to help the peasants during the years of starvation?

The clergy are a caste, believing themselves to be the sole bearer of a special grace – the sacrament of priesthood. A vested clergyman becomes a fetish, an icon, faced by the faithful in silence and humility. The imperceptible, immaterial “grace of the heart” has been replaced with a materialized grace, transformed into a monopolized privilege that allows the clergy to close their eyes to the real suffering of the people, while at the same time, they impose a spiritual yoke on everyone, from a beggar up to the tsar. Most active and energetic in imposing that yoke, they maintain a lofty indifference toward the real problems of life. It is a logical consequence of the ideal that condemns earthly life in the name of spiritual sainthood – an ideal of a man sitting in a cave and looking into the grave.

An obvious confirmation of that diagnosis was – according to Rozanov – the monotonousness of Orthodox Church music and the hieratic stasis of the icons. The Orthodox art – he argued – eliminates all that is living, sensual and mobile. The icon saints must stand still and be very old, on the brink of death. For life is a sin, while sainthood means turning back on life to contemplate death.

All in all, Christianity carried no ideas that were useful to life, helpful in life. Consequently, the whole progress of the European civilization had not been “God-inspired” but, rather, had been realized by laymen, naturally taking on an atheist character. The Christian ideals had shaped only the rhetoric, being “bloodless” and unreal themselves. The symbolic symptom of that “bloodlessness” was the prohibition of all blood sacrifices. And yet, the God of the Old Testament had accepted such sacrifices, ordering Moses to follow a sacrificial ritual. Giving up that ritual was – in Rozanov's opinion – tantamount to breaking the Earth-Heaven connection and transforming “real” theism into an “unreal” one.

At the following meeting, Rozanov made a stand on the Synod's decision to “divorce” Tolstoy from the Church.<sup>168</sup> He questioned the theoretical validity of that decision, pointing out that the Synod was a secular, state institution,

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167 See *Ibid.*, pp. 470-477 (O sviashchenstve i “blagodati” sviashchenstva. – Ob osnovnom ideale tserkvi. – O drevnikh i novikh zhertvakh).

168 *Ibid.*, pp. 478-479.

unauthorized to make pronouncements on the major religious phenomenon that – despite all his errors and blasphemies – was Tolstoy. Divorcing an individual from a religiously offended community would have been acceptable in an emotionally charged situation – for example, if Tolstoy were “divorced” by a crowd of rallying peasants and babushkas. Whereas a bureaucratic, paper decision of “divorce” was fundamentally lacking seriousness.

An escalation of Rozanov’s attack on the Church came with his lecture *On Adogmatism of Christianity*.<sup>169</sup> This time – rather than criticize the New Testament itself – Rozanov aimed his attack at the “historical Christianity” as drastically contradicting the Gospel spirit. The Gospels – Rozanov argued – preached no dogmas, nor did the Apostles usurp the name of “Church Fathers.” A dogma is a petrification, an end to the “living,” “vegetarian” development – the Savior had not furnished his disciples with these kinds of fossils. They have been invented by scholars and dispute-loving theologians, such as Origen or Cyril of Alexandria; those of them who had managed to force through their views, became Church Fathers, while those who had failed were stigmatized as heresy-mongers. The teaching of the Church Fathers, known as Patristics, is by all means “a-Evangelical” – while the Gospels are “a-Patristic.” Patristics had quenched the prophetic spirit of Christianity, depriving it of warmth and friendliness – failing, however, to become a true wisdom, capable of sustaining the test of scientific thought. People had been prepared to die for the Gospels – while the writings of the Church Fathers provoked but sarcastic comments.

The conclusions that Rozanov derived from those arguments left his contemporary institutionalized Church no chance of survival. Potentially reformist Orthodox Church theologians were being told that, in order to seriously reform the Church, they ought to start with the simplest decision: to close down the dogmatic theology and canon law departments in all the seminars and spiritual academies, prohibiting all the related literature.<sup>170</sup> Christianity – in Rozanov’s opinion – could then be reborn as a creative force – a messianism – an apocalyptic prophecy of the Woman who would crush the serpent’s head under her foot; of the ultimate victory over Satan and of God’s Kingdom on Earth. It would thereby become the religion of the future and the future-shaping force.<sup>171</sup>

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169 Ibid., pp. 479-489.

170 Ibid., p. 481.

171 Ibid., pp. 485-488. The idea that the soteriologic process had ended with the coming of Christ was ridiculed by Rozanov as worthy of Gogol’s comic or pitiful characters – Sobakevich of *Dead Souls* or Akakius Akakiievich of Gogol’s short story “The Coat” (Ibid., p. 487).

A comparison of that vision with the previously mentioned *Table of religious-philosophical questions* reveals, however, that Rozanov was torn by profound doubts: a desire of Christendom's Messianic revival vied in his mind with a radical skepticism about its possibility. Rozanov kept returning to the idea that the essence of Christianity was monasticism, the cult of the grave and death<sup>172</sup> – which made it intrinsically incapable of becoming a source of “development” or a creative, resuscitating force. Supplements to the *Table of religious-philosophical questions* – added following the official ban on further discussion meetings – prove that he soon resolved those doubts, to the disadvantage of Christianity. Christianity – he declared – had departed from the way indicated by Judaism. The Old Testament that sanctioned polygamy and fertility had been a religion of Genesis, of creation and an affirmation of life. Christ, however, had turned men's eyes on death and commanded them to follow him abandoning all earthly matters. The Christian Church was trying to reconcile the New Testament with the Old one on the basis of continuity and historical sequence – but that was an unfeasible task. For, in fact, the Christian truth – rather than complete the truth of Judaism – was its radical contradiction.<sup>173</sup>

Rozanov developed those ideas in his article *Christ – the Judge of the World* (*Novi Put'*, No 4/1903)<sup>174</sup> and – once the religious-philosophical meetings had been revived (following the 1905-6 Revolution) – resumed them in his lecture *On Sweetest Jesus and Bitter Fruits of the World*, of November 1907. The lecture directly referred to the discussions held at the first series of the meetings, summarizing them and formulating conclusions that Rozanov now brought to public notice.

This time – rather than from the sex question – he started from the problem of the Church's attitude toward contemporary culture. He recalled the optimism of Merezhkovsky who had opined at those meetings that the Orthodox Church of their day – unlike the Orthodox Church of Gogol's confessor, Father Matthew – saw no contradiction between the Gospels and modern literature and art.<sup>175</sup> However – Rozanov concluded – the optimism had been rather ungrounded. For was it possible to imagine a passage from Gogol inserted in the Gospel text? It

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172 Ibid., pp. 492-493.

173 See Ibid., pp. 491-495 (Post scriptum) and pp. 495-502 (“Vetkhiie” tezisi i “noviie” tezisi, and footnotes to the quoted fragments of John Chrysostom's criticism of the Old Testament).

174 See V.V. Rozanov, *Religiia i kultura*, op. cit., pp. 543-559.

175 Ibid., pp. 560-571. Merezhkovsky expressed that opinion in his lecture Gogol and Father Matthew, at one of the religious-philosophical meetings.

was as unimaginable as visualizing a smiling Christ or an Apostle in love. True, the Orthodox Church tolerated the existence of modern literature – but only as a contraband of sorts which ought to be disregarded. Thus, Pushkin’s poetry might be tolerated – just as debauchery was – but it could not be delighted in. A seriously treated Christianity excluded all the joys of life – from the joy of family life down to the joys of culture. It might tolerate sin, but it would not depart from the monastic ideal. A monk who had begotten a child is demanded to accept its being drowned – or he would be excluded from the Church.<sup>176</sup>

As Berdiaev observed – in that perspective, the chief enemy of man’s normal aspiration seemed Christ himself, rather than the Church.<sup>177</sup> After all, the Church had conceded to an opportunistic compromise with the lay world, adjusting somehow to its demands. And yet, the compromise, Rozanov believed, was forced, feeble and only partial – for had not Christ challenged the “world” with an implacable war that made bitter all the fruits of this earth? The Christian ideal that the Church was not going to abandon was monastic asceticism, that is, a life of death. Within the frame of “Jesusotheism,” the problem set by Merezhkovsky – that of religious sanctification of earthly life – had only a negative solution.<sup>178</sup> One had to choose: either Christ or the earthly life.

A deeper study of Rozanov’s texts reveals, however, that he did not exclude the possibility of a “new religious consciousness” emerging on the grounds of the Christian tradition. He saw that possibility in replacing “Jesusotheism” with Trinitarianism, accentuating the immanent presence of the three-person God in the world.<sup>179</sup> He never developed that concept, yet it is worth noting that it practically sanctioned the pantheist-Trinitarian trend in post-Solovievan Russian religious thought. Rozanov’s own religious radicalism was no lesser for that. Within the frame of religious consciousness, he waged a war against Christ in order to restore the pre-Christian world of values – a war comparable in its boldness with Nietzsche’s challenge of Christianity. That is, at least, how Rozanov’s contemporaries saw it.

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176 Ibid., pp. 564-565.

177 See, N. Berdiaev, “Khristos i mir (Otvet V.V. Rozanovu, 1908),” in: Berdiaev, *Tipi religioznoi mysli v Rossii*, Paris 1989, p. 329.

178 Rozanov, *Religiia i kultura*, p. 556.

179 Ibid. (Let us note that emphasizing the “Trinity” idea has become the main way of bringing God closer to the world for the post-Vaticanum II Catholic theology. See, Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us. The Trinity and Christian Life*, San Francisco 1992.)



Polemical toward Merezhkovsky (and, indirectly, also toward Nietzsche) was Rozanov's replacement of Hellenism with Judaism. The Ancient Greek – Rozanov declared in the same lecture – was merely:

A pacified Jew, a Jew deprived of his depth. The Jew is the yolk of this Easter egg whose white and shell are provided by Hellenism; a colored shell, a literary one, inscribed with "Christ Resurrected," with painting and art. [...] And yet, despite all those inscriptions, the shell is fragile and the white – poorly nourishing, jejune. The crucial thing is the yolk hidden within and containing a tiny fertile seed; that is the Jew, with his mysterious circumcision, the eternal, inextinguishable Jew.<sup>180</sup>

The lecture *On Sweetest Jesus* brought to a logical end the train of thoughts that had been haunting Rozanov during the religious-philosophical discussions of 1901-1903. To keep within the chronological frame of the present book, we ought to end the presentation of his views precisely at this point. That, however, would mean a serious distortion of Rozanov's overall portrait. For that reason – as a *post scriptum* – I feel obliged to add some vital information on the philosopher's most memorable declarations, following the 1905 Revolution.<sup>181</sup>

Rozanov's texts on the Revolution itself were marked by mutual contradiction: in some periodicals, the author featured as a conservative, while in others – as a supporter of revolutionary chaos pulling down the authoritarian structures. The latter tendency was somehow in keeping with his characteristic revulsion for the spirit of discipline and control, and protectiveness of spontaneous instincts. In his collected essays, *When the Authority Vanished* [*Kagda nachalstvo ushlo*, Petersburg 1910], Rozanov associated the Revolution with the dream of a natural paradise regained where no repression is suffered and "the cherry trees bloom twice a year."

He was still locating the primary repression – one that nipped off the very roots of life – in Christian asceticism. In *Moonlight Men* [*Ludi lunnovo sveta*], he tried to prove that the entire Christian civilization had been created by monks, the latter being, as a rule, men repelled by "normal" sexual life and incapable of establishing a family (e.g., homosexuals or hermaphrodites). He can only reinforce the domination of asceticism. He was himself an admirer of the

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180 Ibid., p. 565.

181 Rozanov published a great number of books after 1905. Cf. the biographic-bibliographic dictionary by B.V. Yemeljanova and V.V. Kulokova, *Russkoe myslit'eli vtoroi poloviny XIX-nachala XX veka*, Yekaterinburg 1996, pp. 271-272. From the point of view of "new religious consciousness," the most important are: *Okolo tserkovnikh st'en* (1906); *T'omnii lik. Metafizika khristianstva* (1911); *Ludi lunnovo sveta. Metafizika khristianstva* (1911); *Uedinionnoe* (1912); *Opavshie listia* (1913-15); *Apokalipsis nashevo vremeni* (Sergiyev Posad 1917-1918).

“sunny” religions that sanctified the family and fertility – and, amongst them, especially the religion of the Old Testament.

During the Kiev case of Mendel Beilis – a Jew accused of a ritual murder – Rozanov astonished his readers (who had considered him a sworn philosemite) by siding with the indictment and supporting it with his argument that ritual murders were part of essential Judaism, which he discussed in the tabloid press, the serious titles refusing to publish his articles.<sup>182</sup> The effect was Rozanov’s exclusion, in January 1914, from the Petersburg Religious-Philosophical Society that he had co-founded. The decision was preceded by a long and dramatic dispute. Some Society members (like V. Ivanov) opposed it in the name of absolute freedom of speech. While others (like Anton Kartashev) demanded that Rozanov be condemned in the name of the “religious revival” idea. The decisive voice became that of Merezhkovsky who declared that there existed “a certain minimum” which the Society was entitled to require of its members for social, rather than religious, reasons.<sup>183</sup>

The last year of Rozanov’s life was both the most mysterious and the most tragic one. The sway of the 1917 Revolution – which this time terrified him – meant to him the definitive bankruptcy of Christianity: a proof of the fact that, having compromised itself as powerless to solve the problems of life, the “religion of death” had lost the loyalty of the masses. Nevertheless, following the closing down of the periodical *Novoe vremia* that had been providing his means, Rozanov decided to seek refuge “close to the church walls” and, together with his family, took lodgings in Sergiyev Posad (Zagorsk), next door to the famous Troitse-Sergiyev monastery. The conditions were rather appalling, but he was allowed to use the monastery printing shop for publishing the 10 volumes of his last work, *Apocalypse of Our Times*, in which he continued his passionate war against Christianity and especially against Christ the Martyr who (in Rozanov’s opinion) had brought on all the current misfortunes on mankind. Rozanov argued that Christianity had corrupted men’s hearts – rather than *vice versa*. In his interpretation, the Book of Apocalypse became, in fact, anti-

182 Owing to the defence by Russian liberal lawyers (Petrzycki included), the Beilis case ended in the defendant’s acquittal. Rozanov’s attitude was definitely connected with his idea of blood sacrifices still being observed in Judaism – which, in his eyes, must have some positive aspects. And yet, the manner of his involvement in “the Beilis case” had been (as Struve put it) “morally insane.” Once the Beilis case was closed, Rozanov tried to justify his own opinions on it in his book *Oboniatelnoe i osiazatelnoe otnoshenie Yevreev k krovi* (1914).

183 See “‘Sud’ nad Rozanovim (minutes of the discussion on the motion to exclude Rozanov from the Religious-Philosophical Society)” in: *V.V. Rozanov. Pro et contra*, vol. 2, pp. 184-215.

Christian – as a prophetic vision of an entirely different religion: a religion of life.

Dying on February 5<sup>th</sup> 1919, he accepted Holy Communion (more than once) and the last anointment. He left all his manuscripts at the disposal of Father Pavel Florensky. And yet, at the end of the long ceremony, he asked those who surrounded his bed: “And now, please, will you leave, I shall pray to my God.”<sup>184</sup>

## Berdiaev, Bulgakov and the 1905 Revolution

### *The Philosophy of “Mystical Realism”*

The notion of the “Russian cultural renaissance” of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century differs in scope from that of the “Russian religious philosophy” that had grown out of that renaissance. The former – made popular by Berdiaev’s classical book *The Russian Idea*<sup>185</sup> – refers to the flourishing of Russian literature and thought that was the result of liberated cultural creativity (especially in poetry and religious-philosophical research), free from the dictate of social-oriented utilitarianism, Populist egalitarianism and Positivist “scientism.” Berdiaev named philosophical New Idealism and the “new religious consciousness” proposed by the Petersburg Religious-Philosophical Society as the principal sources of the “cultural renaissance.” He argued, however, that New Idealism had been but a transitory stage paving the way for the religious philosophy, rather than be *religious* itself. The “new religious consciousness,” on the other hand, was not a *philosophy* – albeit it offered important philosophical inspiration. The philosophical concepts proposed by the authors of *Problems of Idealism*, as well as Merezhkovsky’s and Rozanov’s religious ideas, were characteristic of the early, pre-revolutionary phase of the “cultural renaissance.” As for the Russian religious *philosophy*, it emerged somewhat later, following the 1905 Revolution, to be continued even after the cultural renaissance (and it entailed the Silver Age of Russian culture) but was stopped by the Bolshevik Revolution – only to flourish again in emigration.

In late 1904, following Nikolai Berdiaev’s return from exile, the New Idealists and the preachers of “new religious consciousness” focused around Merezhkovsky and Filosofov’s periodical *New Way* came closer together. Berdiaev and Bulgakov joined the periodical’s editorial staff, assuming

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184 See J. Czapski, op. cit., p. 69.

185 Cf. N. Berdiaev, *Russkaia idea (Osnovnye problemy russkoi mysli XIX veka i nachala XX veka)*, Paris 1949, Chapter X.

responsibility for its philosophical-political section. In early 1905, a new journal, *Questions of Life* [*Voprosy zhizni*] was founded, edited by Bulgakov in collaboration with the religious Socialist (to become “mystical anarchist”) Georgii Chulkov (1870-1931).<sup>186</sup> The new periodical became the meeting ground for all the trends and shades of the Russian cultural renaissance, the texts being supplied not only by the New Idealists and the representatives of “new religious consciousness,” but also by the Symbolist poets of the Viacheslav Ivanov circle (Blok, Bely, Briusov) – as well as independent spokesmen and sympathizers of the new intellectual trends, such as Lev Shestov, Prince Evgeny Trubetskoi, Bogdan Kistiakovskiy or Thaddeus Zieliński.<sup>187</sup> Their collaboration was accompanied by the social integration of former “legal Marxists” with members of the Petersburg religious-philosophical meetings and the Symbolist poet community in the drawing room of Zinaida Hippus.

Their intensive intellectual exchange quickened the process of transforming New Idealism into a religious philosophy, charged with the double task of making philosophy religious and making religion modern and philosophical. Berdiaev, who was closest to the Merezhkovskys and found a common language with them,<sup>188</sup> accepted the idea of a “new religious consciousness” – wishing, however, to see it expressed in the language of philosophy and to be rid of excessive radicalism. Bulgakov did not aim as high, contradicting the vision of a revolutionary transformation of religious consciousness with the idea of reforming the Church from within, without breaking off with “historical Christianity.” Nevertheless, he, too, was an advocate of a profound reform of the Orthodox Church. Even back in 1902, as a member of the Liberation Union, he had declared that the overthrowing of Russian autocracy must be accompanied by a fundamental reform of the Russian Church, so that the Russian revolution becomes a simultaneous religious reformation. Struve, who approved of the idea, started to preach himself in the journal *Liberation* that one of the tasks of liberalism was to modernize and renew religious consciousness in Russia. The discord between Bulgakov and Struve became evident only at the moment of the appearance of the Constitutional-Democratic Party. Bulgakov believed that it should be a worldview party promoting a definite standpoint on religious-philosophical matters, whereas Struve was convinced that the religious task of

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186 See C. Evtuhov, *The Cross and the Sicle. Sergei Bulgakov and the Fate of Russian Religious Philosophy 1890-1920*, Ithaca-London 1997, p. 117.

187 Cf. N. Berdiaev, *Samopoznaniie*, Leningrad 1991, p. 142.

188 Cf. Z. Gippius-Merezhkovskaya, *Dmitri Merezhkovsky*, p. 144.

liberalism was limited to a struggle for the freedom of conscience that was conditional to an authentic religiousness.<sup>189</sup>

Notwithstanding their discrepancies in defining the religious revival, Berdiaev and Bulgakov agreed as to the general direction of the philosophical evolution. Both postulated reaching beyond idealism, into an ontological realism that accepted “mystic realities of the world” and was inseparably connected with the task of a religious transformation of earthly life. Berdiaev summarized that evolution in the introduction to his own collected essays of 1901-1906, *Sub specie aeternitatis*, entitled *On Realism*. Idealism – he opined – had been sufficient for the criticism of Marxism and Positivism, but it contained no creative element – hence, stopping at that point would be unrealistic and unreligious. In fact, any idealism – just like Positivism – was a “philosophy of non-existence:” a phenomenalistic philosophy that negated the ontological reality of the world. Therefore, it had to be replaced with mystical realism, or philosophy of the mystical being – a religious philosophy, disciplined by dynamically defined dogmas, and thus free of the subjectivism of “a-dogmatic” forms of the mystical consciousness. The philosophy – he continued – must not be a mere mystical recognition of the religious sense of the world, but ought to be a philosophy of action too, capable of conquering and governing the world. It ought to be a philosophy of the concrete, related to living history and politics, concerned with the real cause of the world’s and mankind’s salvation.<sup>190</sup>

Berdiaev formulated this philosophical program in the first person plural, using the pronoun “we.” At the end of the text, however, he shifted to the first person singular, to speak for himself. His primary and ultimate thought – he declared – was the idea of liberating the personality:

I seek ways of its affirmation in the cosmos and its unification with the Logos of the world. In my essays, I discuss the problems of Godmanhood, of the Spirit incarnated in the society, of the mystical ties between love and freedom. Departing from the pseudo-communal Marxism and the decadent-romantic individualism, I proceed toward the communal spirit of mystical neo-Christianity.<sup>191</sup>

Berdiaev’s shift from “we” to “I” was his way of acknowledging the difference between his own philosophy and that of Bulgakov. Their common denominator was mystical realism, obviously related to the criticism of rationalistic idealism and Positivist empiricism in Soloviev’s pantheistic philosophy. And yet, while Bulgakov proceeded toward a “God-materialistic” Cosmism, emphasizing the

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189 Cf. C. Evtuhov, *The Cross and the Sickle*, pp. 90-98.

190 N.A. Berdiaev, *Sub specie aeternitatis. Opyty filosofskiiie, sotsyalniie i literaturniie (1900-1906)*, Moscow 2002 (first published: Petersburg 1907), pp. 5-9.

191 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

theme of Sophiology, Berdiaev represented a radically anthropocentric philosophy of freedom, distancing himself from the Sophiological naturalism in his own development of Soloviev's idea of Godmanhood. Not surprisingly, then, the latter ignored Sophiology in his general characteristics of mystical realism, naming Godmanhood as the primary topic while listing the contents of his own philosophy.

In the revolutionary year of 1905, Berdiaev became greatly interested in the ideas of a "new religious consciousness," assimilating and transforming them in the spirit of his own, philosophizing religious concepts more. He summarized his views on this question in a vast and important study, *On New Religious Consciousness*, published in October 1905.

"New religious consciousness" was, according to Berdiaev, an important sign of the times, proving that the process of revelation had not been ended and a major religious revival with a new religious synthesis was imminent. That double – Christian and pagan – revival was to bring on simultaneous resurrections of the Christian God and the Olympian gods. In that perspective, Merezhkovsky seemed to be a writer of an all-European significance – a *sui generis* "Gnostic of our times," a herald of a "new Renaissance" and a prophet of Christianity reborn in a new, universal religion of the Holy Ghost. Berdiaev acknowledged Merezhkovsky's merit in "discovering new ways," calling him a religious revolutionary, far bolder and more radical than the occasionally conservative Soloviev.<sup>192</sup>

"True Gnosis," however – Berdiaev continued – ought to combine a live religious experience with a deep philosophical knowledge<sup>193</sup> – while Merezhkovsky was guilty of a philosophical dilettantism that might lead to serious misunderstandings. The controversy of "sex" as interpreted by Merezhkovsky must not be confused with the philosophical notions of "matter" and "spirit," Merezhkovsky's "sex" being a symbolic notion, semantically including both carnal sexuality and "earth" (as opposed to "heaven,") as well as culture and community (as "the body of mankind.") "Sex" thus defined had nothing in common with matter in the naturalistic sense – the "carnal rehabilitation" within the "new religious consciousness" was not inspired by materialism but, instead, by mysticism, which was so evident in the case of Rozanov. On the grounds of a materialistic concept of carnality, the Merezhkovsky-postulated synthesis would have become a nonsense. It was deeply sensible, however, to connect the two poles of existence – the noumenal "body" and the noumenal "spirit" – on the grounds of a spiritualistic ontology

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192 N.A. Berdiaev, *Sub specie aeternitatis*, p. 385.

193 *Ibid.*, pp. 384-393.

that firmly discerned between the transcendent (mystical) world and the empirical one. The crucial thing about the new religious consciousness was that it overcame the body-spirit dualism, rather than fall into a philosophical anti-spiritualism.<sup>194</sup>

Berdiaev's definitions emphasized, too, the difference between Merezhkovsky and Rozanov:<sup>195</sup> while Rozanov criticized Christ's teachings, Merezhkovsky restricted his criticism to "historical Christianity." Despite the many superficial analogies, Rozanov's views were, in fact, symmetrically opposed to those of Merezhkovsky: while Rozanov's apotheosis of sanctified sexual life expressed the desire to return to the original paradise, Merezhkovsky looked forward into the future, rather than back into the past, prophesying the triumph of "sex" in a transformed, redeemed and resurrected world. Berdiaev resumed the topic in his essay on Rozanov of 1908, contradicting Rozanov's vision with his own concept of a new religious consciousness, focused on the theandric idea. He concluded his argument as follows:

Christ had revealed God-man, the Holy Ghost shall reveal God-mankind. The trans-deification of mankind, the trans-deification of the world's sex shall become a fact. But the new, holy sex must not be the old, pagan, corruptible sex that Rozanov is concerned with. The new world shall include all the elements of our world, yet in transformed forms, nothing shall be lost, but everything shall be illuminated. We are looking forwards, instead of backwards, toward the future Kingdom of God, instead of toward the lost paradise of the past. We want to be religious revolutionaries, rather than reactionaries [...] Rozanov is not striving toward the kingdom of the Spirit, nor toward the kingdom of God the only one in the Trinity, but to the kingdom of God the Father – and yet, the kingdom of God the Father is past beyond return, having been irreconcilable with the mystical dialectics of Trinitarianism that unites the Creator with the created world.<sup>196</sup>

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194 Ibid., pp. 391-402. Cf. James P. Scanlan, "The New Religious Consciousness: Merezhkovskii and Berdiaev," *Canadian Slavic Studies*, 4, No 1, Spring 1970, pp. 17-35.

195 Ibid., pp. 400-401.

196 N. Berdiaev, *Tipy religioznoi mys'li v Rossii*, p. 346.

His ideas were strikingly concordant with the Trinitarian "philosophy of revelation" presented in August Cieszkowski's *Our Father* (history divided into the ages of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost that corresponded to, respectively, the age of naturalism, the age of dualism marked by "abnegation of the world", and the future age of reintegration – the middle one being called the age of "God-Man", while the last one – that of "God-Mankind."

For an analysis of analogies between the Russian religious-philosophical renaissance and the Polish Romantic philosophy, see my treatise, "Mesjanizm i filozofia narodowa w okresie renesansu filozoficzno-religijnego w Rosji a romantyczny model polski," in:

In an extensive reply, Merezhkovsky accepted the philosophical corrections to his views, as well as the charge of there being a fundamental difference between his own ideas and those of Rozanov, expressing hopes for a closer ideological co-operation with his critic.<sup>197</sup> The co-operation seemed feasible, considering the many analogies of their respective worldview-political views during the Revolution. Both connected the issue of a “new religious consciousness” with the revolutionary war against autocracy;<sup>198</sup> both, too, supported Soloviev’s vision of a “free theocracy”; both, finally, preached the idea of political leadership by supra-class intelligentsia, defined in an elitist – rather than in the Populist – sense: as the cultural-religious mission of a spiritual aristocracy.

In Berdiaev’s case, the idea of theocracy came as a result of a transformation of the liberal idea of natural law, defined as God-given and superior to both the state law and the democratic idea of the people’s sovereignty. The liberal idea of the state of law became, in this conception, the ideal of a “universal theocracy,” i.e., a social order founded on God’s authority [*bogovlastiie*] and excluding all forms of human authority [*chelovekovlastiie*]. Nor was there room in “universal theocracy” [*vselenskaia teokratiia*] for an institutionalized Church authority, i.e., that of the clergy, the only integrating factor being God’s law, rather than the authority of any human group.<sup>199</sup> This – in a strictly etymological sense – meant a theonomy, rather than a theocracy. Another term used by Berdiaev was “theocratic anarchism” – not to be confused, he stressed, with Chulkov’s “mystical anarchism.” In his opinion, “mystical anarchism” combined mysticism with Bakunin’s apology of revolutionary destruction – whereas “theocratic anarchism” was supposed to be a constructive and creative ideal: one of a stateless society that, nevertheless, is not willful, being governed by absolute, God-given laws.<sup>200</sup>

“Universal theocracy” was to guarantee the absolute significance of individual rights as the chief dogma of “new religious consciousness.” At the same time, however, it was hardly compatible with the liberal respect for law

*Między reformą a rewolucją. Rosyjska myśl filozoficzna, polityczna i społeczna na przełomie XIX i XX wieku*, Eds. W. Rydzewski, A. Ochotnicka, Krakow 2004.

197 See *Ibid.*, pp. 528-547 (D.S. Merezhkovskii, *O novom religioznom deistvii. Otkrytoe pis'mo N.A. Berdiaevu*).

198 During the Petersburg religious-philosophical meetings, Merezhkovsky had sometimes spoken of the providential mission of the Russian autocracy, but he abandoned the idea under the influence of the 1905-1906 Revolution that made him an implacable enemy of the tsarist regime.

199 *Ibid.*, pp. 404-412. See also pp. 475-477 (*O narodnoi volie*).

200 N. Berdiaev, *Novoe religioznoe soznaniie i obshchestvennost'*, Petersburg 1907, pp. 17-18 (*Velikii Inkvizitor*).



and the state. Berdiaev's apology of "true anarchism" – i.e., an elitist one, based on the principle of a spiritual hierarchy<sup>201</sup> – somewhat resembled the ideal of "holy anarchy" of Polish poet Juliusz Słowacki's Romantic Messianism. Obviously, the thinker's engagement in the cause of religiously sanctioned individual rights was not an all-positive contribution to the building of a liberal political culture in Russia.

The results of Bulgakov's religious-philosophical thought were largely different. Bulgakov, too, declared his faithfulness to the liberal ideal of inalienable individual rights, which he justified summoning Soloviev's philosophy. However – influenced by Prince Evgeny Trubetskoi who, in his book on Soloviev, focused on a criticism of the theocratic utopia – he distanced himself from both theocratic and (even more so) anarchic ideas.<sup>202</sup> Instead, he referred to Soloviev's conception of a Christian *state* realizing Christian – and liberal – values within an institutionalized legal order, guaranteeing citizens' individual freedom and "the right to a respectable life." In late 1905, he published an article on this topic, entitled *An Urgent Task*, which was at the same time a program of the Christian-Socialist movement called the "Christian Politics Alliance."<sup>203</sup> It was meant to be a worldview-oriented organization, keeping away from party squabbles, yet entering political activities from a "non-party constitutionalist" position. Having failed as an independent political force, it nevertheless exerted some important influence on the reformist-minded part of the Orthodox clergy.

### *The Final Reckoning with Marxism*

A significant part of Berdiaev and Bulgakov's philosophical revolution during the revolutionary years 1905-1906, was bringing to the end the reckonings with Marxism.<sup>204</sup>

Both started from an interpretation of Marxism as a secular religion aimed at an earthly salvation – and therefore implacably hostile toward the idea of transcendental salvation in the afterworld. Echoing Dostoevsky, both saw

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201 Ibid., p. 155.

202 Cf. V.N. Akulinin, "S.N. Bulgakov. Vekhi zhizni i tvorchestva," in: *S.N. Bulgakov, Khristianskii Socialism*, Novosibirsk 1991, pp. 16-17.

203 "Nieotlozhnaia zadacha" (*Voprosy zhizni*, No 9-12, 1905) in: Ibid., pp. 25-60. On the Christian Politics Alliance, see: C. Evtuhov, *The Cross and the Sickle*, chapter 6.

204 Cf. A. Walicki, "Russian Philosophers of the Silver Age as Critics of Marxism," in: James P. Scanlan (ed.), *Russian Thought after Communism*, Armonk, New York-London 1994, pp. 81-103.

Socialism as an attempted deification of man and a striving to “organize earthly life not only without God, but also against God.”<sup>205</sup> Marxism, they believed, was the most intensely religious form of Socialism: an all-embracing faith pretending to have solved “the problem of the sense of life and the aim of history,” while it aspired to subject all the spheres of man’s life to a total ideological control, leaving no room for the freedom of conscience or the spontaneous shaping of personal identity.

Berdiaev summarized his own criticism of the Marxist faith in the essay *Socialism as a Religion* (1906). He named three aspects of the Marxist religion: first, the primitive theodicy, justifying the historical evil, the conscious use of highly immoral means to achieve the ends included; second, a coldly cruel theory of progress, ruthlessly demanding sacrifice of the present for the sake of the future and treating living, concrete individuals as mere tools of “generic” history – thus cancelling Kant’s thesis that the individual must always be the end, and never the means; third, a depressing poverty of the ultimate ideal, reduced to material welfare and a general, middle-class satisfaction.

The first two points focused on the Hegelian heritage of Marxism, namely, the idea of rational historical necessity and the objective, “iron” laws of progress. Berdiaev’s sensitivity to those particular aspects of Marxism had had a long tradition in Russian intellectual history. It was doubtlessly influenced by Nikolai Mikhailovsky’s criticism of the Marxist concept of “objective laws of progress” from the point of view of human personality, with a reference to Belinsky’s rebellion against Hegel’s “rational necessity.” As obvious as Dostoevsky’s influence was: Berdiaev did not fail to mention Ivan Karamazov and his refusal of a future harmony, were it to be achieved at the price of tears of tormented innocent children. Finally, Berdiaev’s criticism of the “evil infinity of progress” echoes the views of Nikolai Fedorov who opined that progress was a fundamentally immoral idea, since it assumed that fathers must be sacrificed for their descendants, and so it must continue *ad infinitum*.<sup>206</sup>

Decisive, however, were to be Berdiaev’s conclusions concerning the theory and practice of Bolshevism. The Bolsheviks’ revolutionary radicalism stemmed

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205 N.A. Berdiaev, “Sotsyalizm kak religiiia,” in: *Berdiaev, Novoe religioznoe soznanie*, p. 72. (First published in *Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii*, November-December 1906.)

206 Berdiaev and Bulgakov were critical of Fedorov’s ideas, and yet they summoned him in their own criticisms of the “religion of progress.” Bulgakov, for example, quoted Fedorov in one of his later essays, describing the Socialist vision of the future as a repulsive and cynical “picture of descendants feasting on the graves of their ancestors” (S.N. Bulgakov, “Khristianstvo i Socializm,” in: *Bulgakov, Khristianskii Socializm*, pp. 216-218).

from their ideological fundamentalism, sharply in contrast to the pragmatic deschatologization of Marxism in the mainstream of the German Social Democrats. That was why the crucial characteristics of Marxism as an integral “religion of progress” had been much better expressed by Lenin than by Kautsky. Berdiaev understood that perfectly, drawing the correct conclusion that the greatest threat to freedom in Russia was Leninist Marxism.

Unlike Berdiaev, Bulgakov focused on the Feuerbachian – rather than the Hegelian – aspect of Marxism. In 1905, he published – in *Problems of Life* – a serious study of Feuerbach’s anthropotheism as a forgotten, yet vital source of Marx’s philosophy.<sup>207</sup> A year later, he continued the topic in his dissertation *Karl Marx as a Religious Type (His Attitude to the Anthropotheist Religion of Ludvig Feuerbach)*.<sup>208</sup>

Marx’s worldview was, according to Bulgakov, an atheist religion, implacably hostile toward the theist ones and to Christianity in particular. The novelty of that diagnosis was Bulgakov’s notice of Marx’s early works and his emphasis on the differences between the Marxism of Marx (especially the *young* Marx) and the Positivist Marxism of the German Social Democrats. The innovations were the result of Bulgakov’s thorough study of several early works by Marx, published by Mehring in 1902.<sup>209</sup>

Having read two essays by the young Marx – *On the Jewish Question* and *A Note on the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law* – Bulgakov arrived at the conclusion that the two contained the “philosophical maximum” of the future author of *Capital*.<sup>210</sup> At the same time, he believed the texts to constitute a decisive argument against the popular view that Marx had depended on Hegel. Marx – Bulgakov argued – could not have been Hegel’s disciple, since he had never been a philosophical idealist. His real teacher had been Ludvig Feuerbach. Marx’s historical materialism was, in fact, a translation of Feuerbach’s ideas into the language of political economy.

The conclusion confirmed Dostoevsky’s thesis of Socialism being essentially a humanistic atheism, aspiring to replace the religion of “God-Man”

207 S.N. Bulgakov, “Religiia chelovekobozhiiia u L. Feuerbakha” (*Voprosy zhizni*, No 10-11, 1905). Reprinted in: *S.N. Bulgakov, Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, vol. 2, Moscow 1993, pp. 162-221.

208 “Karl Marks kak religioznoi tip” (*Moskovskii ezhenedelink*, 1906; published a year later as a separate brochure. Reprinted in: *S.N. Bulgakov, Filozofia khaziaistva*, Moscow 1990, pp. 310-342.

209 *Auf dem Literarischen Nachlass vom K. Marx, F. Engels und F. Lasalle*, ed. F. Mehring, vol 1-4, Stuttgart 1902. The first two volumes included Marx’s and Engels’ works of 1841-1847.

210 S.N. Bulgakov, *Filozofia khaziaistva*, p. 336.

with that of “Man-God.” Trying to avoid simplifications, Bulgakov did not charge Marx with an open acceptance of Feuerbach’s “religion of manhood.” He observed, however, in the works of the young Marx a purely Feuerbachian vision of man’s ultimate destiny: a vision of man liberated from “egotism” and transformed into a “generic creature” [*Gattungswesen*] – free of the alienating pluralism of civic society and rediscovering his own identity in a conflict-free unanimous community. In his comment on Marx’s essay *On the Jewish Question*, Bulgakov wrote:

We easily recognize here Feuerbach’s idea of *Gattungswesen*, of human kind as the highest instance for Man. In Marx, that “love of the distant” and yet inexistent is transformed into contempt for the really existing “other” [...]. Thus, only when man annihilates his own individuality, when society is transformed into a Sparta, or an anthill or a beehive of sorts – only then shall man be emancipated.<sup>211</sup>

Pointing out the relationship between Feuerbach and Marx was the strong point of Bulgakov’s interpretation. The publication (in 1927-1932) of the entire output of the young Marx proved beyond all doubt that Feuerbach’s philosophy had been one of the principal sources of Marx’s concept of the alienation of the human generic self and the overcoming of that alienation through Communism, defined as a “the real reappropriation of the human essence by and for man.”<sup>212</sup> Back in 1906, however, Bulgakov’s interpretation was a real discovery, radically overcoming the universally repeated patterns of Engels’ *Development of Socialism from Utopia to Science*. It is worth noting, too, that Bulgakov interpreted Marx’s heritage quite differently from the so-called Western Marxists and the Marxologists of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who observe its deeply humanist message, supportive of the idea of individual liberation and development – and therefore by all means worthy of continuation. The Russian thinker’s opinion was entirely different: he saw the young Marx’s concept of liberation of the “human generic self” as a program of an integral collectivism and a complete socialization of man. This he found to be the essence of Marx’s utopia and the very core of Marxism as a comprehensive worldview.

Pointing out Marx’s dependence on Feuerbach, however, was not enough to justify the thesis that Marx had owed nothing to Hegel. One of the facts that Bulgakov’s Marxology ignored was the ultimate emergence of Marx’s vision of man’s alienation and reintegration from Hegel’s dialectics of self-enriching alienation. Bulgakov’s error can be partly justified with the then inaccessibility

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211 Ibid., pp. 331-332.

212 K. Marx, *Selected Writings*, ed. D. McLellan, p. 96.

of Marx's *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* that had not been published until 1932.

A fact more difficult to explain is the one-sidedness of Bulgakov's analyses and his ignoring of the economic content of Marx's idea. As is generally known, Marx's Communism was supposed to overcome man's alienation by a total abolition of the market economy. Bulgakov cannot be accused of totally overlooking that problem. In his later texts, he occasionally admitted that the Marx-envisioned "leap into the kingdom of freedom" was, in fact, a utopian idea of "liberation from economy" and a replacement of the market power game by a society organized along the pattern of "a single giant factory."<sup>213</sup> And yet, Bulgakov did not make that observation the foundation of his own interpretation of Communism. His greatest concern was the vision of developing the godly attributes of man and saving mankind without God – the motive that Marx shared with Feuerbach.

The Russian religious thinkers' undeniable contribution to the understanding of Marxist Communism was their recognition of its inherent soteriological myth – a laicized version of the Millenarist idea of collective salvation. Both Berdiaev and Bulgakov separated Millenarianism from eschatology, believing the former to be a distorting caricature of the theocratic ideal, threatening with the introduction of a "total and ultimate form of slavery."<sup>214</sup> Their own political thinking, however, was not free of chiliastic temptation. While Berdiaev rejected "Socialist theomachy" ("Socialism as a religion"), he published the meaningfully entitled essay, *The Truth Of Socialism*, in which he wrote with much sympathy about a "neutral" Socialism – a reformist one that waged no war against God and, indeed, remained faithful to man's eternal dream of realizing the Kingdom of God in earthly life.<sup>215</sup> Bulgakov shared that standpoint. While criticizing the secularized Millenarianism, he expressed his approval of the religious Millenarianism. His study of Marx ended in a phrase from the Lord's Prayer: "Thy Kingdom come," interpreted as a promise of God's Kingdom on earth.<sup>216</sup>

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213 Cf. Bulgakov, "Khristianstvo i Socializm," in: *Bulgakov, Khristianskii Socializm*, pp. 209-216.

214 N. Berdiaev, *Sotsializm kak religia*.

215 N. Berdiaev, *Sub specie aeternitatis*, pp. 113-118.

216 S. Bulgakov, *Filosofia khoziaistva*, pp. 341-342.

Bulgakov even hoped that Marx's Socialist activity – which he separated from Marxism and “a religion of Man-God” – would prove to be one of the forces constituting the foundations of that Kingdom.<sup>217</sup>

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217 Bulgakov's analyses of Marxism were referred to by Pavel Novgorodtsev in his book *On the Social Ideal* (first published in *Problems of Philosophy and Psychology, 1911-1916*). Devoted to the historical developments of Marx's Socialism, the book contained a weighty theoretic critique of utopian thinking. Novgorodtsev discussed the problem from the new-Kantian position, combining criticism of utopianism with the religious standpoint that defined any attempted immanentization of the Absolute as creation of false absolutes that entailed the mortal sin of idolatry. See, A. Walicki, *Russian Philosophers of the Silver Age as Critics of Marxism*, pp. 94-99.

## Chapter 23

# The Religious-Philosophical Renaissance During the Years of Reflection upon the Experience of the First Revolution

The 17<sup>th</sup> October 1905 Manifesto's introducing of elementary civic rights in Russia did not solve the political – let alone the social – problems, thus failing to put an end to the wave of revolutionary violence. Nevertheless, it made Russia a country of freely expressed public opinion that could organize itself into political parties. A further step in the same direction was the Empire's Fundamental Laws, proclaimed in May 1906. They institutionalized the Russian constitutional – or (depending on the definition) semi-constitutional – order, largely analogous to the compromise between absolutism and constitutionalism that had been reached in the German Empire. From the point of view of the Constitutional Democrats' Party that aspired to a *parliamentary* monarchy – i.e., to replacing the monarch's absolutism with the people's sovereignty principle – the changes were far from satisfactory. And yet, from the point of view of individual freedom and the freedom of associations – i.e., that of the civic society's emancipation in Russia – they were, indeed, breakthrough changes.

The breakthrough coincided with the transition of the Russian religious-philosophical renaissance from its preparatory period of searching to its maturity that laid the foundations for 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian religious philosophy – a phenomenon reaching beyond the frame of the Silver Age and broken by the 1917 catastrophe. Indeed, the trends of Russian thought of 1905-1906 were continued after the Bolshevik Revolution, flourishing in political emigration. To offer their presentation until 1917 and then stop at that date would mean, however, severing in half the creative evolution of the chief Russian religious philosophy representatives of that time – while, on the other hand, an attempt at giving a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon of Russian religious philosophy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century would entail broadening the chronological frame of the present book by a quarter of a century, i.e., practically, writing another separate volume, temporally encompassing the first decades of post-Revolutionary Russia. And yet, it is as hard to imagine a presentation of the

history of Russian thought arbitrarily cut short on the years 1905-1906, without mentioning the directions of later developments.

The present, closing chapter of this book extends to the initial five post-Revolution years – that being the period constituting a graphic caesura in the intellectual history of Russia. It was then that the Russian religious renaissance flourished, while the leading representatives of that trend attempted to re-evaluate – in the light of the Revolution experience – the entire 19<sup>th</sup> century tradition of the Russian intelligentsia, trying to create a constructive cultural and intellectual program for constitutional Russia.

## The Situation in Philosophy at the Turn of 1905/1906

### *Philosophical Societies*

From the point of view of Russian religious philosophy self-defined as “mystical realism,” the constitutional period brought on, first of all, some rather successful attempts at an organizational-programmatic consolidation, combined with a new definition of the tasks facing the nation’s new intellectual elite.

Soon after the proclamation of the October 17<sup>th</sup> Manifesto, the Vladimir Soloviev Moscow Religious-Philosophical Society was inaugurated. Its dominant orientation being, from the very beginning, Orthodox, it rejected the ideas of a “new religious consciousness” and “new revelation.” The Society’s chief initiator was Bulgakov who, in early 1905, became reconciled with the Church, symbolically confirming it with an act of confession.<sup>1</sup> The co-founders – Father Pavel Florensky (1882-1937), Vladimir Ern (1882-1917), Aleksandr Yelchaninov (1881-1934) and Valentin Svetsitsky (1879-1931) – were also members of an organization called “The Christian Battle Fraternity” which tried to couple Orthodox faith with Christian Socialism.<sup>2</sup> Ideologically, the “Fraternity” was inspired by Evangelical egalitarianism and Eastern-Christian Millenarianism – a Millenarianism that was also retrospective and deliberately purged of elements that seemed heterodox against the official teachings of the Church.

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1 Cf. V.V. Sapov, “Khristianskaia sotsiologiiia S.N. Bulgakova,” Afterword to: *S.N. Bulgakov, Filosofiiia khaziaistva*, p. 348.

2 See George F. Putnam, *Russian Alternatives to Marxism. Christian Socialism and Idealistic Liberalism in Twentieth-Century Russia*, Knoxville 1977, pp. 58-60; see also, M. Bohun “Paradoks religijnej rewolucji. Włodzimierz Ern I Chrześcijańskie Bractwo Walki,” in: *Między reform a rewolucją*, pp. 101-125.



In the years 1906-1907, the Moscow Society members – with Berdiaev at the helm – helped to organize the Petersburg Religious-Philosophical Society. Religiously more varied than the Moscow one, it continued the tradition of the 1901-1903 religious-philosophical meetings and was still involved in the debates concerning the need and necessity of a “new religious consciousness.”<sup>3</sup> The prominent figure of the first series of the new Society’s meetings was Rozanov – to mention only his November 1907 blasphemous lecture *On Sweetest Jesus*. “God-making” became one of the topics of the following sessions and its representatives were heard out.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, Merezhkovsky had radicalized his ideas, proclaiming a religious revolution, i.e., a radical break with the official Church and “historical Christianity” in order to embrace the oncoming religion of the Third Testament – that of the Holy Ghost.<sup>5</sup> He believed that the overthrow of autocracy would follow inevitably from that revolution, in being an autocracy in the religious sense and thus unable to continue without religious sanction. The appointed leader of the imminent religious and political revolution was the radical intelligentsia – a charismatic driving force of the Russian nation. A Russia liberated from the Orthodox Church and autocratic rule would become capable of fulfilling its Messianic mission. A reborn Russia would initiate the era of God’s Kingdom in the history of mankind, with Christ as its only ruler.

A much milder, reformist version of the “new religious consciousness” had been preached at the same time by Berdiaev who advocated the evolutionary ways toward the “new revelation.” Even as he quoted Joachim of Fiore, he distanced himself from the revolutionary chiliasm, prophesying “the Third Kingdom, the Kingdom of the Holy Ghost” as an old, Church-sanctioned Christian hope and emphasizing that the “new revelation” could emerge only from the existing ecclesiastic structures. Irritated and antagonized by Merezhkovsky’s anticlerical radicalism, Berdiaev was to confess years later that

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3 Ibid., pp. 60, 78-85.

4 On January 9, 1909, V.A. Bazarov lectured for the Society on Making God and Seeking God. A fortnight later, the same topic was discussed by Dmitri Filosofov (Ibid., pp. 97-98).

5 In his essay “Revolution and Religion” (1907), Merezhkovsky claimed it to be the result of the 1901-3 religious-philosophical sessions. Having failed to bring on the desired mutual understanding between the representatives of the lay culture and those of the Church, the sessions did not lead to a religious reformation. And yet, their fruit was still greater – for the “new religious consciousness” severed ties with the Orthodox Church and the entire historical Christianity, thereby achieving – on the brink of the 1905 Revolution – the first phase of the Russian religious revolution, namely, a spiritual victory over the official Church.

after discussions with Merezhkovsky he had felt more Orthodox than he had been in fact.<sup>6</sup>

A firm protest against Merezhkovsky's ideas came from Struve – who was still being considered the political mentor of the former “legal Marxists.” Struve called absurd any attempt at combining the revolutionary intellectual tradition with any religious consciousness.<sup>7</sup> He also firmly rejected the Millenarian dream of God's Kingdom on earth, defining it as a “God-materialism” – an attempt at materializing the truths of faith that contradicted the mystical-eschatological concept of history.<sup>8</sup> His views were echoed by Frank, then a close friend and collaborator of Struve: he found (fortunately) unrealistic the idea of maintaining and reinforcing the “revolutionary soul of the intelligentsia” by cutting Marx out of it to replace him with John the Apostle – and yet he believed that idea to be profoundly harmful and potentially dangerous.<sup>9</sup>

Despite their differences, the two Religious-Philosophical Societies were symptoms of one and the same phenomenon, namely, an institutionalization of the philosophical life as part of civic society that had been emerging as a result of the constitutional transformations. They also epitomized an intellectual exchange focused on religious-philosophical problems that were of more than just philosophical importance, being also vital to Russia's spiritual and national rebirth. Unlike the semi-closed and officially licensed religious-philosophical meetings of 1901-1903, the post-Revolution Religious-Philosophical Societies acted within the frames of the general right of free associations. Rather than places of dialogue between the intellectual elite and selected clergy representatives, they were institutionalized discussion forums of both professional and popular nature, provoking no particular interest of the Church authorities. Nevertheless, the topics of their debates, and even their very names, promoted philosophical-religious problems, signaling the deliberate striving of the two Societies' leaders – Moscow's Bulgakov and Petersburg's Berdiaev – to construe a philosophy capable of a creative integration with modern theology. As Berdiaev correctly observed some years later, the phenomenon was quite new and original to European thought, the philosophy and theology of the West preferring to keep apart from each other.<sup>10</sup> There was yet another intention – one

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6 See N.A. Berdiaev, *Samopoznaniiie*, p. 157.

7 See P. Struve, “Spor s D.S. Merezhkovskym” (1908), in: *D.S. Merezhkovsky: Pro et contra. Lichnost' i tvorchestvo Dmitriia Merezhkovskovo v otsenke sovremiennikov*, Sankt Petersburg 2001, p. 161.

8 *Ibid.*, pp. 168-169.

9 S. Frank, “O tak nazyvaemom novom religioznom soznanii,” *Ibid.*, p. 312.

10 See N. Berdiaev, *Russkaia idea*, p. 237.

that Bulgakov and Berdiaev preferred not to express directly, and yet, it obviously motivated their activities – namely, the intention to make the striving for a modernized religious consciousness more philosophic, thereby limiting the influence of Merezhkovsky’s and Rozanov’s anti-philosophical and anti-Christian radicalism.

### *Signposts*

Another crucial symptom of the 1905-1906 intellectual situation was an increasing desire to oppose the revolutionary movement that had been pushing the moderate forces into a ceaseless confrontation with the authorities, making impossible a full enjoyment of guaranteed constitutional freedoms. The boldest and the most authoritative declaration on this subject became that of Struve, published in program essay collection *Signposts* [*Vekhi*, March 1909] and received (not quite deservedly) by public opinion as a definitive break with the traditions of the Russian radical intelligentsia.<sup>11</sup> The majority of the book’s seven authors were former “legal Marxists” of the *Problems of Idealism* circle (Berdiaev, Bulgakov, Kistiakovsky, Frank and Struve himself) – no wonder, then, that the book was received as the second (after *Problems of Idealism*) program declaration of the intellectual elite of Russian liberalism. Not quite ungrounded, the classification was but partially correct. While *Problems of Idealism* had formulated the program of a left-wing liberalism – the then dominating trend of Russian liberal thought – *Vekhi* became the manifesto of a right-wing liberalism that was anti-revolutionary and declared that the Act of October 17<sup>th</sup> 1907, should have formally ended the intelligentsia’s war with autocracy, inaugurating a positive co-operation of the intellectual elites and the “historical authorities” in building an economically and culturally powerful Russian “state of law” [*pravovoe gosudarstvo*]. The new views were not representative of the mainstream of Russian liberalism. The Constitutional Democrats’ ideologues joined the accusatory chorus of voices condemning *Signposts* as a disgraceful treason and an attack on the defeated.<sup>12</sup> Struve lost his

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11 For a comprehensive presentation and analysis of the contents of *Signposts*, see my book *Filozofia prawa rosyjskiego liberalizmu*, pp. 389-404. See also: C. Read, *Religion, Revolution and the Russian Intelligentsia 1900-1912: The Vekhi Debate and Its Intellectual Background*, London 1979.

12 The Russian liberals published as many as three volumes of essays as a reply to *Signposts*: *Po Vekham* (Moscow 1909), *V zashchitu inteligentsii* (Moscow 1909) and *Intelligentsia v Rossii* (including Milukov’s essay, “The Intelligentsia and the Historical Tradition,” Moscow 1910).

reputation amongst the ranks of the party that he had co-founded,<sup>13</sup> while the party's leader, Pavel Milukov, went on a lecturing tour, chastising the *Signposts* authors for their dangerous departures from the liberal orthodoxy. The chief dogma of that orthodoxy was, of course, the unconditional primacy of political struggle.

Merezhkovsky, predictably, joined the group of *Signposts*' critics. In his article *Seven Humble Ones* – read out as a lecture for the Petersburg Religious-Philosophical Society on April 25<sup>th</sup> 1909 – he condemned the *Signposts* authors for indirectly assisting the reactionaries and compromising the cause of Russia's religious rebirth.<sup>14</sup>

From the point of view of the objectives of the present book, the two especially noteworthy chapters of *Signposts* are the essays by Struve and by Berdiaev. It was Struve who conducted the most fundamental and consistent reckoning with the tradition of the Russian radical intelligentsia. Berdiaev, on the other hand, focused on the problem of relations between the intelligentsia's intellectual history and the tasks of philosophy – between the intellectuals' "truth-justice" and the cognitive truth.

The Russian intelligentsia – Struve argued – was characterized by a specific "dissidence" – an "alienation from the state structures and hostility toward it [the state]."<sup>15</sup> The first and paradigmatic Russian intellectual had been Bakunin. His anarchism represented the anti-state attitude in an absolute form – while the revolutionary radicals adopted a theoretically relativized, though politically uncompromising variant. The Russian intelligentsia had emerged in the 1840s when the Europeanized educated class felt useless and estranged from their state. As a political force self-defined in opposition to the state, the intelligentsia took shape during the years of the Great Reform, in the times of Chernyshevsky; its political activity culminated in the revolutionary years 1905-1906. Anti-religiousness had always made an inherent part of the intelligentsia's identity;

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13 See R. Pipes, *Struve: Liberal on the Right, 1905-1944*, Cambridge, Mass. 1980, p. 114.

14 See D.S. Merezhkovsky, "Siem' smiriennikh," in: *Merezhkovsky, Polnoe sobreniie sochinenii*, vol 12, Petersburg-Moscow 1911, pp. 69-81 (first published in *Rech'*, April 26, 1909.

Completing the scene is the opinion of Lenin who called *Signposts* "an encyclopedia of liberal renegacy" (Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 16, 1963, p. 124). The leader of the Bolsheviks doubted the sincerity of Milukov's condemnation of *Signposts* – he was convinced that Milukov pretended to be the journal's critic in order to win popularity, while, in truth, he wholly identified with the content of the criticized book (Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 16, 1963, p. 124).

15 P.B. Struve, *Intelligentsia i revolutsia*, quoted after the anthology *V poiskakh put'i. Russkaia intelligentsia i sud'by Rossii*, Moscow 1992, p. 137.

Soloviev – who, mentally, had nothing in common with the intelligentsia – had been wrong in ascribing to it unconsciously religious attitudes. The activists and the thinkers of the Russian Enlightenment – Radishchev included – had not been members of the intelligentsia, since they had reasoned in religious and state categories. The intelligentsia in a specifically Russian sense emerged only after the completion of the process of “disassociating” a large part of the Europeanized, educated class from the autocratic state that, under Peter the Great, had initiated that same process of Europeanization. The dissociation process consisted in self-definition by negation, which made it essentially pathological. The absolute opposition-mindedness of the Russian intelligentsia turned out to be a destructive force, organically incapable of a constructive, state-building action. That was why the Russian intelligentsia had responded to the October 1905 Manifesto with increased attacks on the “historical statehood” and the “bourgeois social system” – attacks marked by a ferocious hatred and a lethal straightforwardness of conclusions and proposals.<sup>16</sup>

Struve’s account of the radical intelligentsia was diametrically opposed to the apology of the intelligentsia by a New Populist author, Ivanov-Razumnik (1878-1946), in his two-volume *Istiriia russkoi obshchestvennoi mysli* (Petersburg 1907). Ivanov-Razumnik’s book was a hymn in praise of the intelligentsia in the normative sense of the term, i.e., the intelligentsia defined as an “ethical category” opposed to the notion of “middle class” signifying all kinds of political and social conformism. Its central heroes were, therefore, representatives of the radical democratic and populist traditions: Belinsky, Herzen, Chernyshevsky, Dobrolubov, Pisarev, Lavrov and Mikhailovsky. One of the final chapters was devoted to the authors of *Problems of Idealism*. Ivanov-Razumnik judged them all favorably as “idealistic individualists” involved in a struggle for high ethical ideals and thus fitting in the category of non-conformist intelligentsia.<sup>17</sup> The publishing of *Signposts* made it clear, however, that – following the 1905-1906 Revolution – the former “legal Marxists” had broken out of the “intellectuals’ solidarity.” Abandoning loyalty toward the intelligentsia’s “struggle for liberation,” they chose an elitist intellectual mission of shaping the culture and working at the spiritual regeneration of the nation.

Struve proved more consistent in his break with “intelligentsia-ness” than were his *Signposts* co-authors. A supporter of state nationalism, he foresaw that economic development would transform the ideologically involved intelligentsia into non-political professionals.

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16 Ibid., p. 144.

17 See R.V. Ivanov-Razumnik, *Istiriia russkoi obshchestvennoi mysli*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Petersburg 1908, vol. II, chapter VIII: “Idealisticheskii individualism.”

A striking signal of that tendency was the declarations of literary critic Nikhail Gershenzon (1869-1925). In his introduction to *Signposts*, Gershenzon described the common platform of the book's authors as their conviction of the superiority of spiritual life over external social forces, as well as of the desired rebirth of social life through moral perfection, rather than through political reforms. In his essay *Creative Self-Knowledge*, he went even further, condemning revolutionary activity itself and warning the intelligentsia against the people's hatred, while he encouraged them to accept the authorities who, with bayonets and prisons, defended the educated class from the plebeian rage.

Struve did not go as far. While accepting lawfulness of revolutionary struggle against non-reformed autocracy, he merely distanced himself from radical revolutionary action. He hoped that, following the October 17<sup>th</sup> Manifesto, revolutionary form of struggle ought to give way to a constructive opposition representing the idea of state nationalism. He prognosticated that economic development would transform the ideologically involved intelligentsia into Western-type professionals – and wholeheartedly supported such an evolution.

Berdiaev and Bulgakov, who expected a healing spiritual revolution, endowing Russia with a special mission in the transformation of the world, did not fit in the frame of such a prosaically realistic program. Nor did they fit, however, the social-oriented definition of the intelligentsia by which any under-educated student-revolutionary became a typical intellectual – while Soloviev, for that matter, was not one. The mission that the two wished to represent was one of an intellectual *elite*, a spiritual aristocracy of philosophical and religious leaders of the nation.

And yet, in Berdiaev's text inaugurating the book, *Philosophical Truth and the Moral Truth of the Intelligentsia*, extra-philosophical aspirations and objectives of philosophy were not discussed. Instead, the article defended the philosophical autonomy of truth against the despotic domination of utilitarian-moral and political criteria. A typical Russian intellectual – the author argued – is not interested in the truthfulness of an idea but, rather, he searches philosophy for instruments to fight for social justice, instruments for realizing the class interests of the proletariat or the peasants; not being concerned with truth, he focuses on the real or alleged social-political function of an idea, dividing ideas into "reactionary" or "progressive," "bourgeois" or "proletarian." His attitude toward science was identical – when the Russian intelligentsia welcomed scientific Positivism, it was not for their interest in cognitive truth, but because they identified the scientific spirit with political progress and social radicalism. It meant, in fact, succumbing to the temptation of the Great Inquisitor who demanded that truth be renounced for the sake of the people's happiness.

The argument was supportive of Struve's protest against "the hegemony of politics over the entire area of the spirit that is independent from it." Berdiaev's diagnosis suggested a necessary professionalization and de-politicization of philosophy, so that it became free from the dictate of political correctness. And yet, Berdiaev himself had never become a strictly academic philosopher ignoring the salvation of the world. He opined, however, that philosophy was obliged to respect the superiority of cognitive truth to the moral argument, and even more so – to the ideological one. Similar opinions were voiced by other co-authors of *Signposts*, arguing in favor of the autotelic status of culture and the superiority of spiritual values to utilitarian ones. They differed, however, in their respective emphases and priorities.

Sergei Bulgakov in his essay *Heroism and Asceticism* attacked the intelligentsia's populism as a form of self-admiration and a usurpation of the role of the Russian people's saviors. He accused the intelligentsia of a "heroic extremism" smacking of autohypnosis and ideological possession, finding the intelligentsia's attitude toward the people paternalistic, marked by a sense of their own superiority to the immature, unenlightened masses. In Bulgakov's opinion, it was the sad result of a deep split between the Russian intelligentsia and the Russian people, following not so much from the discrepancy in education, as from the intelligentsia's atheism and cosmopolitanism. Severing ties with Christian and national traditions, the intelligentsia confined itself to a self-satisfied, conceited immaturity which made it reject the ideal of the saint in favor of the ideal of the revolutionary student.

The same subject was elaborated on in detail by A.S. Izgoev in his essay *On the Young Intelligentsia* which described Russian students as men living in an "exceptionally infantile culture," contemptuous of "bourgeois" science, sticking to "progressive" dogmas and intolerant of any expression of independent thought.

In Bulgakov's interpretation, however, that mental framework of the Russian intelligentsia did possess also a positive side, namely, an unconscious religiousness which – albeit deformed – was still capable of being healed through a return to Christian sources. The Russian intelligentsia was intensely seeking the State of God, wishing to follow God's will, as in heaven, so on earth – which distinguished it favorably from the Western middle classes.

The diagnosis was firmly rejected Semen Frank in his essay *The Ethics of Nihilism*. In Frank's opinion, the Russian intelligentsia was not religious, since religiousness could not be combined with ascribing an absolute meaning to transitory earthly goods. The intelligentsia's worldview – Frank argued – constituted a curious mix of nihilism and moralizing, of nihilistic content and moralizing form, of absence of religious faith and rigidity of moral directives.

Bulgakov was right, diagnosing the intelligentsia's fanatical faith in a future paradise on earth. Frank himself, however, believed that secularized Millenarianism to be an especially dangerous form of nihilism, rather than an acceptable symptom of religiousness.

The main part of Frank's essay, however, pertains to another topic, namely, that of the intelligentsia's attitude to material wealth and productiveness. Frank defined the Russian intelligentsia's pseudo-religion as a religion of social justice – distributive justice, to be precise – preaching an equal division of material and cultural goods and suffused with the spirit of productiveness, both material and cultural. The Russian intellectual – he claimed – had transformed a love of the poor into a love of poverty itself, rejecting the ideal of a wealthy, intensive and powerful life.

The ones who came closest to that ideal were, of course, the Populist ideologists. Being fully conscious of the fact, The *Signposts* authors emphasized the positive role that the reception of Marxism had played in Russia. The Marxism of the 1890s had been the first Russian intelligentsia's ideology that dared to preach the primacy of development – that of production, as well as that of culture. Frank stressed, however, that the change had not been permanent: upon the emergence of the Marxist revolutionary movement, the Populist spirit had returned, taking control of Marxist theory.

The same evolution was acknowledged by Berdiaev. In his opinion, Marxism in Russia had been subject to a Populist distortion that transformed historical objective-truth-seeking materialism into a “class point of view,” i.e., a new form of “subjective sociology.”

A separate figure amongst the *Signposts* authors was Ukrainian thinker Bogdan Kistiakovsky (1868-1920) – a Marxist in his youth who came to study under Georg Simmel and Wilhelm Windelband and wrote a valuable doctor thesis, *The Society and the Individual* [*Gesellschaft und Einzelwesen*, Berlin 1899]. Unlike his Russian colleagues, Kistiakovsky was not a religious thinker, representing “scientific idealism” that sought to overcome Positivist naturalism by supplying social sciences with strong epistemological foundations, arrived at through transcendental (but not transcendent!) New Kantian idealism.<sup>18</sup>

Kistiakovsky's essay published in *Signposts* was entitled: *In Defense of Law*. It blamed the Russian intelligentsia for totally ignoring legal culture and failing to understand that law was an independent social value, rather than a mere tool for realizing some political goals. To illustrate that accusation, Kistiakovsky quoted opinions on law pronounced by both the rightist and the

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18 For a comprehensive presentation of Kistiakovsky's scholarly work, see Chapter VI of my book *Legal Philosophies of Russian Liberalism*, Oxford 1987.



leftist thinkers – such as the Slavophiles and Hezen, Leontiev and Mikhailovsky – and pointing out that a deep distrust of law marked even declared Westernizers, such as Kavelin or Plekhanov. He found more evidence of a weak and distorted legal consciousness in the programs of Russian political parties, exposing their evident tendency toward a detailed regulation of social relations, which – he observed – was typical of police states’ bureaucracies.

The general conclusion of Kistiakovsky’s observations undermined Gershenson’s opinion that social rebirth depended on inner moral perfection, rather than on “outer forms” (the legal ones included) – while supporting Petrażycki’s declaration that, in social life, law was more important than morality. Amongst the authors of *Signposts*, Struve was, obviously, the closest to sharing those opinions.

Let us return now to the cultural program presented by *Signposts*. It was based on the appeal for a deep revision of popular visions of Russian 19<sup>th</sup> century thought, postulated in greatest detail in the essay by Berdiaev. All the authors of the book agreed that Russian intellectual history must not be identified with the tradition of the radical intelligentsia – and that a new canon of intellectual tradition ought to be established, focused on religious thought and attempted definitions of Russian national identity. Berdiaev specified that program, postulating a new positive valuation of Chaadaev’s and the Slavophiles’ heritages, as well as a serious treatment of Dostoevsky’s religious philosophy; he also suggested acknowledgement of the works by philosophizing theologians (like Nesmelov), as well as those by representatives of heterodox mysticism: Rozanov, Merezhkovsky and Viacheslav Ivanov. Berdiaev was against ignoring or marginalizing professional idealist philosophy, represented by a figure as great as Chicherin (“who can teach us a lot”) and by others: Kozlov, Lopatin, Sergei Trubetskoi and, the most recent, Nikolai Lossky. The central, dominating place in the heritage of Russian philosophy belonged – according to Berdiaev – to Soloviev. Soloviev’s thought was described as the perfect combination of the great tradition of universal philosophy and specifically Russian motives – which made it the ideal starting point for the development of a Russian philosophy marked by authentic national characteristics and, at the same time, related to all-European and all-human tradition.

#### *“Put” Publishing House*

Realization of that program became the focus of Moscow publishing house “The Way” (“Put”) founded in 1910 on the initiative of some members of the Soloviev Religious-Philosophical Society. Its organizer and owner, Margarita

Morozova, declared that the objective of “Put” was to contribute to “defining our national image.”<sup>19</sup> In the program declaration that completed the first volume of the series of collective works – *On Vladimir Soloviev* – the objective was justified by the following diagnosis:

Russia’s self-knowledge is in the state of a prolonged crisis. The old foundations of life and the traditional forms of consciousness have been destroyed or are being destroyed in front of our eyes, while the new ones are just being born in heavy struggle.<sup>20</sup>

The conclusion was Berdiaev’s:

Russia’s historical task today is a mature, brave national consciousness in all the spheres of life, related to a universalist religious consciousness.<sup>21</sup>

Besides Morozova, Berdiaev and Bulgakov, the group of the publishing house organizers and editors included Prince Evgeny Trubetskoi, literary critic and translator Grigory Rachinsky and Vladimir Ern. Amongst the collaborating authors were nearly all the representatives of religious philosophy, poetry and literary criticism of the Silver Age – including the excellent historian of Russian thought, Mikhail Gershenzon; the ideological leader of the Moscow Plato-oriented New Slavophiles, Pavel Florensky; theologian and historian of philosophy Vassily Zenkovsky (1881-1962), the future author of the excellent *History of Russian Philosophy*; major Symbolist poets – Viacheslav Ivanov and Andrei Bely; a friend of Soloviev’s and pioneer of the rebirth of metaphysical idealism Lev Lopatin, and an outstanding representative of the young generation of professional philosophers, Nikolai Lossky (1870-1965). After some hesitation, provoked by his attachment to the philosophizing Westernism of the journal “Logos,” “Put” was also joined by Frank. Rozanov – despite his own willingness – was not invited to collaborate.

In a few years’ time, the publishing house boasted an impressive output. The series of collective volumes – apart from the abovementioned book on Soloviev – saw the publication of *Lev Tolstoy’s Religion* (1912). The series “Russian Thinkers” – inaugurated with Gershenzon’s monograph *The Life of V.S. Pecherin* (1910) – was enriched by two program-type books: the monograph on Khomiakov by Berdiaev (December 1911) and the book on Skovorod by Ern (1913). Gershenzon published *The Collected Works [Polnoe sobranie sochinenii]* of Kireevsky (1910), as well as Chaadaev’s *Works and Letters*

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19 Quoted after E. Gollerbach, *K niezrimomu gradu. Religiozno-filosofskaia grupa “Put” (1910-1919) v poiskakh novoi russkoi idientichnosti*, Petersburg 2000, p. 23.

20 O Vladimiriie Solovievie, ‘Put’, Moscow 1911: Ot izdatelstva “Put”, p. 1.

21 See R. Gollerbach, *K niezrimomu gradu*, p. 23.

[*Sochineniia i pis'ma*, 1913]. French-language texts by Soloviev were made available to Russian readers, along with a number of books on Western philosophy, such as Lossky's book on Bergson, Ern's books on the Italian ontologists Rosmini and Gioberti, or the monograph of the Catholic modernist Edouard Le Roy (Bergson's successor in College de France), *Dogma and Critique*. The editorial plans for the series "Philosophy Classics," initiated with the publication of Fichte's works, included the translations of Plato and Plotinus, Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius the Aeropagite and Erigena, Cusanus, Hegel, Schelling and Baader. First and foremost, however, the "Put" offer included a number of original philosophical works by Russian authors: Berdiaev (*Filosofia svobody*, 1911), Bulgakov (*Filosofia khoziaistva*, vol. I; *Svet nevechernii*, 1911, and others), Lopatin (*Filosofskiiie kharakteristiki i rechi*, 1911), Trubetskoi (*Mirosozertsaniie Vl. S. Solovieva*, vol 1-2, 1913, and others), Florensky (*Stolp i utverzheniie istini*, 1913) and Ern (*Bor'ba za Logos*, 1911).

The overall result was a factual institutionalization of Russian religious philosophy of the Silver Age whose central position in contemporary Russian culture thus became firmly established, as was its influence on the subsequent philosophical search for Russian identity.

## **New Slavophilism, Ontologism and the Search for Eastern-Christian Sources of Russian Philosophy**

### *The Program of National Philosophy*

The founding of "Put" publishing house can be described as the moment when the Russian religious philosophers summarized their theretofore evolution, trying to define a common platform of future activity. The evidence was their three self-defining decisions.

Firstly, the founders and sympathizers of the publishing house described themselves as Christian philosophers, thus closing the period of debates over a brand new religious consciousness – which was not tantamount, however, to giving up hopes for a profound renewal of religious life and of Church structures.

Secondly, they decided to create a consciously *Russian* philosophy that would be universal in its aspirations, yet aimed at defining the Russian spiritual identity and establishing grounds for a specifically Russian philosophical tradition within that of world philosophy. Paradoxically, it was proposed in

relation to Soloviev who never believed in the possibility of a “self-made” Russian philosophy, firmly expressing his opinion to that effect.<sup>22</sup>

Thirdly, the first two objectives were combined in a vision of Russia’s great historical mission – that of leading mankind toward a religious rebirth and a Christian transformation of earthly life.

The pertaining discussion was initiated with Berdiaev’s book on Khomiakov – published with the official date 1912, yet available even in late 1911. It postulated a return to the Slavophile tradition, defining Slavophilism as the first independent Russian national ideology and the pioneering attempt at formulating Russia’s national consciousness.<sup>23</sup> Berdiaev called the Slavophile national ideology a vision of the national mission, arguing, however, that the Slavophiles had failed to attain a “pure Messianism” comparable with that of the Polish Romantics – which he deplored. In his opinion, Slavophilism had been dominated by “missionism,” i.e., the view that each great nation performed a particular mission in the world’s history. That, however, differed from true Messianism – the concept of a superior, universalist mission entailing mankind’s universal rebirth and eliminating any form of national exclusiveness. A classic Messianism was the Polish one: “the most consistent Messianist had been Towiański.”<sup>24</sup> While the Slavophilism of Khomiakov and Kireevsky had contained some elements of Messianism, it had never reached the level of the Polish model, being polluted by Russian nationalism and a conservative fascination with the past. Not only did it lack a consistent universalism, but also a prophetic dimension that was so evident in the Polish Romantics. This fact facilitated the Slavophiles’ evolution toward an ethnic nationalism, so severely criticized by Soloviev.<sup>25</sup>

### *Discussing Messianism*

Berdiaev’s book published at about the same time – *Philosophy of Freedom* (1911) – offered a positive justification of Russian Messianism. The Russian

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22 V.S. Soloviev, *Natsionalnii vopros v Rossii*, Chapter V, “Chto trebuetsa ot russkoi partii?,” in: Soloviev, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, vol. 1, Moscow 1989, pp. 346-349. Soloviev ended his argument in a firm conclusion: “We observe no positive symptoms, nor any definite possibilities (under the given conditions) for a great and independent Russian future in the sphere of thought and knowledge” (p. 349).

23 N.A. Berdiaev, *Aleksei Stepanovich Khomiakov*, Tomsk, 1996, p. 5.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 133. Berdiaev quoted the book by T. Canonico, *Andrea Towiański*, Rome 1895, French transl. 1897 (Polish transl. Torino 1897).

25 *Ibid.*, pp. 133-134.

people – Berdiaev claimed – had long believed in Russia’s Messianic mission and they were right.<sup>26</sup> Russia is, after all, situated between the East and the West, it combines the two worlds, constituting the knot of universal history. Only Russia is capable of combining the Eastern-type culture based on the contemplation of divine truths with the Western type representing the principle of human activity.<sup>27</sup> Only Russia can bring about the union of the Churches, realizing the mystical prophecies concerning a new, final revelation – that of the Holy Ghost. The religious movement that has been progressing in Russia is the bearer of a new Messianic consciousness that heralds the new revelation. Obviously, the birthplace of the new revelation must be the existing Orthodox Church of Russia.<sup>28</sup>

Berdiaev’s messianic visions were supported by Viacheslav Ivanov who furnished them with a programmatically ecumenical and pro-Catholic interpretation. In his lecture *V. Soloviev’s Religious Action* (given to the Moscow Religious-Philosophical Society on February 10<sup>th</sup> 1911), Ivanov interpreted Soloviev’s ideas as an expression of “pure Catholicism” that ignored the division to the East and the West.<sup>29</sup> That “Catholicism” – he argued – followed from a nostalgia for universality that was deeply rooted in the spiritualism of the Russian nation – albeit its manifestations were specific and often misused. In Dostoevsky, it had taken on the form of an imperialist Messianism, while in Soloviev it was transformed into an ecumenical Messianism. Both referred to the myth of Moscow as the Third Rome – yet, on a different level than did the Russian tsarist state, namely, by emphasizing the word “Rome” that implied universality, rather than stress the opposition between the Third Rome and its two predecessors. Both tried to convince the Russians that the truth represented by the Russian tsarist state must be a universal one, of an all-human significance.<sup>30</sup>

That is how the idea of the Russian Empire’s universal mission in whose name Dostoevsky had claimed Constantinople for Russia got transformed into that of Russia’s special role in the task of uniting the Churches. The next step

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26 N.A. Berdiaev, *Filosofia svobody. Smysl tvorchestvs*, Moscow 1989, pp. 183-184.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 228.

28 *Ibid.*, pp. 24-225.

29 “Religioznoe delo V. Solovieva,” in: V. Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 3, Brussels 1979, pp. 301-302.

30 According to Ivanov, identifying “the Russian idea” with the Third Rome – i.e., Rome of the Spirit – meant as much as saying: “You are Russian, therefore remember one thing: your truth is the universal truth; if you wish to save your soul, do not be afraid to lose it” (*Ibid.*, p. 326).

was to find a new connotation for Khomiakov's *sobornost'* which Ivanov promptly turned into a synonym of "ecumenism."<sup>31</sup>

The ideas did not meet with a unanimous acceptance by the "Put'" group. Some of its members were afraid that a Messianic universalism might be too farfetched an ambition in Russian circumstances – harmful, too, to the formative process of Russian identity. Evgeny Trubetskoi wrote a polemical essay with Berdiaev's book on Khomiakov – *The Old and the New National Messianism* (1912) – focusing on two issues: first – that no nation may claim to be representing the universal truth in history and, second – that Russian Messianism confused Russianness with Orthodoxy and the Orthodox Church with Christian universalism, thus diluting the Russian national identity in its alleged universalism and hampering its development.<sup>32</sup> Similar in spirit were the reactions of Bulgakov who – while maintaining reticence about Russia's global mission – argued that the universalist content of religion was compatible with a national form and therefore, the notions of a "Russian Christ" and a "holy Russia" were not blasphemous, but testified to a deep, intimate relationship between Russian-ness and Orthodoxy. Bulgakov used an analogous argument to defend the program of creating a national Russian philosophy – all-human in content and, at the same time, conveying specifically national traits of the Russian mind.<sup>33</sup>

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31 Ibid., p. 181.

The closeness of Ivanov and Berdiaev was greatest in years 1910-1911. In a letter to his wife of 1910, Berdiaev wrote that he had been disputing with Ivanov until 5 a.m.: "Forever on Catholicism and Orthodoxy, the West and the East" (cf. A.B. Shishkin, "Iz pisiem k V.I. Ivanovu," in: *Viacheslav Ivanov. Materialy i issledovaniia*, Moscow 1996, p. 125). While writing his essay "The Problem of the East and the West" in V. Soloviev's *Religious Consciousness* (published in the collected volume *On Vladimir Soloviev, "Put'" 1911*), Berdiaev repeatedly consulted Ivanov, directly and by letters (cf. *Ibid.*, p. 137).

32 E.N. Trubetskoi, *Izbranniie*, Moscow 1997, pp. 312, 319-329.

33 See S.N. Bulgakov, "Razmyshleniia o natsionalnosti" (*Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii*, No 3. 1910) in: Bulgakov, *Izbranniie statii*, Moscow 1993, pp. 435-457.

At the same time, Bulgakov authored an extensive, interesting study on the problems of Messianism and eschatology – devoted, however, to religious Messianism and its relationship to Socialist ideologies as expressions of a secularized Millenarianism. The question of national Messianism was discussed by Bulgakov only in connection with the Jewish Messianism (see, Bulgakov, "Apokaliptika I sotsializm," *Ibid.*, pp. 368-434).

*New Slavophile Ontologism and the Controversy with “Logos”*

Despite the lack of unanimity in the understanding of Messianism (except for the “messianic minimum” in the shape of the idea of national missions) the co-founders of the “Put” Group agreed with Berdyaev as to the relevance of Khomiakov’s philosophy and supported his postulate of direct reference to the Slavophile concept of “new philosophical principles.” In Berdyaev’s case, those ideas were not novel – he had elaborated on them even in the pre-Revolution years, in his essay *Khomiakov as Philosopher* (*Mir Bozii*, July 1904). However – just like in so many other cases – the direction of thought that had been budding on the threshold of the Revolution came to its full shape and generated numerous supporters only in the years of the so-called Stolypin’s Reaction.

Khomiakov’s philosophical relevance – Berdyaev wrote in 1904 – consists in that, in his critique of Hegelianism, he justified the thesis of the definitive bankruptcy of rationalism that was “the original sin” of Western philosophy. The development of rationalism, culminating in Hegel’s “absolute idealism,” had led to pan-logical reduction of Being to Thought, and thus to a *de-ontologization of the world* that denied Being a substantial reality. Berdyaev approvingly quoted Khomiakov’s argument that rationalism – by considering notion to constitute the sole foundation of all thinking – inevitably destroyed the world, transforming all its given reality into abstract possibility. In accordance with the intention of the Slavophile philosopher, he extended his criticism of Hegelianism to all German idealism, starting from Kant, and hence drove the conclusion concerning a necessary shift from abstract idealism which “transformed being into nothingness” to a “concrete spiritualism” that would restore the world’s ontological reality. Khomiakov seemed, in this perspective, a direct forerunner of Solovyev and the “Put” Group philosophers.<sup>34</sup>

Specifying on the idea, Berdyaev argued that, having done with the Positivist scientism, Russian religious philosophy now faced the problem which Kireevsky and Khomiakov had struggled with even back in the 1840s, i.e., that of overcoming rationalistic idealism, rediscovering the “substrate” for the world of ideas and restoring to philosophy the *istinno sushchiie*, i.e. real (ontologically defined) being and real (existentially defined) continuity.<sup>35</sup> The only difference was that – while for the Slavophiles the main object of criticism had been, obviously, Hegel – the contemporary religious philosophers found their major exemplification of rationalism (their chief opponent) in Kant’s and New Kantian

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34 N.A. Berdiaev, “A.S. Khomiakov kak filosof,” in: Berdiaev, *Sub specie aeternitatis* (2002 edition) pp.217-218.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 222.

philosophies.<sup>36</sup> This, however, only confirmed the diagnosis of Khomiakov who had treated Kant and Hegel as two major representatives of essentially one and the same line of thought – the one initiated by the author of *Critique of Pure Reason* and developed with extreme consistency by the founder of “Absolute Idealism.”

Understandably, such a description of the contemporary front of philosophical contention brought on a fundamental re-evaluation of the attitude toward Kant whom the thinkers of the Berdiaev circle had until recently treated as their major ally in the war with Positivism. In his article of 1905 on Shestov’s work (*Tragediia i obidennost’, Voprosy zhizni*, March 1905) Berdiaev agreed with Shestov that Kant was dangerous and needed to be battled against; he justified this view by presenting the Kantian mind as “a Philistine mind” and Kant’s ethics as a “scholastic formalism” that sanctified the “everyday morality” and was utterly powerless against tragic experience.<sup>37</sup> In *Philosophy of Freedom*, he extended that criticism to Kant’s theory of cognition, treating it as an example of the excessive focusing on epistemological questions (“Gnoseology” was the term used by the author himself) that had plagued European philosophy since Descartes’ times. His argument pertaining to that question is worth quoting here as a *locus classicus* of Russian anti-epistemologism:

Kant has given us a perfect pattern of police-type philosophy. It is akin to the police state and to the secularization of the society. Philosophy had ceased to be a holy gnosis, transforming itself into a method for police regulation of abstract thinking, a body guarding, a municipal supervisory power whose permission must be asked to build anything in the realm of thought and cognition. Gnoseology performs the police service and usurps the police function. But the police liberates not, and thus, neither does its twin – gnoseology. A police-type philosophy, just like the police state, inevitably nips off the roots of life. Such a philosophy is inevitably bereft of realism and transforms being into illusion.<sup>38</sup>

The positive opposite of theoretical-cognitive philosophy was – according to Berdiaev – religious philosophy. Nothing but religion – he argued – “makes the living grounds of philosophy,” nothing but religion “nourishes philosophy with the reality of being.”<sup>39</sup> He even criticized Soloviev for making religion too philosophic, arguing that it was only to religious thinking that the universal synthesis and All-Unity were accessible. Kireevsky and Khomiakov understood

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36 Ibid.

37 “Tragediia i obidennost’,” Ibid., pp. 299, 303-304.

38 N.A. Berdiaev, *Filosofia svobod. Smisl tvorchestva*, pp. 19-20.

39 Ibid., p. 20.



that better than Soloviev and were therefore more consistent in their criticism of rationalism than he had been.

In his own introduction to *Sub specie aeternitatis*, Berdiaev described his new, post-idealist standpoint using the term “mystical realism,” as opposed to the two forms of phenomenological “illusionism” – the Positivist one that reduced the world to a total of empirical states of the mind, and the Idealist one that denied the substantial reality of being/existence [*sushchiie*] by identifying it with pure thought. In his monograph on Khomiakov, Berdiaev introduced a new terminology, replacing “mystical realism” with “ontologism” and giving both forms of “illusionism” the common name of “meonism” (from the Greek *me-on*, nothingness).<sup>40</sup> To Khomiakov he ascribed the merit of proving that Hegel’s panlogism was not an ontologism, but a variant of meonism, i.e. a triumph of one of the forms of abstract thinking over the “live being.” But above all else, he described the Slavophile philosophers as excellent diagnosticians of the state of Western philosophy who had rightly prognosticated that its future development would be a chain of successive victories of meonism. And so it came to be. Even though – following the collapse of “absolute idealism” – Western philosophy did fall for a brief time (as Khomiakov had foreseen) into the trap of materialism, it emerged from it to embark on the road of Positivist phenomenism and subjective idealism, which eventually led to complete deontologization of the world’s image in the contemporary immanentism and neo-Kantian transcendentalism. It was only the Russian philosophy that followed a different way, searching for the true being in religious experience and mystical cognition.<sup>41</sup>

Strikingly, the diagnosis was fully concordant with the description of the crisis of Western philosophy presented in Soloviev’s master’s thesis. In Soloviev’s opinion, the ultimate result of Western philosophy was the reduction of reality to concepts (in rationalist idealism) or to a bunch of impressions (in empiricism); he believed that the way to overcome that sickly separation of the cognitive subject from the cognized reality was to unite philosophy and religion,

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40 N.A. Berdiaev, *Aleksei Stepanovich Khomiakov*, p. 80.

It is unknown whether Berdiaev realized that Western European philosophy associated the term “ontologism” mainly with the doctrine that had been pronounced erratic and formally condemned by the Vatican in 1861. The Catholic Church found erratic the thesis that “direct cognition of God is quite natural to man’s mind” (cf. E. Gilson, T. Langan, A.A. Maurer, *Recent Philosophy: Hegel to Present*, Random House, 1962, ch. 8).

41 Ibid.

which – as Kireyevsky had foretold – would be achieved through discovering the treasures of spiritual contemplation in the Christian East.<sup>42</sup>

Just like the Slavophiles and Soloviev, Berdiaev, too, found the necessary condition for a newly ontologized philosophy in replacing the rationally conceived subject with the integral personality of the subject directly involved in the world and inherent to the cognized reality, rather than separate from it.<sup>43</sup> For a philosophy of thus conceived “integralism” Berdiaev (in his polemics with Merezhkovsky) used the name “philosophical spiritualism” or (following Sergei Trubetskoi) “concrete idealism.” A slightly different approach – though very similar in terms of the general worldview intention – was adopted by Bulgakov in his seminal study, *Nature in the Philosophy of Vl. Soloviev* (1911).<sup>44</sup> Bulgakov found Soloviev a defender of the ontological status of Nature against the “two nightmares” of contemporary philosophy: mechanist materialism – or the philosophy of pure object, transforming the world into a soulless machine – and idealist subjectivism – or the philosophy of pure subject, reducing reality to a gnosteological pattern, to a naked potentiality of cognition. Following Soloviev, he countered those dangerous errors with “religious materialism.” He emphasized that, in strictly philosophical categories, the system ought to be

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42 See V.S. Soloviev, “Krizis zapadnoi filosofii (Protiv pozitivistov)” in: Soloviev, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, vol. 2, Moscow 1988, pp. 106-107.

Soloviev justified his own diagnosis using the concept of three stages in the development of Western rationalism and empiricism, namely:

Rationalism

The major assumption (dogmatism:) being is cognized by a priori thinking.

The lesser assumption (Kant:) yet, in a priori thinking, we have access only to the forms of our thought.

Conclusion (Hegel:) therefore, the forms of thought are the true being.

Empiricism

The major assumption (Bacon:) the way to know being is through experience.

The lesser assumption (Locke et.al. :) yet, in experience, we have access only to the empirical states of our own consciousness.

Conclusion (Mill:) therefore, empirical states of consciousness are the true being.

The only difference between Soloviev’s and Berdiaev’s diagnoses lay in their respective judgments of Hegelianism: while Soloviev believed Hegel’s “absolute idealism” to be the climax of Western anti-ontologism, Berdiaev identified the perfect anti-ontologism with his contemporary New Kantianism.

43 See N.A. Berdiaev, *Aleksei Stepanovich Khomiakov*, p. 80.

44 S.N. Bulgakov, “Priroda v filosofii Vl. Soloviova,” first published in the collected volume *O Vl. Soloviove*, “Put”, 1911. Quoted after: Bulgakov, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, vol. 1, Moscow 1993, pp. 18-20.

defined as “natural-philosophical spiritualism, or pan-psychism.”<sup>45</sup> Yet, he accepted the term “religious materialism” for axiological reasons – as allusive to the ideas of “Nature’s rehabilitation” and sanctification of matter. Religious materialism – he argued – agrees with natural materialism as to the substantiality of matter and the metaphysical reality of Nature; it considers Man a spiritual-carnal creature, related to Nature by metaphysical ties. At the same time, however, unlike materialism, it perceives Nature as an organic part of the living, divine All-Unity, rather than a dead mechanism.

Evidently, upon its establishment, the “Put” Group boasted a definite philosophical program which helped its reputation as a philosophical school. The program was to create a national Russian philosophy on the grounds of classical Slavophilism and Soloviev’s metaphysics of All-Unity. The philosophical foundations of the budding school were summarized in two separate 1911 publications, namely, Berdiaev’s monograph of Khomiakov and the collective volume *On Vladimir Soloviev*.<sup>46</sup> And yet, from the very onset, what the authors had in common was only the starting point. Evgeny Trubetskoi felt obliged to emphasize that fact in the introduction to his own fundamental work on Soloviev, dated February 18<sup>th</sup> 1913. He wrote that, while the contemporary continuators of Soloviev’s thought did have a common task, they differed in its realizations – much like boughs of a tree that, stemming from one trunk, grow in diverse directions.<sup>47</sup>

The problem of a national Russian philosophy was discussed also by the journal *Logos*, published since 1910 in Petersburg by the Moscow publishing house “Musaget.” Its editors were two young philosophers: Sergei Hessen (1887-1950) – a pupil of Heinrich Rickert and author of the doctor thesis *Über die individuelle Kausalität* (1910), and Fyodor Stepun (1884-1965) – a pupil of William Windelband who made his PhD on Soloviev (*V. Soloviov*, Leipzig 1910) in Germany. They defined their own standpoint on the issue of national philosophical aspects as “supra-nationalism” [*sverkhnatsionalizm*], thus countering both cosmopolitanism and nationalism in philosophy.<sup>48</sup> While

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45 Ibid., p. 20.

46 See V.N. Akulinin, *Filosofiiia vseedinstva. Ot V.S. Soloviova k P.A. Florenskomu*, Novosibirsk 1990, pp. 34-35.

47 See E.N. Trubetskoi, *Mirosozertsanie V.S. Soloviova*, Moscow 1995 (first published 1913), vol. 1, pp. 11-12.

48 On the founding of *Logos* and on its collaborators, see Hessen’s autobiography *Moie zhizneopisanie*, in: *Hessen, Izbranniie sochineniia*, Moscow 1994, pp. 209-211. See also Hessen’s essays “Neoslavianofilstvo filosofii” (1911) and “Idea natsii” (1915) in: *Izbranniie sochineniia*, pp. 71-105.

admitting a national specificity of philosophy as unavoidable and, indeed, welcome, they believed that it must not be a presumed goal, nor can it serve as a pretext to isolate the home philosophical tradition from universal philosophy. In reference to Russia, it was tantamount to a consciously chosen Westernizer orientation, since the *Logos* editors named profound knowledge of the Western philosophical heritage – New Kantian transcendentalism in particular – as conditional to the development of Russian philosophy.

Their position was described with utmost moderation, to avoid provoking anyone. They even took care of preventing the New Kantian orientation from charges of hostility toward religion and mysticism: in a vast essay, *Mysticism and Metaphysics* (*Logos*, I, 1910), Hessen argued that the New Kantians' ambition to establish the limits of the philosophical mind was compatible with the Eastern Christian tradition of negative, apophatic theology of contemplating God in his incognizability and defining his nature as inexpressible to language and inaccessible to reason.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, it seemed obvious that the *Logos* editors sided with Western “gnoseologism” and were philosophically opposed to the program ontologism of the “Put” Group’s religious thinkers.

The religious philosophers found the “gnoseologic” standpoint inadmissible for fundamental reasons. Evgeny Trubetskoi in his book *On the Metaphysical Assumptions of Cognition* (with the characteristic subtitle, *An Attempt to Overcome Kant and Kantianism*), wrote:

It is impossible to pose the question of a religious attitude to the absolute *within gnoseology*, since gnoseology treats only on the necessary assumptions of human cognition and, solving the problem exclusively by means of the logical criteria, it engages no religious assumptions in its analysis. Nor does the result at which we arrive that way entitle us to draw any religious conclusions.<sup>50</sup>

Bulgakov promptly supplied the other side of the argument, observing that “at the basis of truly original philosophical systems, there is always – *horribile dictu* – a philosophical myth” – philosophy itself being, indeed, a “critical or ideological mythology.”<sup>51</sup> For the continuators of Soloviev, the mythology had to be a Christian one. After all, according to Soloviev’s formula, the issue was to “justify the faith of the fathers, raise it to the level of rational consciousness.”<sup>52</sup>

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49 See *Ibid.*, p. 61.

50 E.N. Trubetskoi, *Metafizicheskie predpolozheniia soznaniia: Opit preodoleniia Kanta i kantianstva*, Moscow 1917, p. 34.

51 S.N. Bulgakov, “Transcendentalnaia problema religii,” *Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii*, No 25, 1914, pp. 753, 766.

52 A quotation from Soloviev’s introduction to *The History and the Future of Theocracy* (*Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 4, p. 243).

Realization of that task simply could not start with an immanent analysis of cognitive processes. Its obvious starting point was the positive *data of revelation* – as had been proved by the old Schelling in his critique of the “negative philosophy” of rationalist idealism.

The Russian philosophical movement thus split into “ontological” and transcendental-idealistic. The former gathered the majority of the Silver Age religious thinkers, its core being the co-founders of “Put” Publishers: Evgeny Trubetskoi and the two former “legal Marxists” – Berdiaev and Bulgakov. A separate sub-group was made up of spiritualist philosophers who referred, in various ways, to Leibniz’s monadology: Lev Lopatin, Sergei Askoldov (Alekseiev) and, first of all, Nikolai Lossky. Lossky’s book *The Foundations of Intuitionism* [*Obosnovaniie intuitivizma*, first published in *Problems of Philosophy and Psychology*, No 2-5, 1904] elaborated on the theory of intuition as a “mystical empiricism” that allowed for avoiding the skeptical results of “individualist empiricism” – owing to the fact that, in intuitive cognition, the subject was not separate from the object, while Being was immanently present in the cognitive act. Berdiaev called Lossky’s system an “ontological gnoseology” that supported the status of ontologism as a mystical realism. Lossky – who had initially collaborated with *Logos* – accepted Bulgakov’s reasoning, pronouncing mystical realism to be a specifically Russian philosophy that tried to combine, in an organic synthesis, Leibniz’s spiritualism with Schelling and Hegel’s “mystical rationalism.”<sup>53</sup> The Russian monadologic tradition that had been initiated by Kozlov thus became a vital component of the Russians’ philosophical self-knowledge – of no lesser importance than the Solovievan tradition.

A *sui generis* go-between for “Put” Publishing House and the official Orthodox Church became the ideological leader of Moscow New Slavophiles, Father Pavel Florensky, who opposed Kant’s subjectivist idealism from a Platonic position.

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53 For an extensive presentation of Lossky’s intuitionism, see Berdiaev’s book *Philosophy of Freedom* (N.A. Berdiaev, *Filosofiiia svobodii. Smysl tvorchestva*, pp. 96-122). Among his predecessors, Lossky named Wincenty Lutosławski – a Polish pupil of Teichmüller and a philosophy professor at Kazan University from 1890-1893 (see, N.O. Lossky, *The Intuitive Basis of Knowledge*, authorized translation by Natalia Duddington, London 1919, pp. 218-220). He was convinced that Russian religious philosophy expressed the general Slavic spirit, declaring so in his lectures on Polish, Czech and Russian Religious Philosophy, given in 1933 at Stanford University in California. He published three of those lectures – on Krasieński, Cieszkowski and Lutosławski – in a brochure entitled “Three Polish Messiahists” (Prague 1937).

The other trend – the transcendental-idealistic one – united representatives of the young generation of New Kantians (Hessen, Stepun, Boris Jakovenko, Boris Vysheslavtsev) with those of the older generation – from the pioneer of Russian New Kantianism, Aleksandr Vvedensky, to Bogdan Kistiakovsky, co-author of *Problems of Idealism* and *Signposts*.

The journal of the Moscow Psychological Society – *Problems of Philosophy and Psychology* – remained neutral about the controversy, offering its columns to representatives of both trends and supporting their mutual approaches.<sup>54</sup>

*Vladimir Ern and the Idea of Eastern-Christian Logos*

*Logos* program declarations provoked a fierce reaction from Vladimir Ern (1882-1917) who represented the extreme philosophical right in the “Put” Group, notwithstanding his leftist social views. In his collected essays *The Battle of Logos* – published by “Put” in 1911 – Ern attacked the *Logos* editors for a lawless, as he believed, and blasphemous use of the word “Logos,” arguing that the divine Logos belonged to the tradition of the Orthodox East and had nothing in common with Western rationalism, let alone transcendentalist “meonism.”<sup>55</sup>

In his book on the Ukrainian philosopher Gregory Skorovoda, published a year later, Ern developed a three-point characteristic of the opposition between Western philosophy and the Eastern-Christian worldview – the latter as present in the writings of the Eastern Church Fathers and in the monastic tradition of the Orthodox Church.<sup>56</sup> Firstly – he argued – Western philosophy, apart from a few exceptions,<sup>57</sup> was that of the human *ratio*, whereas Eastern-Christian thought

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54 A concise presentation of the divisions in Russian philosophy following 1910 is offered by Hessen’s essay “Novshaia russkaia filosofiiia,” published in the Czech journal *Ruch filosoficky* (No 1, 1923) and reprinted in the almanac *Preobrazheniie*, vipusk 2, 1993, pp. 8-14, foreword by A. Yermichev and M. Travnikova-Pushkina.

55 See V.F. Ern, “Niechto o Logosie, Russkoi filosofii i nauchnosti,” in: Ern, *Sochineniia*, Moscow 1991, pp. 71-108. See also: B. Hellman, *Kagda vremia slavianofilstvovalo. Russkiiie filosofi i piervaia mirovaia voina, Studia Helsingiensa et Tartuensia*, Helsinki 1989, pp. 211-239.

Interestingly, the author’s father, Franz Karlovich Ern, was half-Swedish and half-German, of Lutheran denomination, while his Orthodox mother was half-Polish.

56 V. Ern, *Grigorii Skorovoda. Zhizn’ i ucheniie*, Moscow 1912, pp. 1-29.

57 The major exceptions were, according to Ern, the philosophers of the Italian Risorgimento, Antonio Rosmini and Vincenzo Gioberti. To both Ern devoted his monographs: *Rosmini I ego teoriia znaniia* (Moscow 1914) and *Filosofiiia Gioberti* (Moscow 1916).

stemmed organically from the divine Logos that permeated the Orthodox “religion of the Word.” Secondly, the development of Western philosophy led inexorably to “meonism,” culminating in Kant’s phenomenalism – while Eastern-Christian thought was marked by ontologism. Thirdly and finally, the most typical feature of Western philosophy was its rationalistic impersonalism – contrary to Orthodox personalism, rooted in the living faith in a personal God. As a result of Russia’s geographical situation, Russian thought had been strongly influenced by Western rationalism – and yet, its true, life-giving source remained the Eastern tradition of Logos that had been discovered by Skorovoda (whom Ern classified as a Russian thinker). Consequently, in order to develop an independent, authentically creative Russian philosophy, the artificial Western transplants had to be rejected. The Slavophiles, Soloviev and the religious thinkers of the Silver Age had made it clear that a truly national Russian philosophy had to follow the ontological tradition of the Eastern-Christian Logos which had nothing in common with the German-imported pseudo-Logos of the New Kantians.

The return to the sources that Ern proclaimed was both a manifesto of anti-Westernism, and a firm rejection of the attempts at modernizing Orthodox religiousness. Ern found absurd the idea of a new religious consciousness that, while declaring itself to be Christian, opposed the institutionalized Church Christianity – the Church, he believed, was only one and so it would be until the end of the world. To oppose the present Church with a future “Church of John the Apostle” contradicted the very idea of the Church and was incompatible with membership of the Christian community.<sup>58</sup>

Not surprisingly, the ideas provoked some anxiety from thinkers who tried to combine the program of Russia’s religious and national rebirth with liberal constitutionalism. Trubetskoi distanced himself from Ern’s “chauvinism,” accusing him of “nationalism in philosophy.” Ern replied with the argument that the issue of Eastern-Christian Logos was in no way related to nationalism or the imperial ambitions of the Russian state.<sup>59</sup> Further developments, however, expressly denied that declaration. The outbreak of the First World War provoked a strong wave of anti-German patriotic euphoria in Russia, which Ern

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58 In *The Battle of Logos*, the issue is discussed in the essay “Istoricheskaia Cerkov’” (*Sochineniia*, pp. 264-270) that accuses Merezhkovsky of Gnosticism.

59 Ern’s attack on *Logos* (prior to being included in *The Battle of Logos*) was published in the weekly *Moskovskii ezhenedelnik* (No 29-32, 1910). Frank addressed Ern with his polemical essay “On Nationalism in Philosophy,” published in Struve’s journal *Russkaia mysl’*, September 1910 (reprinted in: *S.L. Frank. Russkoie mirovoztreniie*, A.A. Yermichev Publishing, Sankt Petersburg 1996, pp. 103-119).

interpreted as a confirmation of his own ideas. Moreover, he did not hesitate to make use of the anti-German emotions in his own war against his philosophical opponents. In a demagogical article entitled *From Kant to Krupp* (1914), Ern tried to prove the existence of a close, immanent connection between the soulless, phenomenalist rationalism of Kant that destroyed the ontological foundations of the world in order to subject it to its own jurisdiction – and the destructiveness of the Krupp-organized German war machine.

Ern's visions constituted an extreme version of the program that in 1910-1911 had been common to all the founders of the "Put'" Group – all of them set on realizing the idea of a return to "treasures of the spiritual contemplation of the Christian East" that had been formulated by Kireevsky in 1856 (in his article *On the Necessity and the Possibility of New Principles for Philosophy*), to be resumed and repeated by Soloviev in 1874. The long-term results of that movement of a "return to the sources" proved definitely positive, bringing on a major renewal of Orthodox theology which, in turn, largely influenced the process of the modernizing renewal in the Catholic Church. The importance of that renewal was confirmed by Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Oriente Lumen* (of May 2, 1995) acknowledging that Orthodox spiritual tradition is in many ways superior to the Latin one. It must be remembered, however, that a renewal at a theological level was not automatically translatable to a reform of the existing ecclesiastical structures – and that the process was long and hampered by frequent resistance, not only on the part of the Church hierarchy. The Orthodox Church presented in Pavel Evdokimov's classical book<sup>60</sup> that summarizes the achievements of the Orthodox renewal movement, is an idealized vision reconstructed on the basis of the best – yet, rather elitist – traditions of Eastern-Christian spirituality, rather than a realistic picture of the Orthodox Church that faced the Russian religious philosophers of the Silver Age. In fact, that ideal Orthodox Church had not been as well-known in pre-Revolutionary Russia as it is today, after several-decades' work on its reconstruction.

The tradition of Hesychasm – intellectually summarized in the exquisite teachings of St. Gregory Palamas on the theology of the Holy Spirit and the divine energies – is considered today to constitute the cornerstone of separate Eastern-Christian spirituality. According to Evdokimov, "Hesychasm makes a clear-cut division between the East and Rome."<sup>61</sup> It must be remembered, however, that Gregory Palamas had been forgotten by the Orthodox Church until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when his heritage was rediscovered and

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60 P. Evdokimov, *L'Orthodoxie*, Neuchâtel 1959.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 30; "Introduction," part 11.



acknowledged as an important source and part of Orthodox theology.<sup>62</sup> In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, rather than be the pride of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Hesychastic-monastic center on Mount Athos provoked the Church's anxiety about a pantheist heresy and a "new schism." The anxiety was fuelled by the popularity of "name-praisers" [*imieslavtsy*] – preachers of the holiness of God's name – amongst the monks, which, from the point of view of the Most Holy Synod, meant idolatry and a dangerous symptom of insubordination. The battle against that danger that was ferociously waged in the first half of 1913 involved the pressure of the Greek ecumenical Patriarch – there was even a threat to use the army. It ended in an act of violence: some 800 monks were deported from Mount Athos and placed in various monasteries all over the Russian Empire. The action shocked the community of Russian religious philosophers, quickening the crystallization of their views.<sup>63</sup>

While discussing the Slavophile classics' views, I mentioned the thesis that traces their religious-philosophical ideas back to the Hesychasm tradition, brought to the Optyn Hermitage by an alumnus of Kiev Academy, Paisii Velichkovsky – who had imported that tradition directly from Mount Athos. A detailed analysis of the Slavophile ideology formation process shows, however, that it had grown out of the revision of Russian problems in the light of the German Romantics' ideas, particularly those of Schelling and Baader. While Kireevsky's visits to the Optyn Hermitage enriched his views, they had no fundamental influence on their content. It is even truer of Soloviev who – while postulating (after Kireevsky) a philosophical renewal through turning to spiritual contemplation of the Christian East – never, in fact, realized that program himself. His choice within the great Christian Neo-Platonic tradition was the Western trend represented by Boehme's mysticism. As for the spiritual heritage of Byzantium, Soloviev treated it lightly, if not contemptibly, seeing Hesychasm as nothing but a total withdrawal from the world – which was the very variant of

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62 See Fr. A. Schmemmann, "Russkoe bogosloviie za rubiezhom," in: *Russkaia religiozno-filosofskaia mysl XX veka*, ed. P.B. Poltoratsky, Pittsburgh 1975, pp. 82-83. The figure and the heritage of Palamas were "resurrected" thanks to the endeavors of Archbishop Vassily (Krivoshein), Archimandrite Cyprian (Kern) and Mr. J. Meyendorff.

63 Especially those of Father Pavel Florensky. Cf. P. Florensky, *Perepiska sviashchennika Pavla Aleksandrovicha Florenskovo I Mikhaila Aleksandrovicha Novosielova*, Tomsk 1998) and P. Florenskii, "Imiaslaviie kak filosofskaia priedposilka," in: Florensky, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, vol. 2, Moscow 1990. The Mount Athos controversy was discussed also by Bulgakov ("Afonskoe delo," *Russkaia mysl*, September 1912), while Berdiaev protested against the form of its termination ("Gasiteli dukha," *Ibid.*, August 1913). In 1912-1913, Bulgakov was a member of the committee for deciding whether *imiaslaviie* was a heresy.

Christianity that he himself opposed in the name of “Christian politics” that required an active participation in the world. He went as far as to declare that Hesychasm was akin to the worldview of the ancient East – especially India – and thus alien to true Christianity.<sup>64</sup> In the opinion (not ungrounded) of Sergei Khorouzhy, that declaration proved that Soloviev belonged to the Western-type of mystical tradition that found it very difficult to comprehend the Christian East.<sup>65</sup>

Soloviev’s pro-Catholic orientation – combined with his open distancing himself from the idea of an independent Orthodox Russian philosophy – obviously confirms Khorouzhy’s diagnosis.

In the case of Berdiaev, we have his own testimony included in his autobiography. He writes that he has never felt an organic affinity between his own philosophy and the Eastern-Christian traditions. Eastern Patristics, to which the founders of the Russian religious-philosophical renaissance consciously referred, never evoked Berdiaev’s enthusiasm – indeed, he suspected that it was being searched for things it did not include.<sup>66</sup> While discovering traces of his favorite Neo-Platonic tradition in the classics of Eastern mysticism, he made it clear that his principal teachers had been the German representatives of that tradition: Master Eckhart, Angel Silesius and Jacob Boehme. He was reluctant about the official Orthodox Church theology – as well as about Russian monastic mysticism: the conversations between St. Seraphin and Motovilov left him cold, while Teophan the Hermit’s views on asceticism and practical morality seemed to him obscurantist and marked by a slavish spirit.<sup>67</sup> In order to meet some of the Orthodox “elders” described by Dostoevsky, he travelled to the Optyn Hermitage – having prepared himself thoroughly for that encounter – only to find a new disillusionment.<sup>68</sup>

Berdiaev’s case graphically illustrates the fact that there existed no direct continuity between the Eastern Christian tradition that had, to some extent, survived in the inner-ecclesiastic mysticism of Russian monasticism – and the Russian religious-philosophical thought of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Both the culture of Europeanized Russia and inner-ecclesiastic mysticism flourished in

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64 V.S. Soloviev, “Velikii spor,” in: *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 4, p. 42.

65 See S. Khorouzhy, “Solov’ev and Hesychasm,” in: *Vladimir Solov’ev: Reconciler and Polemicist*, eds. Wil van den Bercken, Manon de Courten and Evert van der Zweerde, Leuven 2000, p. 89.

66 N. Berdiaev, *Samopoznaniie*, p. 173.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 196.

68 *Ibid.*, pp. 185-186.

the 19<sup>th</sup> century – and yet, the distance between them was impassable. Pushkin had never heard of St. Seraphin – and *vice versa*.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian monks deliberately turned their backs on their contemporary culture, seeking escape from it. They did not know the works of Soloviev and other representatives of philosophical-religious thought – and even if they did, they would have rejected those works as heresies.<sup>69</sup>

Berdiaev's disillusionment with the idea of resuscitating philosophy by returning to grassroots Orthodoxy found a powerful expression in his "attempted anthropodicy," *The Sense of Creativity* (1916). Neither in Patristic theology, nor in the entire Christianity of the ecumenical councils era – he argued – had there ever been a Christian anthropology capable of revealing the Christological truth of man.<sup>70</sup> The existing theology – rather than be that of a filial relationship with God – was one of an infinite distance between man and God. The Church Fathers did not see man as a microcosm, nor did they turn to the macrocosm.<sup>71</sup> Their sole preoccupation were the problems of sin and redemption – rather than the question of man's likeness to God, manifested in human creative abilities. Even though they wrote about man's "trans-deification" [*theosis*], man himself was missing from their pattern. They conceived of man's destiny as "angelic" – i.e., passive, non-creative, non-divine.<sup>72</sup>

Berdiaev traced an analogous anthropological error in Kant's philosophy, which he believed to be a refined philosophy of obedience and sin – an expression of a split and doubtful reflexive consciousness, typical of the "helpless spirit" state.<sup>73</sup> Consequently, Kant's criticism – rather than be a theory of the active subject – seemed to Berdiaev to constitute a philosophy of "Old Testament law" that left no room for creativity.<sup>74</sup> He countered Kantianism with Christian Neo-Platonism in its Renaissance and Romantic – rather than Patristic – version preaching the idea of man's special dignity as a *vinculum substantiale*, or "the crossroads of the two worlds:" the earthly one and the divine one.<sup>75</sup> He discovered the idea of man's potential divinity in the Renaissance philosophy of nature and in the "Northern mysticism" of Paracelsus and Boehme, as well as in the philosophic Romanticism of Baader and Schelling. Praising the "congenial

69 See S. Bolshakoff, *Russian Mystics*, London 1977, pp. 106-107. Introduction by the famous American Trappist Thomas Merton.

70 N. Berdiaev, *Filosofia svobody. Smysl tvorchestva*, p. 315.

71 *Ibid.*, p. 317.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 318.

73 *Ibid.*, pp. 278, 282.

74 *Ibid.*, p. 342.

75 *Ibid.*, p. 296.

*Essence of Christianity*” by Ludvig Feuerbach, Berdiaev described it as the book that formulated (albeit *a rebours*) the crucial truth of religious anthropology.<sup>76</sup>

*The Sense of Creativity* can be read as an explanation of why the program of a religious renewal by returning to the Patristic sources of Eastern-Christian spirituality failed in Berdiaev’s case. Aware of that failure, Berdiaev focused on developing a programmatically anthropocentric philosophy, which made him one of the forerunners of religious existentialism.<sup>77</sup> A different – theo-cosmic – direction was followed by Bulgakov who remained faithful to the idea of “Orthodoxizing” philosophy and philosophizing Orthodoxy. On the publishing of *The Sense of Creativity*, however, the common core of the two philosophers’ religious systems was still observable. As we shall see, Berdiaev’s philosophical anthropology and Bulgakov’s “Sophiology” were two variants of “mystical realism” and pantheistic metaphysics that stemmed from Neo-Platonism and Schelling, from the Slavophile tradition and Soloviev.

## Lev Shestov

An opponent of that tradition was Lev Shestov (born Yehuda Schwarzmann, 1866-1938) – one of the co-authors of the anti-Positivist breakthrough of Russian culture who became famous in the 1890s as a philosophical interpreter of Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Tolstoy and Shakespeare. In the Russian religious thought of the Silver Age, Shestov occupied a separate, unique and individual place. His “rebellion against reason” was total, aimed at rationalism and Positivism, as well as at programmatically religious philosophies, such as Soloviev’s metaphysics of All-Unity. He discredited Soloviev’s philosophy as an inadmissible rationalization of faith that imposed the general laws of reason on both man and God, transforming a personal God into a philosophical Absolute stripped of arbitrary omnipotence.<sup>78</sup> Shestov extended that criticism to all speculative religious metaphysics and particularly to the Neo-Platonic one. According to Shestov, attempts at transforming irrational faith into a

76 Ibid., p. 298.

77 Cf. Y.P. Ivinin, *Mezhdú garmoniei i vosstaniem (Problema sotsialnogo ideala v russkoi filosofii “Serebriannogo veka”)*, Novosibirsk 1997, Part II, pp. 59-60.

78 See G.L. Kline, “Spor o religioznoi filosofii: L. Shestov protiv V. Solovieva,” in: *Russkaia religiozno-filosofskaia mysl XX veka*, pp. 37-53.

Shestov expressed his view on Soloviev in the essay “Umozreniie i apokalipsis: religioznaia filosofia VI. Solovieva,” published in the emigrational journal *Sovremenniie zapiski*, No 33-34, Paris 1927-1928. The essay was reprinted in Shestov’s book *Umozreniie i otkroviienie*, Paris 1964.

philosophical system meant Hellenization of Judeo-Christianity -which was entirely alien to the Biblical tradition. Shestov developed that thought in one of his last books, contrasting two diametrically opposed attitudes to religion, symbolically termed the Jerusalem tradition and the Athens tradition. "Jerusalem" stood for the irrationality of faith, while "Athens" epitomized the desire for a rationally organized world subject to the laws of necessity – unchangeable even for God himself.

The beginnings of Shestov's philosophical work, however, were different (a fact too often ignored by literature on the subject). In his first book – *Shakespeare and his Critic Brandes* (1891), Shestov located the sense of life in reasonable necessity – rather than in arbitrary, irrational freedom – arguing that if the world were governed by coincidence and mankind's countless sufferings were not explicable with a hidden rational necessity, human life would become an unjustified horror – in other words: a pure absurdity. Fortunately, however, the world as presented by Shakespeare allowed for thinking that blind chance did not exist, while human fates – even the most tragic ones – were marked by rational necessity that endowed them with a higher sense. The opinion echoed the views of the young Belinsky who interpreted Shakespeare and Goethe as two great preachers of man's reconciliation to reality.<sup>79</sup>

Shestov abandoned that attitude, however, in his further books – repeating Belinsky's rebellion against Hegel's "rational necessity" and deliberately referring to it. The culmination of his own rebellion was the book *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche* (1903)<sup>80</sup> in which Shestov identified with the reflections of Dostoevsky's narrator of *Notes from the Underground*, defining freedom as irrational willfulness – a liberation from external coercion, as well as from the laws of nature and logical necessity.

The claim that the main enemy of man's freedom was "the general," i.e., rationality, objective laws, knowledge and logic – rather than the a-logical coincidence, inexplicable in the categories of "the general" – brought Shestov close to the irrational individualism of Max Stirner. And yet – unlike Stirner – Shestov was not an atheist who believed rejection of reason to follow from rejection of God. Indeed, he defended both man and God against the "tyranny of reason," defining God as a person of powerful emotions, exempt from the principle of non-contradiction, free to change his own decisions, capable of vengefulness, content with the fact that not everyone is like Himself and willingly tolerant of the existence of Satan. The major argument for endowing

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79 See R.V. Ivanov-Razumnik, "Lev Shestov," in: Ivanov-Razumnik, *O smysle zhizni*, Petersburg 1910 (reprint: Bradda Books, Letchworth-Herts 1971), pp. 172-188.

80 *Dostoevsky i Nitshe (Filosofia tragedii)*, Petersburg 1903.

God with an absolute, arbitrary freedom and omnipotence was the necessity of hope: since God can do anything – even freely alter the past (according to the thesis of St. Peter Damianus, 1007-1072)<sup>81</sup> – being exempt from all laws of necessity, then anything is possible – salvation included. A total questioning of “rational necessity” thus offered some hope – irrational, yet unique, having no alternative.

In the revolutionary year 1905, Shestov published his “attempt at a-dogmatic thinking” in the shape of *An Apotheosis of Groundlessness*. The Russian title *Apofeoz bezpochvennosti* suggested a simultaneous apotheosis of “breaking away from the soil” which the Slavophile tradition condemned. According to Soloviev, a settled man, rooted in the soil and appreciating firm ground under his feet, along with a roof over his head and a certain tomorrow, could not become a true “examiner of life.”<sup>82</sup> In order to know life, man must accept homelessness, unpredictability and the rule of blind chance; he must not fear the absurd, and – giving up the services of reason – must reject causal explanations and discursive thinking, since causal knowledge is unknowing (*per causas scire est nescire*), it being impossible to squeeze the diversity of the world into conceptual categories.<sup>83</sup>

The only thing in life that can be relied on is irrational faith – *credo quia absurdum*. Rejecting logic and positive scientific knowledge, this declaration meant also rejection of morality. Morality – Shestov argued – is the twin sister of science: like science, it sets universally observed laws, declaring superiority of “the general,” ignoring irreducible diversity and demanding unconditional subordination of the individual. Tolstoy and Dostoevsky were therefore wrong, opposing science in the name of morality: they failed to understand that, in fact, “morality is scientific and science – moral.”<sup>84</sup> The one who was right was Nietzsche who declared war on morality that was an inalienable part of man’s emancipating aspirations.

Comparing absolutist demands of morality with rationalistic rigors of science, Shestov concluded that it was the moralists- rather than the scientists – who posed the greatest danger to the individual’s freedom, since they were vengeful and used morality as a refined and effective instrument of revenge. The moralists were not satisfied with self-condemnation and their own judgment of their fellowmen – they wished for a universal condemnation and a universally

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81 See F.C. Copleston, *Russian Religious Philosophy*, Notre Dame, Indiana 1988, p. 112.

82 L. Shestov, *Apofeoz bezpochvennosti. Opyt adogmaticheskogo myshleniia*, Paris 1971, pp. 26-27.

83 *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27, 121-122.

84 *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

shared damning judgment, accepted even by the conscience of the condemned individual: “Only then do they feel fully satisfied and calm down.”<sup>85</sup>

Shestov clearly separated the aspiration to a moral authority, i.e., domination and control, from the moral protest against the justification of suffering with higher motives. In reference to the latter, that severe critic of moralizing sided with Belinsky who rejected Hegel’s historioidicy – as well as with Ivan Karamazov who rejected “harmony” bought at the cost of suffering children.<sup>86</sup> The tradition of solidarity with innocent victims was, in Shestov’s opinion, the most valuable one in Russian literature. Morality, on the other hand, was identified by him with the demand of sacrifice in the name of “general,” morally justified goals.

That attitude placed Shestov close to the anarchizing individualism of Herzen that had grown out of the latter’s battle with Hegel’s theory of progress. The fact was observed and emphasized by the leading ideologist of Populist individualism, Ivanov-Razumnik. In his book *On the Meaning of Life* (1910), Ivanov-Razumnik described the author of *An Apotheosis of Groundlessness* as the last voice of “immanent subjectivism” that had been initiated in Russian thought by Herzen.<sup>87</sup> The opinion was largely justified, considering that both Herzen and Shestov radically criticized all forms of faith in an objective, supra-individual and rationally recognizable sense of the human life. There was, however, a fundamental difference – Shestov’s irrational faith in the Biblical God, superior to laws of logic and causality.

Amongst the religious thinkers of the Silver Age, Shestov was a lonely figure – even if recognized and respected.<sup>88</sup> He deliberately distanced himself from the mainstream of the early religious-philosophical thought. Referring to the search for “a new religious consciousness,” he curtly observed that no man was entitled to create a religion, for either God existed – and then we had been given religion in the Bible, or God did not exist – and then the subject be better left unspoken.<sup>89</sup> His opinions concerning religious philosophers of the former Marxists’ circle were included in the meaningfully entitled essay *A Praise of*

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85 Ibid., p. 63.

86 Ibid., pp. 221-222.

87 Ivanov-Razumnik, “Immanentnyi subektivizm,” in: Ivanov-Razumnik, *O smysle zhizni*, pp. 254-256.

88 The fact had been stressed by G.L. Kline in *Religious and Anti-Religious Thought in Russia*, Chicago-London 1968, pp. 73090. See also, V.A. Kuvakin, “Lev Shestov,” in: *A History of Russian Philosophy*, ed. A.V. Kuvakin, Buffalo, N.Y. 1994, pp. 594-620.

89 L. Shestov, “Vlast’ idiei (D. Merezhkovsky)” in: Shestov, *Apofieoz bezpochviennosti*, pp. 267-269.

*Foolishness* (reviewing Berdiaev's book *Sub specie aeternitatis*). Shestov praised Berdiaev for abandoning common sense and embracing "foolishness," castigating him, however, for his attempts at a logical motivation of the choice and the accompanying emotions. He also deplored the conventionality of the Berdiaev-announced "fooleries," having expected a philosopher of that caliber to invent some special brand-new fooleries.<sup>90</sup>

Shestov's next book, *Beginnings and Ends* (1908), introduced the subject of plural worlds and plural truths. Philosophy – the author observed – is the teaching of truths that do not oblige anybody in any way.<sup>91</sup> Each man is entitled to feel, think and act according to his own will; he need not justify his point in discussions with others; the world is enormous – in fact, it is composed of many different worlds – and therefore, there is room in it for all the attitudes and worldviews. That goes for both the common worldviews and the great metaphysical conceptions.<sup>92</sup> The opinions did not stem from a relativist indifferentism toward nature or a disinterest in metaphysics. Indeed, Shestov emphasized that the Positivists were deeply wrong to discredit metaphysical theories as empty and meaningless. Those theories – he argued – have a profound, mysterious meaning and include great, vital truths. Their only error is to absolutize the truths they represent. There exists, in fact, many metaphysical truths – which does not prevent them from co-existing in harmony. The conflicting truths are the empirical ones – which causes the sad necessity to subject men's empirical co-existence to the judgment of superior authorities. Metaphysical order, however, is pluralistic and polysemantic – it has no need of rivalry.<sup>93</sup> Support of one metaphysical theory can be accompanied by an empathic understanding of other theories and acknowledgment of their right to exist.

The views were very close to the concept of pluralistic values proposed several decades later by another outstanding Russian Jew, Isaiah Berlin.<sup>94</sup> Shestov, however, went much further than Berlin, claiming that no worldview option could be, or should be, obligatory and exclusive of other ones – he also maintained that lack of logic and consistency was not disqualifying and that man

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90 "Pokhvala gluposti" (*Fakely*, No 2, 1907), reprinted in: A.N. Berdiaev, *Sub specie aeternitatis* (the 2002 edition), pp. 569-586.

91 L. Shestov, *Nachala i kontsy*, Petersburg 1908, p. 128.

92 *Ibid.*, pp. 156-157.

93 *Ibid.*, pp. 176-177.

94 Interviewed by Ramin Jahanbegloo, Berlin named Herzen and Shestov as his favourite Russian thinkers (See Ramin Jahanbegloo, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin*. London 1992).



need not follow the principle of non-contradiction, since it was not a Biblical principle.<sup>95</sup> He went as far as to declare that the fundamental illogicality of life justified our own inconsistent actions, as well as careless utterances and inattention to what is being said to us by those nearby.<sup>96</sup>

Shestov's philosophical work flourished during the emigration period of his life. It was then that he wrote his most important books: *Potestas Clavium* (1923), *On the Scales of Job* (1929), *Kierkegaard and Existentialist Philosophy* (*Kierkegaard et la philosophie existentielle. Vox clamantis in deserto*, Paris 1938) and – published posthumously – *Athens and Jerusalem* (1951), *Sola fide* (1957) and *Speculation and Revelation* [*Umozreniie i otkroveniie*, 1964]. It was then, too, that – having read Kierkegaard – he declared himself a religious existentialist and, shortly before his death, got involved in an impressive, authoritative and magnanimous polemic with Husserl's rationalist essentialism.

Apart from his break with “rational necessity” for the sake of programmatic irrationalism, Shestov's intellectual evolution was a continuous process. His early works had been indeed a “new beginning,” heralding the subsequent success – international, too – of religious existentialism. May it serve as a meaningful symbol of the continuity of Shestov's thought that, in his book on Kierkegaard, he compared the Danish philosopher to the favorite heroes of his own youth – the rebellious anti-Hegelian Belinsky and Ivan Karamazov.

## Metaphysics of All-Unity and Sophiology

### *The Schellingian Inspiration*

For “Put” Group religious philosophers, the principal reference system in Western philosophy was, undoubtedly, Schelling's “positive philosophy” – the system developed by the old Schelling in his Berlin lectures on philosophy of mythology and the philosophy of revelation, initiated in 1841 with a bravado attack on Hegel's rationalist idealism. Schelling-the-anti-Hegelian became the flagship figure of the Russian thinkers – as the first consistent critic of the entire tradition of Western rationalism from Kant to Hegel, and as the founder of a programmatically Christian religious philosophy whose Russian version was developed by Soloviev. That is why the Russian philosophers repeatedly emphasized their dependence on Schelling – in the general direction of thought, rather than in particular questions. In his monograph of Soloviev, Trubetskoi

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95 Cf. F.C. Copleston, *Russian Religious Philosophy*, p. 111.

96 L. Shestov, *Nachala i kontsy*, pp. 190-191.

presented the author of *Lectures on Godmanhood* as a direct continuator of Schelling's "positive philosophy," both in his critical diagnosis (of the crisis of Western philosophy initiated by the downfall of "absolute idealism") and in his program of new roads for philosophy (a synthesis of rational knowledge and revealed faith).<sup>97</sup> Bulgakov described the late Schelling as a philosopher of the "supra-logical unity of life" and father of the idea of philosophy combined with social practice that he himself developed in his *Philosophy of Economy*; Soloviev was, according to him "congenial with Schelling"; he even argued that Marx ought to have chosen Schelling – rather than Hegel – as his "godfather," the former being a "philosopher of objective reality" acknowledging ontological reality of the material world.<sup>98</sup> Berdiaev unhesitatingly declared that "Schelling was largely a Russian philosopher," considering his enormous influence on the Slavophiles and, later on, on Soloviev whose philosophy continued the Schellingian line. "A refashioned Schellingianism" – he argued – "has entered Russian technological and religious-philosophical thought. Especially significant has been the Schelling of the last period – that of philosophy of mythology and revelation."<sup>99</sup>

Emphasizing the relation of their own thought to that of Schelling was more than a confession of a debt of gratitude owed to one of the major Western philosophers. The issue was to define the place of Russian philosophy within the universal one. In that perspective, Schelling's "positive philosophy" appeared as the final word of classical German philosophy defined as the climax of Western philosophy's development – while simultaneously constituting a profound criticism of that philosophy and pointing to the necessity of overstepping broadly defined rationalism as a philosophy autonomous to religion that ought to be replaced by a radically new philosophy, aiming at the synthesis of the truths of philosophical reason with the truths of revelation. That was precisely the task undertaken by Soloviev and the continuators of his thought who thereby opened a new chapter in the history of universal philosophy.<sup>100</sup>

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97 E.N. Trubetskoi, *Mirosozertsaniiie V.S. Soloviova*, vol. 1, pp. 60-65.

98 S.N. Bulgakov, *Filosofia khoziaistva*, Moscow 1990, pp. 26, 62-63.

99 N. Berdiaev, *Typy religioznoi mysli v Rossii*, pp. 693-694.

100 Polish Romantic philosophers identically defined their own tasks, making references to the late Schelling. See, A. Walicki, "Mesjanizm i filozofia narodowa w okresie renesansu filozoficzno-religijnego w Polsce a romantyczny model polski," in: *Między reformą a rewolucją. Rosyjska myśl filozoficzna, polityczna i społeczna na przełomie XIX i XX wieku*, Eds. W. Rydzewski, A. Ochotnicka, Krakow 2004.

Schelling's "positive philosophy" constituted a radical criticism of the essentialist assumptions of philosophical idealism.<sup>101</sup> Idealism – Schelling argued – is, in fact, a *negative* philosophy, concerned with pure concepts and rational definitions of the essence of being, in total abstraction from real existence. In its most consistent form that was Hegel's panlogical idealism, rationalist idealism appeared as an extended argument that underlay the so-called ontological proof of God's existence – namely, an unauthorized transition from a being to being there. In fact, however, a rational definition of *what* a thing is does not mean that the thing really, *positively* exists. The knowledge of existence – of the positive – escapes pure reason, being accessible only to concrete experience. By "experience," Schelling meant also the mystical one, believing that the positive reality of an experiential fact included the existing nature, as well as mythology and Christian revelation.

The peculiarity of Schelling's "positive philosophy" consisted in the fact that it emphasized a vital concurrence of Romantic irrationalism and naturalism – of Baader's theosophy and Feuerbach's materialism. The concurrence – which largely remained unobserved – described the two systems' common platform of opposition toward absolute idealism – namely, their acknowledgement that reality is not reducible to reason, nor can being be deduced from a concept – as Anselm and then Hegel had done. That made a strong argument for the postulated religious "rehabilitation of nature" that would restore nature's ontological status. It was from that source – rather than from the Eastern Patristics – that the programmatic ontologism, or mystical realism, of Russian religious philosophers had grown, to contradict all forms of Western "meonism," both the Positivist and the idealist. The Schellingian impulse was evident also in their idea of a religious re-appreciation of the created world that was so much present in Soloviev's "God-matarialism" or Bulgakov's "religious materialism."<sup>102</sup>

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101 The following account of Schelling's system is based mainly on: K. Löwith, *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche: Der revolutionäre Bruch im Denken des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*, Zurich 1941, ch. II/2; P. Tillich, *Perspectives on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Protestant Theology*, London 1967, ch. IV; P.C. Hayner, *Reason and Existence: Schelling's Philosophy of History*, Leiden 1967.

102 Cf. N. Zernov, *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century*, New York-Evanston 1963, p. 285.

According to Zernov, the belief in a potentially saintly matter, in unity and sanctity of the entire created world, as well as in man's calling to participate in God's plan of salvation was shared as fundamental by all Russian religious philosophers of the Silver Age (Ibid.)

The metaphysical basis of those concepts, named the “philosophy of All-Unity” by Soloviev, had stemmed from an ancient tradition of European thought – namely, Neo-Platonism that had been initiated in antiquity to be continued as Christian Neo-Platonism – including the Eastern-Christian mysticism of Pseudo-Dionysius – and, in the modern times, found its representatives in Nicholas Cusanus, Boehme and the German Romantics.<sup>103</sup> An outstanding Russian expert on that tradition, Sergei Khorouzhny, has called the metaphysics of All-Unity “pantheism” – from *pan en theo*: all in God.<sup>104</sup> The term – introduced by Schellingian K. Ch. F. Krause (1781-1832) who described his own philosophy as *All-in Gott-Lehre* – became accepted (as a proper name of their own philosophical systems) also by Bulgakov, Florensky and Frank. The latter – who considered himself Cusanus’ pupil – used Soloviev’s term “All-Unity” as a synonym of “pantheism.”<sup>105</sup> Vassily Zenkovsky confirmed the identity, suggesting, however, that the term “philosophy of All-Unity” be maintained as traditional to Russian religious philosophy.<sup>106</sup>

The main intention of pantheism is to strive toward a definition of the “God-world-man” relationship that would reconcile transcendence with immanence, thus closing the rift between the creature and the Creator. The core of the problem was best defined by a Polish Romantic philosopher, August Cieszkowski, who observed that the point was that the world stops being Godless, while God stops being worldless.<sup>107</sup> In times of crisis for absolute idealism, that meant opposing both Hegel’s panlogic pantheism and the

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103 S. Khorouzhny, “Idea vseedinstva ot Geraklita do Bakhtina,” in: *Khorouzhny. Posle piereryva. Puti russkoi filosofii*, Sankt Petersburg 1994, pp. 32-66.

104 *Ibid.*, p. 40.

105 See P. Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology. Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov. Orthodox Theology in a New Key*, Grand Rapids, Mi. 2000, pp. 335, 349; R. Slesinski, Pavel Florensky. *A Metaphysics of Love*, Crestwood, N.Y. 1984, pp. 177, 200.

Frank, who usually used the term “All-Unity,” in the anthology of Russian philosophy he edited, described his own system as “pantheism,” writing: “I have been mostly influenced by Platonism, especially by Plotinus and Nicolaus Cusanus. In the religious-philosophical sense, I represent pantheism.” (*Iz istorii filosofskoi mysli kontsa XIX I nachala XX veka. Antologiya*, Ed. S.L. Frank, Washington-New York 1965, p. 265).

106 See V.V. Zenkovsky, *Idea vseedinstva u Vladimira Soloviova, Pravoslavnaiia mysl. Trudy Pravoslavno bogoslovskovo Instituta v Parizhe*, vol. 10, 1955. Quoted after S.L. Frank, *Russkoe mirovozzreniie*, ed. A.A. Yermichev, Sankt Petersburg 1996, p. 702, footnote 5.

107 A. Cieszkowski, *Ojczc nasz*, vol. 1, Poznań 1922, pp. 72-73. Cieszkowski, too, defined the content of the pantheistic idea of God, writing: “God is everything and more [...]. God is everything, in everything and above everything” (*Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 502).

traditional model of Christian theism. Schelling's pantheism that referred to Boehme and Cusanus countered Hegel's evolutionary pantheism with its declaration that the Absolute develops in time to attain self-knowledge in man – such a temporalization of the Absolute seemed to Schelling debasing to both God (by making Him dependent on man) and man (by reducing him to a tool of the Absolute's self-knowledge). On the other hand, he did not want to abandon the concept of intimate ties between man and divinity or that of the immanent presence of the divine element in man. According to Paul Tillich, Schelling's solution to the problem was inspired mainly by Cusanus' idea that infinity and finality are mutually inclusive, thanks to which "divinity is extended in the world, the world is included in God."<sup>108</sup>

An identical idea was formulated by Berdiaev – even though he distanced himself from the pantheist tendencies of the "philosophy of All-Unity." In *The sense of Creativity*, Berdiaev wrote: "God is immanent both to the world and to man. The world and man are immanent to God. All that happens to man, happens also to God."<sup>109</sup>

Contrary to Frank's belief, a complete identification of the metaphysics of All-Unity with pantheism would not be correct. The All-Unity of Schelling and Soloviev did not stop at a pantheist definition of the God-world relation, being also – like Hegelianism – a teleological vision of development, assuming progress and therefore contrary to emanationist theories of descendance. It was, in fact, an evolutionist ontology, defining development as a progressive revelation of God according to His nature, i.e., to the succession of potencies of His inner nature. The system treated man as a creative being immanent to God, which allowed for reconciling the freedom of man's will with God's omnipotence. It divided the theogonic process to Eon of the Father – corresponding to mythological times – and Eon of the Son – the time of the Christian Revelation. Within Christianity, it distinguished between the Church of St. Peter (Catholic), the Church of St. Paul (Protestant) and the future Church of St. John. It held that the objective of history was to restore man to his original state, i.e., to direct participation in the life of the divine Absolute. Preaching the "philosophy of All-Unity," Soloviev meant all the elements of that dynamic structure, not only pantheism. It is true, however, that it was pantheism that made the basis and bind of that structure. Philosophy of All-Unity may thus be called pantheism, as long as it is remembered that the notion of "pantheism" is both narrower in content and broader in scope.

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108 P. Tillich, *Perspectives*, pp. 77, 145.

109 N. Berdiaev, *Filosofia svobody. Smysl tvorcestva*, p. 258.

*Berdiaev's Anthropologism and Bulgakov's Theocosmism*

As has already been observed, the Russian metaphysics of All-Unity during the active years of "Put'" Publishers took on two forms: the anthropological one, represented by Berdiaev, and the theocosmic one, developed in the Sophiological visions of Bulgakov. Berdiaev's anthropocentrism, coupled with his reluctance about too literal interpretations of "religious materialism," won him a separate and unique place among the Slavophile-oriented "ontologists." Literature on the subject has even known the tendency to exclude Berdiaev from the group of "All-Unity philosophers."<sup>110</sup> That, however, seems to be an exaggeration, resulting from judging the Berdiaev of 1911-1916 from the perspective of the later development of his thought. Indeed, Berdiaev's thorough revision of his own past views, conducted during the years of emigration, justifies the need for a clear distinction between various periods and phases of his thought. Berdiaev himself, in his intellectual autobiography, graphically separated the phase when he had found Kant closer to his own views than Schelling or Plato – from the neo-Slavophile, anti-Kantian period of his own philosophical evolution. He emphasized that he had arrived at the former phase through a negation of philosophical ontologism which made him abandon the tradition of the philosophy of All-Unity.<sup>111</sup> The confession is tantamount to a declaration that, in the pre-Revolution period, Berdiaev had represented the very tradition that he later broke off with. And so it was in fact. The ideas developed by Berdiaev in *Philosophy of Freedom* and in *The Sense of Creativity* constituted an anthropologic version of the Schellingian-Solovievan panentheist metaphysics of All-Unity.

In *Philosophy of Freedom*, the former neo-Kantian and future existentialist took on the role of a restorer of the German Romantics' anti-rationalism. The extreme anti-rationalism of Baader, to be precise, rather than that of the late Schelling that occasionally bordered on a rationalist theosophy.<sup>112</sup> The philosophical content of the book had been subject to a historiosophic-soteriologic meditation, concordant with the search for a new religious consciousness and chiliastic hopes. Christianity – Berdiaev argued – does not stand for a bodiless spiritualism: rather than be a faith in an otherworldly salvation of the immortal soul, it is a faith in a universal salvation within history, requiring an active participation in the world.<sup>113</sup> Christ is the center of history,

110 The tendency is represented by e.g. V.N. Akulinin in his book *Filosofia vseedinstva*, pp. 118-119, footnote 87.

111 N. Berdiaev, *Samopoznaniie*, pp. 105-107.

112 N.A. Berdiaev, *Filosofia svobody. Smysl tvorchestva*, p. 74.

113 *Ibid.*, p. 141.

but the Christian religion is not the whole of revelation – what remains to be discovered is the sense of *religious anthropology*, the “monist truth of mankind’s earthly fate.”<sup>114</sup> Historical Christianity expressed the spirit of ascetic rejection of the sinful world – but that was only one side of the Christian truth; the era of rejection had to be followed by that of reintegration when earthly life would be reborn through “realization of the Godmanhood ideal in mankind’s collective life.”<sup>115</sup> Mankind’s eschatological destiny that had been prophesied by Joachim of Fiore, Baader and Soloviev, would thus be fulfilled. The spiritual bind of humanity – that “absolute in the state of becoming,” as Soloviev had put it – would be a religion expressing the fullness of Christ’s truth: the religion of the Holy Ghost, i.e. of the Trinity.<sup>116</sup>

*The Sense of Creativity* brought some new aspects. The first one was an emphasis on the antinomy of religious consciousness developing in the process of a continuous renewal and overcoming of the monism-dualism and immanence-transcendence contradiction. Berdiaev declared his own faith in a “nearly pantheist monism,” in the world’s and man’s divinity – while maintaining that the road to a higher monistic unity led through “heroic dualism” that resisted natural necessity with human will.<sup>117</sup> It appeared that, ultimately, one could be a monist and an immanentist in the depth of the mystical experience and ideal vision – and, at the same time, oppose the given, i.e., the existing world, from the position of the dualist split into good and evil, ideal and reality.

Another vital innovation was Berdiaev’s interpretation of the theandric process in the spirit of the Renaissance vision of man’s dignity of a potentially divine creature endowed with creativeness and the mission of world’s transdeification. To justify his point, Berdiaev summoned a variety of thinkers – from Neo-Platonic Pico della Mirandola, through Paracelsus, Boehme and Baader (man as the microcosm on the way to become the macrocosm), to the anthropotheism of Feuerbach, the “unconscious” ideas of Nietzsche, the anthropologism of Dostoevsky and the contemporary occultism and anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner. On the other hand, he was highly critical of Plotinus, considering him a representative of “the most rational and the least anti-nomic mysticism,” as well as of Pseudo Dionysius – as the one who had dug a chasm between man and the unknowable God. Berdiaev summarized his own diagnoses with a severe judgment:

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114 Ibid., p. 163.

115 Ibid., p. 159.

116 Ibid., pp. 180-183.

117 Ibid., pp. 258-260.

Neo-Platonic mysticism and its entailed negative theology ignore the Christian revelation of Godmanhood, as well as the deep affinity between man's and God's natures, failing to bring them together in a way that would not destroy man but, rather, include him in absolute life.<sup>118</sup>

Bulgakov's version of panentheism placed the accents differently, emphasizing man's organic participation in the empirical world of nature – a participation endowed with divine attributes, yet subject to laws of rational, immanent necessity. Indeed – echoing Soloviev – Bulgakov developed a Sophiologic version of the metaphysics of All-Unity. According to Frank, it was one of the authorized variants of panentheism. Panentheism – Frank argued – perceives the world as permeated and irradiated with the divine Proto-Source; in Soloviev's philosophy, that inner-worldly divinity, or divine proto-warp of the world, has been hypostatized (which was not necessary from the point of view of the inner logic of pantheism) as Sophia – a separate entity obtaining in various contexts and under various names (as the soul of the world, the body of God, the nature in God, or the ideal humanity).<sup>119</sup> The function of that hypostasis was to serve as a bridge between the Maker and the created world. That is precisely how Bulgakov understood it, deliberately striving to make Sophiology an instrument of dialogue between the Orthodoxy and his contemporary civilization.<sup>120</sup>

The concept of Sophia underlay an interesting theology of labor presented by Bulgakov in his doctor thesis, *Philosophy of Economy* (1912).

In its strictly religious aspect, Bulgakov's Sophiology was the idea of God's Wisdom constituting the supra-individual foundation of Mankind-in-God – the Wisdom that had been eternally present in God, i.e., prior to the creation of the empirical Mankind. It followed from the definition that God created mankind out of His own being, in an act of an outward projection of His own ideas, to which he granted a separate existence, bound, however, to their divine proto-source. The same was true of the natural world. For Bulgakov conceived of man as the creature connecting the divine Absolute with the empirical world and destined to deify nature, transforming it into an anthropo-cosmos. Sophia-in-the-created-world was, thus, the inner-worldly divinity focused in the human

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118 Ibid., p. 505.

119 See S.L. Frank, "Dukhovnoe nasledie Vladimira Solovieva" (1950), in: Frank, *Russkoe mirovozzrenie*, p. 393.

120 See P. Valliere, "Sophiology as the Dialogue of Orthodoxy with Modern Civilization," in: *Russian Religious Thought*, ed. Judith Deutsch Kornblatt, Richard F. Gustafson, Madison, Wisconsin 1996, pp. 176-192. See also: L. Kiejzik, "Sofiologia Sergeia Bulgakova. Vozniknovenie, razvitie, upadok," in: *Między reform a rewolucją*, pp. 161-176.



creature.<sup>121</sup> The philosopher distinguished between that “created Sophia” and the “Heavenly Sophia” that was its prototype within God Himself.<sup>122</sup> That made the created Sophia the earthly equivalent of the Heavenly Sophia, the two never blending, being separated by the act of Creation. That is how Bulgakov justified the existence of divinity in the created world, safeguarding himself against the charge of pantheism.<sup>123</sup>

Bulgakov’s attempt at reconciling the transcendence of God with the immanent divinity of the world may bring on associations with the mystical theology without Hesychasm that has become the emblem of the Orthodox mentality.<sup>124</sup> A great representative of Hesychasm, Gregory Palamas, distinguished between transcendent, unknowable God – the object of apophatic theology – from God’s energies that are active in the world, accessible to human cognition and participating in man’s life. Unlike the “Sophiologists,” however, Palamas did not combine all those energies in the general term of “Sophia.” In his later years, Bulgakov described Palamism as an “incomplete Sophiology”<sup>125</sup> – thereby situating himself in the tradition derived from Hesychasm and, simultaneously, naming the crucial difference in accentuation. For, Sophiology – rather than focus on unknowable Transcendence – concentrated on the divinity

121 Cf. S.N. Bulgakov, *Filosofii khoziaistva*, p. 115.

122 See, P. Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, pp. 260-266. Cf. also J. Klinger, *O istocie prawostawia*, Warsaw 1983, pp. 193-195.

123 F.C. Copleston doubts the success of that idea, observing that the Bulgakov-approved pantheism is hardly distinguishable from Bulgakov-rejected pantheism. At the same time, however, Copleston rightly observes that it was impossible for Bulgakov to accept the idea of an entirely transcendent God who is alien to the world – if only because it would have made impossible any philosophical explication of his idea of Godmanhood (F.C. Copleston, *Russian Religious Philosophy*, pp. 98-99). Transcendence could have been reconciled with immanence without the help of complex Sophiological structures (Ibid., p. 99).

124 Bulgakov came across hesychasm at the time of the *imiaslaviie* controversy of Mount Athos. Even then, he came to the conclusion that the monks of Mount Athos were right to introduce a distinction between “the entity of God” and the divine energies (see, C. Evtuhov, *The Cross and the Sick. Sergei Bulgakov and the Fate of Russian Religious Philosophy 1890-1920*, Ithaca-London 1997, p. 212).

125 See P. Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, p. 337, footnote 91.

Defending himself from the charge of heresy, Bulgakov even declared that Sophiology stemmed directly from Palamism, since the notions of “divine energies” and “Sophia” were synonymous. See, S. Bulgakov, *O Sofii Premudrosti Bozhei. Ukaz moskovskoi patriarkhii I dokladniie zapiski prof. Sergeia Bulgakova, Metropolitu Yevlogiiu*, Paris 1937, p. 59, footnote. Cf. also T. Spidlik, SJ, *Myśl rosyjska. Inna wizja człowieka*, Warsaw 2000, pp. 398-399.

of the created world, accessible to philosophical cognition. Consequently, rather than stress negative, apophatic theology, it emphasized kataphatic theology, proposing its philosophization and modernization. It even held that the dogmas of faith ought to be established in the process of a general ecclesiastic discussion, with active participation of all the faithful.<sup>126</sup>

In philosophical terms, Sophiology was a variation of epistemological collectivism trying to overcome the epistemological antinomies of Kant's individualism. Bulgakov treated Kant as a philosopher of subjective idealism – in opposition to Schelling's system defined as a "philosophy of nature and objective reality."<sup>127</sup> Kant's transcendental subject became, by this account, a passive subject – individual (in the psychological sense) or, at the best, gnoseological, i.e., merely cognitive, extra-social and extra-historical, having no part in the active creation of the world. Bulgakov opposed that concept with his theory of the existential foundations of knowledge that assumed primacy of action to cognition and the *social* subject shaped in the collective process of work. Sophiology thus became transformed into a philosophy of work that was, at the same time, a philosophy of culture, since work defined as the process of imprinting the "self" on the "non-self," i.e., an active shaping of the object by the subject, was to Bulgakov the paradigm of all culture-formative activity.<sup>128</sup>

The most important sphere of culture-formative activity was, according to Bulgakov, economics, i.e., the domain of man's struggle with nature and of the development of human generic potency in the process of collective work. Humanization of culture by man's economic activity testified, in that perspective, to the existence of a participatory bond between man and God, becoming a practical realization of the Godmanhood ideal. At the same time, however, Bulgakov's *Philosophy of Economy* may be read as a religious reinterpretation of the ideas that had fascinated the thinker at an earlier stage of his intellectual evolution – namely, of Feuerbach's idea of Humanity disclosing its divine attributes in the historical process and of the young Marx's idea of the "generic creature" realizing its potential through the development of production forces. The coincidence extended to a Promethean rhetoric that – albeit not as evident as in Marx – marked Bulgakov's views on the power and heroism of work.

The general ethos of Sophiology, however, was that of harmony, rather than of conquest. Bulgakov treated Sophiology theo-nomically – as a sphere subject

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126 Cf. C. Evtuhov, *The Cross and the Sickle*, p. 213.

127 S.N. Bulgakov, *Filosofia khoziaistva*, p. 47.

128 *Ibid.*, pp. 76-82. Experts on Polish philosophy of that time will, no doubt, mark the similarity of those ideas to Stanisław Brzozowski's philosophy of work.

to God's laws; as inner providence transforming chaos into cosmos; as Hegel's historical reason secretly steering man's egoistic and chaotic activities.<sup>129</sup> Sophiology thus became a form of cosmodycy endowing the world with an inner harmony, as well as an athropodycy naming man as the leader in the process of trans-deification of the created reality. It also agreed with the main postulate of "new religious consciousness:" to overcome ascetic negation of the world and direct religious energies toward a worldly, cultural and social activity.

American theologian Paul Valliere has aptly observed that Sophiology made the opposite of Gnosticism<sup>130</sup> – of the Gnostic dualism, the Gnostic contempt and near-hatred of the created world, as well as total concentration on "otherworldly" matters. Let us observe, by the way, that the term "Gnosis" has been habitually misused in Russian and Polish literatures, taking on an unjustifiably broad and a-historical meaning that embraces all combinations of philosophical knowledge with soteriological-religious one. It was in that sense that the term was used by some of the Silver Age thinkers, particularly by Berdiaev who defined his own views as "Gnostic." However, modern historians of Russian thought should not accept that terminological suggestion<sup>131</sup> – not because words must not be used in metaphorical senses, but because association with Gnosis deforms the worldview meaning of Russian religious philosophy. In fact, the pantheistic messianic-oriented philosophies of the Silver Age radically reversed the historical sense of the Gnostics' heritage. The Gnostics, after all, did not oppose the dualism of God and the world – indeed, they brought that dualism to its extreme form, declaring the world to be a creation of the evil spirit. Nor did they "sanctify" matter or admit the possible existence of

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129 See P. Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, pp. 260-264.

130 *Ibid.*, p. 261.

131 It has, unfortunately, been accepted by I.I. Yevlampiev who declared "the Gnostic paradigm" represented by Dostoevsky and Berdiaev (and also, partly, by Soloviev) to be especially characteristic of Russian religious thought (see, I.I. Yevlampiev, *Istoriia russkoi metafiziki v XIX-XX vekakh*, Petersburg 2000, part II – *Zaklucheniie*). By questioning the term "Gnosis" applied to post-Solovievan religious philosophers in Russia (Berdiaev included), I do not mean to deny the presence of numerous Gnostic-derived themes in the works of those philosophers. The point is, however, that they had subjected those themes to their own anti-Gnostic vision in which the Gnostic dualism was overcome, along with hostility toward matter and programmatic negation of worldly tasks. The attitude had much in common with philosophical Romanticism of Neo-Platonic provenance – rather than with Gnosis in the proper sense of the term. If we insist on using the term "Gnosis" to describe their philosophies, we should speak of a modern Gnosis, radically transformed and accepting the ideas of a deification of world and a terrestrialized salvation.

inner-worldly divinity – rather, they represented a radically anti-cosmic attitude, condemning matter and authoritatively rejecting the idea of nature’s trans-deification. Conceiving of salvation as purely transcendental, they opposed chiliastic dreams of Parousia and earthly salvation, as well as the orthodox Christological dogma of bodily resurrection. That is how – in accordance with the historical meaning of the term – Gnosis was understood by Soloviev, who therefore declared himself to be firmly anti-Gnostic. In his opinion, Gnosticism had been contemporarily continued by the official Church that restricted its own tasks to being concerned about salvation in the afterworld.<sup>132</sup>

In 1917-1918, the author of *Philosophy of Economy* participated – as a lay theologian – in the All-Russian Church Council that restored the institution of Patriarchate. He featured at the Council as the chief reformer, encouraging the Church to accept the principle of ecclesiastic democracy inspired by the Slavophile idea of “counciliarism.” At the same time, however, he defended the idea of maintaining close ties between the reformed Church and the renewed Russian statehood, which would make Orthodoxy the dominating religion. He even demanded that the Orthodox Church be granted the status of a national institution, so that it might influence state politics no less than did the Parliament.<sup>133</sup> On Pentecost Day 1918, Soloviev took holy orders. In emigration, he and Berdiaev were active in the ecumenical movement that largely helped to favorably alter the image of the Orthodox Church in the eyes of the Catholic and the Protestant worlds. Being, unlike Berdiaev, institutionally bound with the Church – as a priest and a professor of the Paris Orthodox Institute – Soloviev took care to keep his speeches within the frame of inner-ecclesiastic discussion.

That was precisely why Bulgakov’s ideas were used to reveal a deep conflict between the religiousness of the intellectuals and the traditionalist Orthodoxy of the clergy. In 1935, Bulgakov’s “Sophiology” was condemned as heresy by two Church authorities: Sergius the Metropolitan of Moscow and the Archiereisky Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church abroad. A shady figure in his case was that of Vladimir Lossky, philosopher Nikolai Lossky’s son. Bulgakov was accused of religious modernism that blurred the difference between God and the world, inordinately extolled man and ignored both the dogmas and the teachings of the Church Fathers. Thanks to the solidarity of the Institute-established committee, Eulogius the Metropolitan of Paris (who was also the Institute’s President) refused to confirm the condemning verdict, arguing that the Moscow Metropolitan had access only to tendentiously selected excerpts from Bulgakov’s works. That, however, did not alter the fact that the official

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132 See Soloviev’s introduction to *La Russie et l’Église Universelle*.

133 See C. Evtuhov, *The Cross and the Sickle*, chapters 11-12.

Orthodox Church structures representing the continuity of ecclesiastical Orthodoxy cut themselves off from the philosophized and reformed Orthodoxy of the Silver Age religious thinkers.

Notwithstanding his huge theological output produced in emigration,<sup>134</sup> Bulgakov had practically no followers in Russian philosophical-theological thought. Even though he strongly influenced such outstanding figures as, for example, Nikolai Zernov (author of a book on the religious renaissance in Russia) or Georgii Fedotov (historian of Russian religious thought),<sup>135</sup> he never fathered a theological school. He is now classified – along with Bukharev and Soloviev – as a representative of the so-called Russian Theological School whose tradition was superseded in the 1930s by New-Patristic theology that – rather than advocate renewal of the Church and philosophical modernization of faith – emphasized the inviolability of tradition, dogmatic precision and direct references to the apophatic theology of Eastern Patristics.<sup>136</sup> An influential representative of the latter trend was Father Georgii Florovsky, the author of the classical *Roads of Russian Theology*, published in Paris in 1937.

In Soviet Russia, any continuation of Bulgakov's theological thought was absolutely impossible. During Gorbachev's *Perestroika*, Bulgakov's thought and the entire tradition of Russian religious-philosophical renaissance was resumed by Father Alexander Mien' who represented the reformist trend of the Orthodox Church.<sup>137</sup>

### *Evgeny Trubetskoi*

Unlike Bulgakov, Prince Evgeny Trubetskoi experienced no dramatic worldview evolution. Throughout his life, he considered himself to be a pupil of

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134 Bulgakov's strictly theological work was initiated with the book *Svet nevechernii* (1917) whose first part is philosophical and the second one – theological. In emigration, Bulgakov published – amongst other works – his monumental trilogy *Agnets Bozhii* (1933), *Utshitel* (1936) and *Nevesta Agntsa* (on the Church, 1945). Posthumously published were his *Filosofii imeni* (1953) and commentary on the Apocalypse (1948).

135 Zernov's book, *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century* (New York-Evanston 1963) discusses in detail Bulgakov's and Berdiaev's activities in the global ecumenical movement. Fedotov's major work on the history of Orthodoxy is his two-volume book, *The Russian Religious Mind (1946-1966)*, written and published in the United States.

136 See P. Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology*, part III, chapter 15.

137 See Father Aleksandr Men's lectures, "Russkaia religioznaia filosofiiia," in: *Protoyerei A. Men'. Mirovaia dukhovnaia kultura. Khristianstvo. Tserkov'*, Moscow 1995 (on Bulgakov, pp. 518-532).

Soloviev and a researcher of Soloviev's heritage. His own ideas were usually expressed as interpretations of and comments on Soloviev's philosophical output. But Trubetskoi was an independent, and occasionally very critical commentator – to the extent of being sometimes perceived as an active and firm opponent of “Solovievism.”<sup>138</sup>

The Trubetskoi brothers got acquainted with Soloviev's ideas during the surge of patriotic enthusiasm that accompanied the Russian-Turkish War of 1877. The Messianic motives of Soloviev's – and Dostoevsky's – visions allowed for interpreting that war as more than just help offered to the Slavic brethren: indeed, as evidence of Russia's universal historical mission. Evgeny Trubetskoi agreed with Soloviev that the content of the Russian mission was the idea of “free theocracy,” realizing the ideal of All-Unity in social life. He saw Soloviev as a consistent representative of theocratic universalism, organically related to the Slavophile criticism of atomistic results of rationalism and secularism. What seemed drastically contradictory to Slavophilism was Soloviev's acceptance of the Pope's primacy – and yet, on the other hand, the Papacy had obviously been the strongest historical center of universalist theocratic aspiration. Had the aspirations been justified – had their realization made the desired alternative to the process of secularization – Soloviev's pro-Papist ideas would have been a natural consequence of the pro-universalist Christian option.

Young Trubetskoi felt no pro-Catholic sentiments. On the other hand, he did not believe that sympathy or antipathy could make a decisive argument on vital questions. Consequently, he decided to research the issue historically. The fruit of that decision – proving his seriousness about Soloviev's ideas – became two cast volumes devoted to the theocratic ideas of Western Christianity: Trubetskoi's master's thesis on St. Augustine (1892) and his doctor thesis entitled *The idea of God's Kingdom in the Works of Gregory VII and the Publicists of His Times* (1897).<sup>139</sup> The books were free of anti-Catholic stereotypes, even to the point of emphasizing positive aspects of the Pope's interventions in Italian and all-European politics. The author's general conclusions, however, confirmed the Slavophiles' thesis of Latin Christianity being infected with the spirit of ancient-Roman legalism that made it too ready to employ the methods of legal-state coercion. The fact obviously contradicted

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138 Cf. A. Losiev, *Vladimir Soloviev i evo vremia*, Moscow 1990, p. 579.

139 See E.N. Trubetskoi, *Religiozno-obshchestvennyi ideal zapadnogo khristianstva v V veke, I: Mirosoziertsanii Blazh. Avgustina* (Moscow 1892); Trubetskoi, *Religiozno-obshchestvennyi idieal zapadnogo khristianstva v IX veke, II: Idea Tsarstva Bozhiiia v voreniakh Grigoriia VII i publitsistov evo vremeni* (Kiev 1897).

the New Testament teaching that justice must not be executed “by order” (St. Paul’s Letter to the Galatians, II, 21). In that perspective, the Orthodox Church’s modest involvement in secular matters seemed a virtue, rather than a defect.

Later evolution of Trubetskoi’s views produced an even more radical conclusion, namely, that *any* theocracy (not just the Latin one) is, of necessity, based on coercion, which makes the very idea of “free theocracy” self-contradictory, much like that of squaring the circle.<sup>140</sup> Theocracy – the thinker argued – is, in fact, a dangerous utopia of an immanentized Absolute, with the transcendent Absolute being ascribed an earthly dimension, while earthly matters are endowed with absolute meaning – which is nothing but creation of false absolutes that subject the human society to the tyranny of idolatry. God, in fact, exists above history – rather than within it – and no form of worldly life can be considered divine; a theocratic state pretending to represent God’s Kingdom on earth would be compatible neither with the transcendence of the divine Absolute, nor with the autonomy of the created world – and thus incapable of realizing the ideal of All-Unity. The proper objective of state authorities is to prevent hell on earth, rather than to create an earthly paradise; a theocratic authority with its self-imposed mission of serving the Absolute Good (which is the task of the Church, rather than of the state) would necessarily become a totalitarian authority, contemptible of the individual’s rights and freedoms and making impossible any autonomy of social institutions.<sup>141</sup>

The argument, developed in Trubetskoi’s monograph of Soloviev, led to a conclusion that contradicted Bulgakov’s idea of strong ties between the reformed state and the reformed Church. Trubetskoi believed that solution to be a milder form of theocracy and opposed it with the classical postulate of liberalism: to separate the Church from the state. He also stressed the autonomy of secular institutions, justifying it with New-Testament respect for relative values. Trubetskoi never tried to present that layout of accents as the proper interpretation of Soloviev’s thought. Instead – like Chicherin (even though without summoning him) – he accused Soloviev of striving to endow the Church with “limitless power” armed with the means of state coercion.<sup>142</sup>

Trubetskoi’s severe criticism of Soloviev’s theocratic ideas was a conscious defense of liberalism against an ethical extremism that would readily sacrifice relative values – such as lay culture, individual freedom or the state of law – for the sake of realizing a utopian ideal of Absolute Good. A very similar critique of utopian absolutism had been simultaneously developed by Pavel Novgorodtsev

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140 E.N. Trubetskoi, *Mirosozertsanie V. Soloviova*, vol. 1, pp. 540-545.

141 *Ibid.*, pp. 553-557.

142 *Ibid.*, p. 507.

who opposed utopianism from the standpoint of New-Kantian historiosophy declaring infinity of historical progress and imperfection of all its achievements.<sup>143</sup> In the practical sense, Trubetskoi wholly accepted that view – supporting it, however, with a different motivation. According to him, the impossibility of a worldly realization of absolute values (“paradise on earth”) followed from transcendence and immanence being rigorously separated: an aspiration to terrestrialize the Kingdom of God was, in his opinion, a pantheistic heresy mixing the earthly order with the divine order. He spotted symptoms of that heresy in Bulgakov’s concept of Sophia which he accused of monophysitism and Gnostic-minded hypostasizing of God’s Wisdom. In Trubetskoi’s own interpretation, Sophia was “God’s force inalienable from God,” rather than a divinity unfolding in the world<sup>144</sup> – which, obviously, meant a transformation of the pantheist metaphysics of All-Unity in the spirit of traditional Christian theism. And yet, the worldview intention of that transformation was opposed to that of traditionalist authoritarianism. What Trubetskoi had in mind was not to defend the “monarchic model of God” as a personified ruler arbitrarily governing the world from a great distance, but rather the opposite – to defend the autonomy of the human world which, albeit imperfect, left room for a liberally defined freedom.

From the point of view of liberal secularism, Trubetskoi’s undertaking proved undoubtedly successful. However – as Berdiaev aptly observed – the price of that success was the practical abandonment of Soloviev’s vision of All-Unity, which meant a return to the dualist concept.

According to Soloviev [Berdiaev wrote] the soul of the world is substantially divine, it is already Sophia. The world is a manifestation of God. The cosmic process is being realized within God. According to Trubetskoi, the world is extra-divine, God is free from the world, while the world is free from God. The world is not a manifestation of God. The cosmic process is being realized outside God. The soul of the world is not Sophia. Sophia is within God, and not within the world. To the world, Sophia is but an ideal, a higher norm, that which should be.<sup>145</sup>

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143 Novgorodtsev discussed the problem of utopia in his extensive dissertation “Ob obshchestvennom ideale,” published in 1911-1916 in the periodical *Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii*. Cf. A Walicki, *Legal Philosophies of Russian Liberalism*, pp. 318-341.

144 See E.N. Trubetskoi, “Smysl zhizni,” in: Trubetskoi, *Izbrannoe*, Moscow 1997, pp. 136-137.

145 N. Berdiaev, “O zemnom i nebesnom utopizmie” (1913), in: Berdiaev, *Tipy religioznoi mysli v Rossii*, p. 532.



*Father Pavel Florensky*

Philosopher and theologian Father Pavel Florensky (1882-1937), who was also an expert mathematician and naturalist,<sup>146</sup> represented the extreme right-wing strand of the “Put” Group, symmetrically opposed to Truebtskoi’s views. The variant of the philosophy of All-Unity preached by Florensky derived culture from cult, leaving no room for an autonomous secular culture. Notwithstanding his strong dependence on Soloviev’s Sophiological theories, Florensky firmly rejected Soloviev’s evolutionism, particularly the idea of an alliance with liberal progress. He also distanced himself from the idea of a religious-philosophical renaissance, finding it akin to atomism and intellectualism and contrasting it with his own proposed return to the medieval mentality that had been holistic and, at the same time, concrete.<sup>147</sup>

As a philosopher, Florensky believed himself to be a firm Platonist. Like Yurkevich, he contrasted Platonism with Kantianism, arguing that Plato saw ideas ontologically – as rooted in the living myth, while to Kant ideas were merely a function of reason, lost in the noumenal void.<sup>148</sup>

Elaborating on that contrast, Florensky argued that while Plato represented the philosophical tradition of “integral knowledge,” Kantianism constituted the unavoidable consequence of cognition disintegrated by one-sided rationalism. The result was a significant correction to the Slavophile critique of Western philosophy, as well as to Ern’s “ontologism,” namely, that *tselnoe znaniie* – rather than stem from Eastern Christian Patristics – originated from classical Greek philosophy that was the common heritage of the West and the East.<sup>149</sup>

Another little expected correction to Slavophile and new-Slavophile anti-rationalism was Florensky’s favorable reference to Kant’s idea of the antinomy of reason.<sup>150</sup> Despite his harsh and momentarily drastic criticism of Kantianism,

146 Florensky was born in Transcaucasia; his mother came from an aristocratic Georgian-Armenian family. Having studied mathematics at Moscow University, in 1904 he entered Moscow Spiritual Academy, to become its President in 1911. After the Revolution, he was employed as a conservator of historical monuments and as a scientist in various Soviet institutions. Arrested in 1933, he was executed by firing squad on December 8, 1937.

147 P. Florenskii, “Avtoreferat,” *Voprosy filosofii*, No 12, 1988. For various interpretations and judgments of Florensky’s work, see the anthology *P.A. Florenskii: Pro et contra*, Petersburg 1996.

148 See A.V. Akhutin, “Sofiiia i chert (Kant pered litsom russkoi religioznoi metafiziki,” in: *Rossiiia i Germaniia: opyt filosofskovo dialoga*, Moscow 1993, pp. 236-237.

149 Cf. R. Slesinski, *Pavel Florensky. A Metaphysics of Love*, Crestwood, N.Y. 1984, p. 63.

150 See P. Florensky, *Kosmologicheskie antinomii I. Kanta*, Bogoslovskii vestnik, vol. 1, No 4, 1909.

Florensky agreed with Kant that the nature of truth was anti-nomic and that the anti-nomicity could not be reduced or overcome in a higher synthesis. To Florensky (as well as to Kant himself) that meant a rational argument for the indispensability of religious faith. Continuing in that direction, however, Florensky parted ways with Kant's criticism, arriving at the conclusion that the unique weapon against skepticism was inviolability of the dogmas.

Florensky's major work was his "attempted Orthodox theodicy" entitled *Support and Confirmation of Truth*, published by "Put'" in 1914.<sup>151</sup> The book combined an easy and highly subjective literary form (12 letters to a friend, reporting on the Author's spiritual autobiography) with a rich apparatus of erudite footnotes, printed in an archaic type and meticulously illustrated with appropriate images and vignettes. Its most important parts were Sophiological meditations whose style and content are well characterized by the following quotation:

If Sophia is the creation, then the soul and the conscience of creation is Humanity, that is, Sophia *par excellence*. If Sophia is the entire Humanity, then the soul and the conscience of Humanity is the Church, that is, Sophia in a specific meaning. If Sophia is the Church, then the soul and the conscience of the Church is the Church of the Saints, another specific aspect of Sophia. If, in turn, Sophia is the Church of the Saints, then the soul and the conscience of the Saints' Church is The-One-Who-Pleads-for-the-Entire-Creation [...], Mother of God – the world's purification, and thus, again, Sophia in a particular sense. But the true emblem of Maria-full-of-grace is Her Virginity, Her inner beauty. That is Sophia.<sup>152</sup>

In another text, Florensky described Sophia as "The great root of the entire creation with which that creation penetrates the depth of the Holy Trinity."<sup>153</sup> Evidently, his fear of pantheism did not make Florensky abandon panentheism – as was the case with Trubetskoi. At the same time, however, it seems clear that Florensky – unlike Bulgakov (who remained under his strong influence) – emphasized the inner hierarchy of aspects in his concept of Sophia (with the Mother of God on top) and was not inclined to admire Sophia in the pre-human nature. He can hardly be imagined facing in speechless admiration the Niagara Falls that (by Bulgakov's account) made "visible proof of Divine Sophia's presence and power in the world."<sup>154</sup>

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151 *Stolp i utverzhdeniie istiny* (reprint Moscow 1990, introduction by S. Khorouzhny).

152 P. Florensky, *Stolp i utverzhdeniie istiny*, vol. 1, pp. 350-351. Quoted after J. Klinger's Polish translation in: J. Klinger, *O istocie prawostawia*, pp. 194-195.

153 *Ibid.*, p. 326.

154 Bulgakov's diary of his journey to the U.S.A. in late 1934. See, S.N. Bulgakov, *Tikhiie dumy*, Moscow 1996, p. 408.

To safeguard himself from pantheism, Florensky (followed by Bulgakov) introduced the already mentioned distinction between “created Sophia” and “heavenly Sophia.” As F.C. Copleston has observed, the distinction was neither precise, nor logically convincing – for, if the created Sophia was simply part of the world, while the heavenly Sophia was part of the divine Absolute, they could hardly be defined as two aspects of one and the same entity; if, on the other hand, Sophia was a two-aspect singularity, then the pantheistic conclusion of man’s essential homogeneity with God seemed unavoidable.<sup>155</sup> Florensky avoided that trap by summoning the antinomy of religious experience, resistant to the logic of the excluded middle. The fact that his thought evolved toward the ideas of Hesychasm (that he became acquainted with during the *imiaslaviie* controversy) proves, however, that Florensky tried to make his own concept of Sophia more precise and to reconcile it with Patristic apophatic theology that resolved the problem of a man-God relationship by distinguishing between the world-suffusing divine energies that man could identify with, and the entire transcendence of God’s being that was inaccessible to human cognition and expressible only in symbols.<sup>156</sup>

Florensky’s need to broaden the distance between Sophiology and pantheism ensued from his conservative vision of the Church that graphically distinguished his own views from the ecclesiastical reformism of the “Put” Group. A strikingly extremist manifestation of his conservatism was Florensky’s brochure, *Around Khomiakov*, published in 1916 by Troitse-Sergiyev Lavra.<sup>157</sup> The author of *Support and Confirmation of Truth* called Khomiakov’s Orthodoxy “an improved Protestantism,” accusing Khomiakov of eradicating – “along with the weeds of Catholicism” – “the wheat of Orthodoxy,” as well as of negating obligatory canons and “the awe principle”; he even put to doubt Khomiakov’s political righteousness, interpreting his idea of “councility” as acceptance of the democratic principle of the people’s sovereignty. There was a consistency to Florensky’s proceedings: having distanced himself from Soloviev, he obviously found that it was now time to attack Khomiakov. Indeed, from Florensky’s point of view, both the ideological patrons of the “Put” Group were guilty of making excessive and unpardonable concessions to immanentism. Soloviev did it by sanctifying historical progress, while Khomiakov –

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155 F.C. Copleston, *Russian Religious Philosophy*, p. 98.

156 S. Khorouzhny believes, however, that Florensky remained faithful to Platonism, while the Hesychasm of Gregory Palamas was an attempt at overcoming the Platonic dualism (see, S.S. Khorouzhny, “Obreteniie konkretonsti,” in: P.A. Florensky, *U vodorazdelov mysli*, Moscow 1990, pp. 11-12).

157 P.A. Florensky, *Okolo Khomiakova*, Sergiiev Posad 1916.

unintentionally – did practically the same, substituting the principle of transcendent authority with ecclesiological immanentism that accepted inner consciousness of “God’s People” as the criterion of truth.

Berdiaev, unsurprisingly, reacted to Florensky’s brochure with an outburst of fury. He called it a scandal and a renegade act of rejecting the entire tradition of philosophical New Slavophilism, Dostoevsky included. Florensky – he declared – had unveiled his true face of a preacher of the religion of necessity, humility and fear, cowering to “facts” and absolutely foreign to authentic mysticism which has to be immanent. The road he had chosen was, indeed, that of the Great Inquisitor.<sup>158</sup>

A more balanced judgment of Florensky had appeared in Berdiaev’s earlier essay, devoted to *Support and Confirmation of Truth*<sup>159</sup> – where Berdiaev pointed out the strong points of Florensky’s “Orthodox theodicy,” the major one being the elaborate idea of inexorable and insurmountable antinomy of religious life. Finally, however, Florensky was categorized as a representative of the “stylized” Orthodoxy, artificially archaic in the spirit of the monastic “elders” who opposed spiritual aristocracy as the sin of pride, while themselves flirting with esotericism and magic. Berdiaev’s main charge against Florensky, however, was that of his transcendentalist option, depreciating the significance of the immanent element in religious experience. Berdiaev found it contradictory with the New Testament spirit that conveyed God’s immanent presence in man.<sup>160</sup>

An opposed, New-Patristic view of Florensky was proposed by Father Georgii Florovsky, author of *The Roads of Russian Theology*. In his opinion, *Support and Confirmation of Truth* was not so much a return to the foundations, as a testimony to the ambiguity and instability of the religious-philosophical movement in Russia. Florovsky described Florensky as an aesthetic-minded Romantic, a skeptic seeking rescue in the dogmas, a Westernist going after salvation in the East, and a thinker borrowing freely from pre-Christian sources, such as Platonism, occultism and magic. He even spotted in Florensky’s system a hope for a new revelation – an idea contradicting fundamentalist Orthodoxy and surprisingly concordant with some propositions of the preachers of “new religious consciousness.” What especially caught Florovsky’s attention,

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158 See Berdiaev’s essay, “Khomiakov i svyashchennik Florensky,” *Russkaia mysl*, February 1917, reprinted in: N. Berdiaev, *Tipy religioznoi mysli v Rossii*, pp. 567-579.

159 N. Berdiaev, “Stilizovannoe pravoslaviie,” *Russkaia mysl*, January 1914, reprinted in *Tipy religioznoi mysli*, pp. 543-566.

160 *Ibid.*, p. 556. Berdiaev declared that pure transcendentalism testified to “religious immaturity.”

however, was the absence of the Christological theme in Florensky's writings and the fact that – never mentioning the dogma of Incarnation – Florensky passed directly from his speculations on the Trinity to the teachings on Paraclete.<sup>161</sup> Florensky's "attempted Orthodox theodicy" thus seemed to include almost everything – except Christ.

Florensky's post-Revolutionary fate was untypically and exceptionally tragic: having remained in Russia, he collaborated as a scientist and renowned inventor with the Soviet authorities – and yet, his refusal to renounce priesthood cost him life. Understandably, he became a legend, carefully preserved in the religious circles of Russian dissidents. However, the awareness of Florensky's numerous ideas being discordant with the teachings of the Church was soon to emerge. Even in the 1970s, Sergei Khorouzhy – in a brochure published underground by a *samizdat* – accused Florensky of excessive Hellenism that led to "antique fatalism" (which, in his opinion, lay at the core of Florensky's Soviet loyalty) and to "Christianity without Christ."<sup>162</sup> Florensky's legend has been recently questioned from quite a different angle by I.I. Yevlampiiev, author of the ambitious *History of Russian Metaphysics of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*. Echoing Berdiaev, he compared Florensky to the Great Inquisitor, observing that the publishing of his manuscript heritage came as a great disillusionment to the philosophical community's expectations, largely diminishing Florensky's status amongst the Silver Age thinkers.<sup>163</sup>

The controversy about the philosophical value of Florensky's vision has not yet been – nor can it be – definitively resolved. And yet, from the point of view of Russia's intellectual history, it is impossible to avoid answering the question whether Florensky was, or was not, an integral part of the Russian religious-philosophical renaissance. Significantly, he situated himself *in opposition* to the "renaissance" tendencies – and had a strong motivation to do so.

The answer to the question can be neither unambiguous, nor simple. Florensky was, in fact, a typical example of a conservative assimilating problems left behind by the reformers in order to placate them and make them practically harmless. That made him a thinker organically related to his own times, dependent on the various contexts and, on many issues, being simply one of the voices of those times. In this sense, he cannot be excluded from the

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161 G. Florovsky, *Puti russkogo bogosloviia* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Paris 1983), pp. 493-498.

162 See S.S. Khorouzhy, *Mirosozertsaniie Florenskogo*, Tomsk 1999 (originally a *samizdat* brochure of the 1970s).

163 I.I. Yevlampiiev, *Istoriia russkoi metafiziki*, vol. 1, pp. 392-405. The author writes of a "precipice" separating Florensky from Soloviev, Frank, Bulgakov or Karsavin and the "absolute impossibility" of putting them on a par (*Ibid.*, pp. 398-399).

Russian “renaissance” – especially considering his Sophiology and its influence on Bulgakov’s ideas.

This, however, does not alter the fundamental fact that – unlike Bulgakov – the author of *Support and Confirmation of Truth* was not a reformer but, rather, he was a conscious counter-reformer (even if conditioned by his own times). The Sophiology he developed was not an attempt to modernize religious life, sanctify secular culture or promote a dialogue between the Church and the modern world.

### *Semen Frank and Lev Karsavin*

Further history of the Russian metaphysics of All-Unity is connected with the thinkers whose philosophical activity flourished in the period beyond the chronological framework of the present volume: Semen Frank and Lev Karsavin (1882-1952).<sup>164</sup> The former – a “legal Marxist” and, later, co-author of *Problems of Idealism* and of *Signposts* – had long searched for his own way in philosophy, until he defined it in his seminal book on the object of cognition (*Predmet znaniia*, 1915) that was a pioneering, highly modern attempt at founding the philosophy of All-Unity on strong logical and theoretical-cognitive grounds.<sup>165</sup>

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164 Expelled from Russia in 1922, Karsavin settled in Berlin, to move to Paris in 1925 and – three years later – take the Universal History Chair at Kaunas. Arrested in 1949, he was deported to a lager at Komi where he died. See, S.S. Khorouzhny, “Zhizn’ i ucheniie Lva Karsavina,” in: Khorouzhny, *Posle piereryva*, pp. 131-188.

165 The main thesis of the book supported the standpoint of ontologism, liberating it, however, from ignorance of logical and epistemological questions. Just like the *Logos* editors, Frank made no attempt at constructing a programmatically “Russian” philosophy, concerning himself with the Russian assimilation of the latest achievements of professional German philosophy. He employed – amongst other ideas – Husserl’s critique of psychologism, arguing (in keeping with Husserl) that, in the cognitive act, we deal with things themselves – rather than with impressions or phenomena. In his later works published in emigration (especially in the book *Nepostizhimoie. Ontologicheskoe vviedeniie v filosofiiu religii*, Paris 1939), Frank came even closer to the Russian philosophers of All-Unity, fully accepting the major ideas of their “ontologism.” Simultaneously, however, he minimized his own dependence on Soloviev, arguing that even the greatest Russian religious thinkers (Soloviev included) did not fulfill the demands of philosophical system construction “in the classical sense of European tradition” (“Russkaia filosofia, yeyo kharakternaia osobiennost’ I zadacha,” in: S.L. Frank, *Russkoie mirovozzreniie*, ed. A.A. Yermichev, Petersburg 1996, pp. 205-210). Privately, Frank admitted that he had never been able to understand Sophiology and felt no kinship with Bulgakov or Berdiaev (letter to M.I. Borodina of

Karsavin – who had been known in the pre-Revolutionary years as an expert on Medieval religiousness – got interested in the metaphysics of All-Unity in the 1920s, producing an innovative dissertation, *Philosophy of History* [*Filosofia istorii*, Berlin 1923]. In many ways, Frank and Karsavin represented contrasting attitudes in the philosophy of All-Unity: while Frank, who owed much to Lossky, was a programmatic personalist and, in his religious views, a Christian ecumenist<sup>166</sup> – Karsavin, as a theorist of “the Russian idea,” developed his metaphysics of history with the concept of collective (“symphonic”) personality, for which he was accused of anti-personalist holism. And yet, the two had a lot in common. Both firmly introduced themselves as panentheists – Karsavin going as far as to declare that panentheism was the unique truly Christian rendering of the God-world relationship.<sup>167</sup> Both – unlike Florensky and the late Bulgakov – opposed the confessionalization of philosophy. Both aspired to a synthesis of the values of the Christian West with those of the Christian East – which was their understanding of the place of Russian philosophy in the universal history of thought. Both, finally, derived their own philosophies from the early-Renaissance Neo-Platonism of Nicolaus Cusanus – thus confirming (against Florensky) the validity of the renaissance impulse in the Russian religious philosophy of the Silver Age.<sup>168</sup>

Frank, understandably, emphasized the Europeanism of his own philosophy much more strongly than the Slavophile-oriented Karsavin. While he tried to harmonize his own ideas with the ontologism propagated by the “Put” Group, he also wished to meet the standards of philosophical Westernism formulated on the pages of *Logos* before the Revolution.<sup>169</sup>

January 24, 1945, quoted in: Philip Boobbyer, *S.L. Frank. The Life and Work of a Russian Philosopher 1877-1950*, Athens, Ohio 1995, p. 148).

166 In a letter to his son, Victor (of February 13, 1945), Frank described himself as follows: “I am an Orthodox, a Catholic and a Protestant, but none of them in separation and isolation” (quoted after, Boobbyer, *S.L. Frank*, p. 194).

167 L.P. Karsavin, “Vostok, zapad i russkaia idea” (1922), in: Karsavin, *Sochineniia*, Moscow 1993, pp. 170-178.

168 Cf. S. Mazurek, “Kuzañczyk I Bruno w oczach rosyjskich myślicieli religijnych,” in: Mazurek, *Filantrop czyli nieprzyjaciel i inne szkice o rosyjskim renesansie religijno-filozoficznym*, Warsaw 2004.

169 Apparently, that was the reason why V. Zenkovsky found Frank’s philosophical output the culminating achievement of Russian philosophy (see, V.V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, p. 872). I.I. Yevlampiev is inclined to share that opinion.

In the Polish language, a thorough monograph of Frank has been written by Leszek Augustyn: *Myślenie z wnętrza objawienia. Studium filozofii Siemiona L. Franka*, Krakow 2003.

This is what won him a special place amongst the Russian religious philosophers of the past century.



## Closing Remarks

The term “Russian religious-philosophical renaissance” has many meanings which, while mutually overlapping in range, are varied in content. It is sometimes used today in the conventional-chronological sense to denote the entire post-Positivist period in the history of Russian culture – from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the 1917 Revolution.<sup>1</sup> In that sense – similarly to the Polish term “the Age of Modernism culture” – “Russian religious-philosophical renaissance” includes programmatically anti-Positivist intellectual trends, as well as new versions of the trends that had been shaped before. A typical example of a trend that, while opposing the new tendencies, nevertheless switched on to them by continuing their themes and maintaining criticism of the dogmas of Positivist scientism was, naturally, the Russian “New Marxism.”

From the point of view of Russian religious thinkers, however, the term “religious-philosophical renaissance” had another meaning – namely, normative, postulative and, occasionally, even openly prophetic – rather than chronological-descriptive. Merezhkovsky’s concept of “new Renaissance” featured in the context of Nietzsche’s rehabilitation of antiquity, as well as that of “new religious consciousness” interpreted as a new version of the universalist mission of the Russian intelligentsia. Berdiaev gave the idea more philosophical shape. Bulgakov, on the eve of the 1905 Revolution, substituted it with the idea of a revitalized religion within the frame of a reformed Orthodoxy. The advocates of Russia’s spiritual revival – with the exception of the politically ambiguous Rozanov – believed themselves to be continuators of the intelligentsia’s battle with autocracy. They criticized materialism, Positivism and the social-oriented utilitarianism of the radical intelligentsia, respecting, nevertheless, its ethical and freedom-bound aspirations. Bulgakov (just as Soloviev) had much admiration for Chernyshevsky; in 1904, in Merezhkovsky’s journal *Novii put’*, he commemorated the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Chernyshevsky’s death with a cordial essay, expressing solidarity with his social ideas.<sup>2</sup> Merezhkovsky himself was,

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1 See e.g., I.V. Kondakov, *Vvedeniie v istoriiu russkoi kultury*, Moscow 1994, chapter VII: “Russkii kulturnyi renesans kontsa XIX-nachala XX vv.”

2 S. Bulgakov, “Literaturnye zamietki: N.G. Chernyshevsky,” *Novii put’*, No 11, 1904 (cf. C. Evtuhov, *The Cross and the Sickle*, pp. 66-67.

indeed, an apologist of the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia: while wishing for its “conversion,” he believed the intelligentsia to be the salt of the Russian soil and never doubted that only the intelligentsia – after it was reconciled to religion – could perform the role of the chosen instrument of Russia’s general renewal.

The first Russian Revolution was the time of great hope and great disillusion. Despite the partiality of its achievements, it opened a qualitatively new era in Russian history: the Russian Empire became a semi-constitutional monarchy, respecting a wide range of civic freedoms and co-governed by the *Duma* whose members were often advocates of radical political and social reforms. The system allowed for official work on the legal and economic modernization of the state which, however, required a constructive co-operation of the oppositionist intelligentsia and the government camp reformers. The necessary condition of such a co-operation was the legal opposition’s condemnation – and thus, moral isolation – of revolutionary terrorism whose victims of the years 1905-1907 numbered more than four thousand.<sup>3</sup>

Naturally, the task would not be accepted by those who wanted to, above all, overthrow the tsarist regime through a political and social revolution. Curiously, however, the Constitutional Democrats Party seemed as little inclined to assume it, even though it agreed with its liberal political philosophy. The reason was the oppositional intelligentsia’s moral fundamentalism which made it incapable of compromise, let alone of a constructive co-operation with the authoritarian government. Against their own state-of-law theoreticians (Petrażycki, Novgorodtsev, and S.A. Kotlarevsky) who declared the predominant importance of civil code reforms,<sup>4</sup> the Kadets focused on the fight to enter the authorities and on political confrontation with the weakening monarchy. Countering liberal

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3 See G. Hosking, *Russia. People and Empire 1552-1917*, Cambridge, Mass. 1997, p. 360.

According to B.N. Mironov, author of the fundamental *Sotsialnaia istoriia Rossii* (vol. 2, Sankt Petersburg 2003, p. 258), the total number of the victims of the 1901-1911 revolutionary terror came close to seventeen thousand. Mironov quotes the data after A. Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill: Revolutionary Terrorism in Russia: 1894-1917*, Princeton, N.Y. 1997, p. 21.

Specializing in revolutionary terrorism were the fighting squads of the New-Populist Socialist-Revolutionary Party. In 1902-1905, they managed to kill two successive interior ministers (Dmitri Sipiagin in 1902 and Viacheslav Plehve in 1904), as well as the Governor General of Moscow Great Prince Sergei (in early 1905). In September 1911, another victim of the terrorists became Petr Stopypin.

4 A very strong argument to support the thesis was presented even by Boris Chicherin in his dissertation *Rossiia nakanune XX stoletiiia* (Berlin 1900).

Westernism that proclaimed the necessity of subjecting the agrarian economy to the rules of the market – which would lead to a gradual elimination of agrarian communities – they opposed the Stolypin reforms that followed that program, interpreting them as a diabolical plan of “the Revolution’s executioner” – while they offered their political support to the village deputies who (in keeping with the liberal-discredited Populist ideas) demanded total abolition of private ownership of land and expropriation of the landowners. Finally – and incredibly to us today – the Constitutional Democrats firmly refused to officially condemn terrorism, arguing that it would be tantamount to declaring themselves on the part of the authorities, in short, a “moral suicide” for a liberal party.<sup>5</sup>

These politics, however, provoked an increasing protest from the intellectual elites that had begun to realize the separate interests of the culture-makers and to distance themselves from the “rank and file” intelligentsia that was still ideologically dominated by the “enlightener” and the Populist heritage. The spokesman of that ideological turn in the liberals’ community became the founder of the Liberation Union and political mentor of the former “legal Marxists,” Petr Struve. The experience of 1905 convinced Struve that the obstacle on the way to Russia’s pacific modernization was not only the anachronistic, nostalgic conservatism of the tsarist court circles, but also the mentality of the radical intelligentsia – simultaneously moralizing and “nihilist,” underrating the autonomous value of spiritual, as well as material culture, and incapable of a compromise – be it a pragmatic one – with the “historical authorities.” Westernization of Russia – Struve argued – required a thorough transformation of the intelligentsia’s consciousness and a fundamental re-evaluation of the mainstream of the intelligentsia tradition. The proposed core of that transformation involved the reshaping of the ideology-oriented intelligentsia into a professional educated elite that would develop a modern national consciousness, harmonized with a revitalization and a modernization of the religious consciousness.

This diagnosis underlay *Signposts* – the second (after *Problems of Idealism*) manifesto of the authors grouped around Struve with whom they shared a common intellectual biography of the period of transition from “legal Marxism” to liberal idealism. It would be farfetched to ascribe to them a common set of political views, let alone to view them all as conservative supporters of Struve’s pro-state Westernism – especially that the two major figures, Berdiaev and Bulgakov, did not even fit into the frame of liberalism, concerning themselves with problems beyond the horizon of the liberal doctrine. And yet, their common

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5 Cf. A. Walicki, *Legal Philosophies of Russian Liberalism*, pp. 398-399.

motive was of a crucial cultural and political meaning. The *Signposts* authors postulated a fundamental re-evaluation of the sanctified intelligentsia traditions and a new construction of Russian intellectual history. They gave up identifying the history of Russian thought with that of the oppositional intelligentsia's ideas – proposing, instead, a recourse to the tradition of the religious thinkers: Chaadaev, the Slavophiles, Dostoevsky and Soloviev.

Unsurprisingly, the publishing of *Signposts* was received as a major scandal by the intelligentsia circles. While *Problems of Idealism* could be considered part of the history of progressive intelligentsia thought – as had been done by Ivanov-Razumnik – *Signposts* postulated a radical break with the intelligentsia mentality. Settling accounts with the entire 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian intelligentsia tradition – both revolutionary and leftist-liberal – *Signposts* symbolically closed the Russian 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup> Questioning the intelligentsia's role of the people's leader in the “fight for liberation,” *Signposts* charged it with a new role of nation-makers, concordant with the priorities of the Russian religious-philosophical renaissance.

The program, philosophically implemented by “Put” Publishers, graphically separated the elitist culture of the religious-philosophical renaissance from that of the leftist intelligentsia continuing its fight for a revolutionary overthrow of the tsarist regime. A period of cultural dualism was thus opened in the history of Russia, to be deepened by the revolutionary extremism and dogmatism of the Bolshevik Party.<sup>7</sup>

The next phase of that cultural polarization became the two 1917 Revolutions, followed by the expulsion of idealist philosophers from Russia in 1922, at Lenin's personal order.<sup>8</sup> Since that moment, the culture of the Russian religious-philosophical renaissance became that of the Russian emigration, to be silenced and banned in its home country. The amputation did no good to the ideological heritage of the leftist intelligentsia that had been so severely

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6 Cf. W. Rydzewski, “Syndrom ‘rosyjskiej idei’,” *Archiwum Historii Filozofii i Myśli Społecznej*, No 43, 1998, p. 115.

7 The above quoted I.V. Kondakov even speaks of two hostile cultures that emerged within a single national culture (*Vvedeniie*, ch. IX). The thesis is disputable, however, ignoring the attempts (for example by the Symbolist poets) at raising bridges between the elitist Silver Age culture and that of revolutionary Russia.

8 See S.S. Khorouzhy, “Filosofskii parokhod,” in: Khorouzhy, *Posle piereriva*, pp. 188-208. At least 160 non-Communist intellectuals were then expelled, the biggest group being the philosophers (including N.A. Berdiaev, S.N. Bulgakov, N.O. Lossky, S.L. Frank, Ivan Iliin, L.P. Karsavin and F.A. Stepun).

For motivations of that decision, see: A. Walicki, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom*, pp. 304-306.

criticized by *Signposts* – eventually, that group, too, was doomed to being crushed by the mechanism of the totalitarian ideocratic state. The so-called revolutionary democrats, particularly Chernyshevsky, became objects of cult and were pronounced the greatest thinkers of the “pre-Marxist” era of universal philosophy.

The reverse side of the cult, however, was an unceremonious distortion of their ideas.<sup>9</sup>

The present book ends with presenting the period of different reactions to the 1905 Revolution, i.e., the years 1909-1912, stepping beyond that framework only insofar as has been necessary to allow comprehension of the worldviews of that period’s major thinkers on both sides of the cultural division. The author’s decision has been pragmatic, rather than strictly the product of subject-matter: to describe the entire Russian religious-philosophical renaissance would have meant extending the chronological scope as far as 1922 – plus the necessity to include the vast philosophical output of the Russian Diaspora. That, however, would have necessitated writing a separate volume, *Russian Philosophy of the Twentieth Century*.

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9 Cf. A Walicki, Afterword to 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of *W kręgu konserwatywnej utopii* (Warsaw 2002), pp. 448-449.

The difficult process of rediscovering and restoring to Russian culture the heritage of the 19<sup>th</sup> century religious thinkers and Silver Age philosophers has been described by S.B. Dzhimbinov in his passionate study entitled “The Return of Russian Philosophy,” published in the collective volume *Russian Thought After Communism. The Recovery of A Philosophical Heritage*, ed. James P. Scanlan, Armonk-London 1994, pp. 11-22 (first published as “Vozvrashcheniie russkoi filosofii,” in *Zdes’ i Tepier’*, No 1, 1992, pp. 76-84).



# Bibliographical supplement

The present bibliography is not an index of texts used by the author (they are mentioned in the footnotes) but only a list of dictionaries of Russian philosophy plus the indication of two other important sources of bibliographical information.

– *Filosofy Rossii XIX-XX stoletii (biografii, idei, trudy)*. Collective volume, Ed. P.V. Alekseev, “Kniga i biznes,” Moscow 1993, 221 large-format pages. Including a rich bibliography, yet (despite its title) it is casual about the presentation of ideas; all the entries are personal.

– *Russkaia filosofia. Malyi entsiklopedicheskii slovar’*. Collective work, editor-in-chief A.T. Aleshina, “Nauka,” Moscow 1995, 624 pages. Includes ca. 320 personal and 120 subject entries, some of them extensive and suggesting new interpretations.

– *Russkaia filosofia. Slovar’*. Collective work, ed. M.A. Maslin, “Respublika,” Moscow 1995, 655 pages. Person and subject entries, a more detailed bibliography. Beginning researchers may find especially interesting the following entries: “Historiography of Russian philosophy” by B.V. Yemelianov (pp. 195-199) and “Western historiography of Russian philosophy” by M.A. Maslin (pp. 199-201).

– B.V. Yemelianov, V.V. Kulikov, *Russkie mysliteli vtoroi poloviny XIX-nachala XX veka. Opyt kratkogo bibliograficheskogo slovaria*, Ural University Press, Yekaterinburg 1996, 383 pages. A detailed bibliography and a plethora of names, without any discussion of the presented thinkers’ ideas; all entries persons.

– *Russkaia filosofia. Entsiklopedia*, ed. M.A. Maslin, Algoritm, Moscow 2007, 734 pages.

– *Idee w Rosji – Idei v Rossii – Ideas in Russia. Leksykon rosyjsko-polsko-angielski*. Collective work (Russian and foreign authors) Ed. Andrzej de Lazari. Volume I of the lexicon was published by “Semper,” Warsaw 1999, the successive volumes (II-V) were published by “Ibidem,” Łódź, Volume II appeared in 1999, vol. III – 2000, vol. IV – 2000, vol. V – 2003, vol. VI (ed. Justyna Kurczak) – 2007, vol. VII (ed. Justyna Kurczak) – 2009, vol. VIII (ed. Janusz Dobieszewski) – 2014. Including subject and person entries, the lexicon

is, above all, an ambitious attempt at interpreting the specificity of Russian intellectual culture; with a detailed bibliography.

– See also, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Craig, vol. 1-10. London-New York 1998. Owing to the initiative of Isaiah Berlin and his pupil, Aileen Kelly, the publication includes many extended articles on Russian philosophy by English-language authors (nine texts by this author included), complete with carefully selected bibliographies (mainly Western-language works). The Encyclopedia is also available in a slightly broader Internet edition, also offering more on Russian philosophy.

A compact yet valuable bibliography is also offered by V. Goerdts, *Russische Philosophie Zugänge und Durchblicke* (Freiburg-München 1984). The book includes a separate (final) chapter on multilingual historiography of Russian philosophy. See also: Boris Iakovenko (*Dějiny ruske filosofie*, Prague 1938); Vassily Zenkovsky (*Istoriia russkoi filosofii*, vol. 1-2, Paris 1948-1950); V.V. Zenkovsky (*A History of Russian Philosophy*, vol. 1-2, London 1953); Nikolai Lossky (N.O. Lossky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, New York 1951-London 1952); Anatoly Galaktionov and Petr Nikandrov, *Russkaia Filosofiiia XI-XIX vekov*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Leningrad 1970); Andrzej Walicki (*A History of Russian Thought From the Enlightenment to Marxism*, translated from Polish by H. Andrews-Rusiecka, Stanford 1979, Oxford 1980); M.A. Maslin (ed.), *Istoriia russkoi filosofii. Uczebnik*, Moscow 2008.



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