

THE PHOENIX OF PHILOSOPHY

ON THE MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN THOUGHT¹

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“The fact that one can annihilate a philosophy or that one can prove that a philosophy annihilates itself is of little consequence. If it’s really philosophy, then, like the phoenix, it will always rise again from its own ashes.”

Friedrich Schlegel. Athenaeum. Fragments, trans. Peter Firchow, 103.

1. State and Philosophy

“The Karamazovs are not scoundrels but philosophers, because all real Russian people are philosophers...”

Dmitry Karamazov, in Fyodor Dostoevsky. *The Brothers Karamazov*

“It’s a property of the Russian people to indulge in philosophy....The fate of the philosopher in Russia is painful and tragic.”

Nikolai Berdyaev. *The Russian Idea*

Historians of philosophy usually do not regard Russia as a great philosophical nation, and many have pointed to its excessive susceptibility to Western intellectual influences. Although it may be true that Russia has not produced an abundance of original philosophical ideas, she is a philosophical nation in a deeper and more comprehensive sense of this word. Perhaps no other nation in the world has so totally surrendered its social, cultural, and even economic life to the demands of philosophical concepts.

It is difficult to trace the origin of this disposition, but if we trust the testament of ancient chronicles, Russia adopted its religious faith from a Greek philosopher who, in 988, persuaded Prince Vladimir of the superiority of Orthodoxy to all other Christian and non-Christian denominations. A few small Christian communities did exist in Kiev at that time, but it was not Vladimir's intention to sanction Orthodoxy because it corresponded to the way of life of Russian natives, the overwhelming majority of whom were still pagans. Rather, this was an act of embracing an imported heritage -- one that predetermined the identity of the Russian nation for at least the next millennium. An entire new

civilization evolved from the adoption of a set of foreign precepts, not through the gradual, indigenous development of society.

Similarly, many subsequent turning points in Russian history have hinged on ideas enthusiastically embraced by the country's rulers rather than engendered by organic national evolution. Thus, in the 18th century, although the small educated sector of Russian society had only recently come to apprehend the spirit of the Enlightenment, Catherine the Great became the most thorough personification of the "philosopher on the throne" in all of Europe, following -- at least in her intentions--the intellectual guidance of such European thinkers as Voltaire and Diderot. Philosophically, Russia has been a "naive" nation, a sort of tabula rasa that time and again sought from abroad the kind of philosophical instruction that might organize the diverse aspects of its existence into one self-conscious whole.

The 19th-century tsars, beginning with Alexander the First's closing years of reign (he died in 1825) clung to the policies of conservative synthesis expressed by the famous formula "autocracy - Orthodoxy - national character" [*narodnost'*], and failed to provide the state with effective intellectual leadership. Thus the task of establishing a philosophical orientation for the society increasingly fell to the intelligentsia, beginning in the 1820s, with revolutionaries from the nobility, known as the Decembrists, and continuing in the 1840s, with descendants of the middle and bourgeois classes, known as *raznochintsy*. In considering the Russian intelligentsia as a social class, we should bear in mind the original meaning of the word, which is derived from the Latin *intellegentia*: "the speculative capacity of human mind, the ability to perceive logical relationships and general concepts." The social stratum that takes this name is a tangible extension of this intellectual capacity, formed to exert the power of ideas to transform reality. Only in Russia could this abstract notion, nurtured on the speculative philosophy of Kant and Hegel, come to signify a specific social group. The cognitive capacity of the mind, its ability to grasp and then beget general ideas, became the preoccupation not of professional thinkers but of a peculiar class whose ambition was to change, through the force of thought itself, the entire society and, finally, all of humanity. Succeeding generations of the Russian intelligentsia differed in terms of their particular political goals and methods (liberals, conservatives, revolutionaries...), but what remained constant was the attempt to intellectualize the very substance of social life and the course of history. In the early 20th century the influence of intelligentsia, of both leftist and rightist orientations, became more and more prominent in the life of the Russian society.

After the Bolshevik revolution, the intelligentsia became politically dominant for the first time, as members of this class formed the ruling elite of what was, ironically, called "the dictatorship of proletariat." In a sense, the revolution was a transformation of a living historical society into a philosophical entity that would henceforth develop according to the laws of the mind as embodied in the ideocratic state and "the ideological activity of the Party."

Though Bolsheviks' usurpation of Marxist ideas took full advantage of the Russian people's inclination "to indulge in philosophy, ...the fate of the philosopher in Russia", as Berdyaev put it, proved to be "painful and tragic." Immediately after the civil war, when the Bolsheviks had mastered the country they intended to "rationalize," many Russian philosophers were violently exiled to the West, while those who failed to emigrate were either persecuted or silenced. This was not because philosophy was no longer needed; on the contrary, the entire country had to be brought under a uniform set of philosophical concepts. Ironically, the intelligentsia in general, and philosophy in particular, became the first victims of this ascendancy of ideas in the new power structure. The relative paucity of properly philosophical systems in the Soviet epoch is due precisely to the fact that the entire political system was based on one specific philosophy. To the extent that philosophy heads for power, power beheads philosophers.

Another paradox concerns so-called "dialectical materialism." Marx claimed he had turned Hegel's entire system from its head (idealism) onto its feet (materialism), but the version of Marxism that became established in the Soviet state drifted back toward idealism again. Materialism, though nominally an official doctrine, became nothing more than an expression of materialistic *ideology*, a new tool of the intelligentsia for mastering the material world. As Andrei Bely ironically remarked in the early 1930s, the triumph of materialism had led to the devastation of material life, indicating that the conditions of physical life in the "materialist" USSR were impoverished as compared with the more "idealistic" prerevolutionary Russia. Thus, the nation "dematerialized" as a historical body in order to become fully transparent for ideocratic rule and vision. Reality proved to be a substance of pure thought, its visible and tangible embodiment. Tramways on the streets, lamps in the shops, kitchens in communal apartments--these were not so much elements of reality as they were reified ideas of the "new life," of "social equality," and "historical progress." Even an ordinary electric light bulb was "the lamp of Ilyich" (based on Lenin's patronymic), and a garment factory was dubbed "Bolshevichka," or "The Bolshevik Woman," although, curiously, it produced only men's garments.

In the Soviet period, it became a typical Russian trait to deduce all practical and theoretical issues from the "highest" philosophical considerations. The violence of the October revolution could be easily justified as "a qualitative leap in quantitative social changes," while the extermination of the kulaks as a class was dictated by the necessity to sharpen "the struggle of opposites" in the construction of a socialist society. Nothing could be more sacred to an exemplary Soviet citizen than "the unity and struggle of opposites" or "history as a form of the movement of matter" (philosophical postulates and idioms of Soviet Marxism). Neither worker nor peasant, scientist nor politician, writer nor artist, could succeed in their respective fields without a specific philosophical preparation in "the dialectical forms of the movement of matter" or "the ABCs of historical materialism." The philosophy of "dialectical materialism" was the core of all practical decision-making: it guided the political and economic course of the country and even determined the rules of everyday behavior. Thus, the argument in favor of communal apartments, shared by several families, was that they implemented the philosophy of "collectivism" and the conditioning of "social consciousness by social being."

Even such questions as the ratio of epic and lyric components in literary works, or decisions regarding the hybridization of vegetables, were treated as, ultimately, philosophical problems. For example, the famous agricultural scientist and plant breeder Ivan Michurin (1855-1935) enjoyed an enormous practical and ideological support of the Soviet government because his experiments asserted the inferiority of inborn qualities of plants to outside influences (nurturism versus naturism) which well conformed to the philosophy of Marxism. According to a Soviet philosophical dictionary, "Michurin's theory is based on dialectical understanding of living nature, the recognition of the unity of the organism and external environment, and the dependence of embryonic cells and the entire process of fertilization from the organism's conditions of life."² On the other hand, Michurin himself claimed to have conducted his experiments under the "truly scientific" guidance of dialectical materialism; he urged his colleagues "to raise the elaboration of philosophical problems of biology to the highest level on the firm, unshakable foundation of Marxist-Leninist methodology."³

As philosophical faith became the ultimate rationale for economic strategy, political institutions, scientific research and even personal opinions, the highest goal of thought, as set by prominent prerevolutionary thinkers, such as Vladimir Soloviev and Nikolai Fedorov, came to fruition. They had conceived this task as the necessity to submit reality to the governance of the universal principles of total-unity, and to transform the divided world of conflicting private interests into a transparent kingdom of absolute ideals. This is why thought itself, in the very moment of its triumph, became a

prisoner in the Crystal Palace that communism erected on a philosophical foundation. In the Soviet State, more than ever before in history, philosophy became a supreme legal and political institution, acquiring the power of a superpersonal, universal "Reason."⁴ In other societies the supreme value and highest authority resides in religious beliefs, or economic gain, but in communist Russia, it was philosophy that served as the ultimate criterion of truth and the foundation of all political and economic transformations. The Soviet Union was the only great power in world history to be totally ruled by philosophical ambitions and assumptions, as distinct from the religious and occult preoccupations of even those regimes that can also be called "ideocracies," such as orthodox Byzantium or Nazi Germany. Loyalty to the teachings of dialectical and historical materialism was the prerequisite of civil loyalty and professional success. Russia has suffered not from a lack, but from an excess of philosophy.

One cannot but recall in this context a dialogue between two outstanding thinkers of the mid-20th century, Alexander Kojeve (1908-1968), the French philosopher of Russian origin (his real name was Kozhevnikov), and Leo Strauss (1899-1973), the American political scientist and historian of philosophy of German-Jewish origin.⁵ In their debate on "tyranny and wisdom" they had come to opposite conclusions. Kojeve strongly influenced by Hegel and Heidegger assumes that "politics is derivative from *philosophy*,"⁶ and, conversely, that philosophy needs politics in order to realize its ideas (even at the price of their temporary falsification) and accomplish its ultimate goal: the construction of the universal and socially homogeneous State. At this point, according to Kojeve, both history and philosophy achieve their end and negate themselves by merging into one. History dissolves in the Absolute Idea which comes to complete self-realization in the universal State, whereas philosophy, being itself only a preparatory stage, a "love for wisdom," enables the full manifestation of wisdom, "Sophia" in social institutions. Leo Strauss bitingly responds that, indeed, "the coming of the universal and homogeneous state will be the end of philosophy on earth,"⁷ though for a less abstract reason than that proposed by Kojeve--the political persecution and physical extermination of philosophers.

Although the Soviet historical experiment is rarely mentioned, it is implicit throughout the debate. No wonder, since Alexander Kojeve, a Russian emigré, emerged from the ideological movement known as Eurasianism which, as early as the 1920s, expressed a reserved support for the Soviet regime as an embodiment of the Hegelian impulse to the Absolute State. They designated this "highest" type of state as "ideocratic," i.e., ruled by and ruling through the power of ideas. This was one of the first, and the most optimistic formulations of what later came to be known as "totalitarianism."

As the ideocratic State demonstrated clearly in the USSR, the attempt to construct society according to the precepts of philosophy brings about their mutual destruction rather than fulfillment. A society subjected to the rule of ideas inevitably degenerates into a concentration camp and gradually disintegrates economically and morally, whereas philosophy subjected to the rule of politicians degenerates into catechism and propaganda and quickly disintegrates physically as its practitioners are exterminated. This result is quite predictable since the State conceived as the embodiment of Philosophy cannot tolerate any philosophy other than itself.

Philosophy itself, however, survives both its martyrs and its persecutors. Today, from the perspective of post-Hegelian and post-Marxist historicism, we are in a privileged position to see what happens after the collapse of the Ideocratic State, that perfect synthesis of "tyranny and wisdom." Although Leo Strauss was essentially correct in his assessment of the perils of such a union, one cannot deny a kind of surplus value in such an experiment. Ironically, Kojeve was not far in error in his prediction that "the coming of the wise man must necessarily be preceded by the revolutionary political action of the tyrant (who will realize the universal State)."⁸ What he meant was the manifestation of "sophia," or "absolute reason" after all philo-sophical aspirations toward wisdom have been realized by

the revolutionary action of a tyrant. What happens, in fact, is that wisdom accumulated by history denies the value of revolution itself and all the philosophical illusions and temptations that struggled to establish the universal State.

In the aftermath of totalitarian regime, the mutual negation of "philosophy and society" in their attempted synthesis turns into the negation of synthesis itself, both on the part of politicians who cut back their ideological claims and on the part of thinkers who withdraw their political aspirations. This sort of wisdom, which draws a clear line of demarcation on the basis of historical experience between politics and philosophy while challenging the effectiveness of the "wisdom-tyranny" union, becomes possible only in the consequence of a futile, though continuous and comprehensive ideocratic experiment. What gives a unique and universal significance to the "deferred" wisdom of Russian thought in the late Soviet and post-Soviet periods is its ability to pronounce a competent judgment on Hegelian and Platonic conceptions of the ideal State from within the "attained" reality of this very State.

Thus, in the 20th century Russian thought found itself at the crossroads of the two major historical tendencies of Western philosophy, one appealing to the "practical implementation" of philosophy and urging its synthesis with the State, the other warning of the disastrous outcome of a union that would give birth to political monsters. No other national philosophy has been so agonizingly divided between these tendencies and so well qualified to testify to the meaning and outcome of this conflict.

2. "Philosophical Awakening" And Main Trends Of Thought.

The more total society becomes, the greater the reification of the mind and the more paradoxical its effort to escape reification on its own.

Theodor Adorno. Prisms, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber, 34

The last period of the Soviet ideocracy, approximately from the early 1970s through the late 1980s, can be characterized as a period of "philosophical awakening," to use the felicitous expression of the theologian Georgy Florovsky (1893 - 1979). "Such awakening is usually preceded by a more or less complicated historical fate, the abundant and long historical experience and ordeal, which now becomes the object of interpretation and discussion. Philosophical life begins as a new mode or a new stage of national existence... One can feel in the generation of that epoch some irresistible attraction to philosophy, a philosophical passion and thirst, a kind of magical gravitation toward philosophical themes and issues."⁹ Florovsky refers here to the first "philosophical awakening" of Russia in the span of years from 1830s to 1840s: roughly, the generation of Chaadaev, early Westernizers and Slavophiles, such as Belinsky, Herzen, Bakunin, Khomiakov, the brothers Aksakov, and the brothers Kireevsky.¹⁰

Russia's second philosophical awakening occurred in the first two decades of the 20th century, following in the wake of the unsuccessful revolution of 1905 and disenchantment of the most refined part of intelligentsia with the low intellectual level of populism, Marxism and other socialist theories. This intellectual renaissance is associated with the philosophical collection *Signposts* (1909) and the work of Merezhkovsky, Rozanov, Berdyaev, Bulgakov, Frank, Florensky, Shestov, and other outstanding representatives of the so-called Silver Age.

Finally, after the soporific years of Soviet materialist scholasticism, a third philosophical awakening occurred in the 1970s-80s. In this period, philosophical works were circulated in various

forms of "samizdat" ("self-publishing"), "tamizdat" ("there-publishing," i.e., in the West) and "togdaizdat" ("then-publishing," i.e., in prerevolutionary Russia). Such works conveyed a mysterious charm that could not be explained in terms of "truth or falsity," "persuasiveness or dubiousness." The very touch of these books, by such authors as Berdyaev, Shestov, and Bakhtin, made one feel involved in the joy and mystery of self-reflective existence.

The new philosophical renaissance had its origins in the period from mid-1950s through the early 1960s, when Khrushchev's thaw evoked, for the most part unintentionally, new trends of thought implicitly independent of, or even opposed to official Marxism, or radically transforming it. From the late 1980s to the early 1990s these undercurrents rose to the surface and may be classified more or less objectively. Before we suggest such a classification, the reader should bear in mind that in Russia the term "philosophy" covers a broad range of social, religious, ethical, and literary thought and cannot be reduced to a narrow academic discipline. The greatest Russian thinkers of the 19th century, including Petr Chaadaev, Alexander Herzen, Mikhail Bakunin, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Vladimir Soloviev, Konstantin Leontiev, Leo Tolstoy, and Nikolai Fedorov, were writers, journalists, critics, politicians, librarians, not university professors and academic scholars.¹¹ This is also true of 20th-century philosophers. Since the term "philosophy" was reserved in the Soviet Union for orthodox Marxism-Leninism, many Russian thinkers came from and retreated into different fields of the humanities, such as literary studies, aesthetics, history, linguistics, ethnology, and psychology. As Gary Morson and Caryl Emerson remark in their study of Bakhtin's "prosaics," it often happens that, "in Russia, criticism and theory become the practice of philosophy by other means."¹² This explains my preference for the broader term "philosophical thought," or even the transliteration, *filosofia*, to designate the broad conceptual scope of this Russian intellectual practice, as distinct from the more specialized field of "academic" philosophy. "Filosofia," an outcome of the Russian spiritual tradition, encompasses various fields of the humanities and social theory insofar as they contribute to universal ideational systems and respond to the most general and "absolute" demands of the human mind and spirit.

Over the past forty years, several "filosofical" schools have emerged to challenge the ideocratic principles of Soviet Marxism which itself has undergone remarkable changes. Below, I will briefly outline seven principal trends of Russian thought of the 1950s-1980s.

1. Marxism. One principal vector of its transformation in the post-war period was the infusion of nationalism into Marxism, undertaken first by Stalin in his work on linguistics, where the class categories of traditional Marxism were abolished in favor of a notion of national unity, as exemplified in the integrity of national language. This tendency resurfaced in the 1980s, with the increasing rapprochement of official Marxism and grass-roots, nativist ideology, which later grew into a political alliance of communists and neo-fascists. Another revisionist tendency, toward the humanization of Marxism, emerged in the mid-1950s with the publication of Marx's early *Philosophical-Economical Manuscripts*, and found expression in the writings of Evald Ilyenkov, Genrikh Batishchev, and Yakov Mil'ner-Irinin. This tendency suffered a severe political blow with the 1968 failure to build "socialism with a human face" in Czechoslovakia, which revealed the incompatibility of humanism and Soviet Marxism.

Later, in the 1980s, three new approaches to Marxism emerge. The first is an attempt to revitalize and modify Marxism in the wake of the failure of the Soviet communist project. This version of post-communist Marxism, exemplified in the work of Sergei Platonov, proposes the purification of Marxism from its Leninist and especially Stalinist contaminations and the incorporation of new realities, such as the persistent success of market economics. The second approach argues that Leninism and Stalinism are consistent with the premises of Marxism, which must therefore be held responsible for all

of communism's crimes against humanity. This version, developed in the writings of Alexander Yakovlev, the chief official ideologist of perestroika, involves the radical criticism of Marxism as a non-scientific and anti-humanist theory which, with its all-inclusive determinism, underestimates the sovereignty of consciousness, reducing personality to a function of social circumstances. The third approach, which can be called post-Marxist communism (as distinct from post-communist Marxism), glorifies the religious aspects of communism, which were abandoned by classical Marxism in favor of a quasi-scientific materialism. This position, articulated in the works of Sergei Kurginian and, to a lesser extent, Aleksandr Zinoviev, promotes a renewal of communism as a religious doctrine encompassing the deepest insights of many Eastern and Western faiths and opposed to the soulless hedonism and consumerism of capitalist civilization. Thus Marxism is presented as the latest form of "humanist religion" that might save humanity from the pitfalls of bourgeois individualism through high spiritual ideals and collectivist aspirations.

2. A number of new methodological approaches starting from the late 1950s may be united under the title of neo-rationalism. Yury Lotman (1922-1993), the founder of the Tartu school of Russian structuralism, undertook comprehensive research on what he calls the "semiosphere"--the universe of signs. He offers many penetrating methodological insights on the role of sign systems throughout history and culture. This project of rapprochement between the sciences and humanities was also developed in the Moscow school of structuralism (Vladimir Toporov, Vyacheslav Ivanov and others). Merab Mamardashvili (1930-90) and Alexander Piatigorsky (some of their works were written in collaboration) undertook a phenomenological analysis of consciousness, with a special interest in non-classical, post-rationalist and Oriental types of logic. The theory of systems and general methodology, as related to the philosophical problems of artificial intelligence and cybernetics, have been elaborated in the works of Georgy Shchedrovitsky, Vasily Nalimov, Yuly Shreider, and Georgy Mel'nikov. Neo-rationalism, and especially structuralism, achieved its greatest impact in the 1960s and 1970s when it boldly challenged the social mysticism of orthodox Soviet Marxism; but later, in the 1980s, the role of the primary philosophical alternative passed from structuralism to religious thought, which increasingly opposed itself to old-fashioned Marxist rationalism.¹³

3. Among the most influential intellectual trends in the 1970s - 1980s are varieties of religious thought, including orthodox Christianity as well as synthetic, occult, non-traditional teachings. Christian visions of history and contemporary society were powerfully expressed by such major writers as Boris Pasternak and Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who inspired many other thinkers. Father Aleksandr Men' (1935-1990) was by far the most influential Russian theologian and Orthodox spiritual leader of the 1970s-80s. In his seven-volume treatise, *In the Search of the Way, Truth, and Life*, as well as in his other books, he elaborates a philosophy of spiritual ascension that leads humanity from paganism to the Christian revelation of Godmanhood. A different, syncretic trend was expressed by Daniil Andreev (1906-1959) in his treatise *The Rose of the World* (1950-1958). Andreev develops an original "meta-historic" and "trans-physical" vision that attempts to absorb the religious wisdom of both West and East and to pave a way for a future "inter-religion" and harmonious world order based on a universal theocracy. Other influential trends in religious philosophy include "the philosophy of the common cause," originating in Nikolai Fedorov's ideas about the universal resurrection of the dead, physical immortality and the technological transformation of the cosmos.¹⁴ Nikolai Roerikh's version of Oriental mysticism and many other para-philosophical, Gnostic and occult teachings are also being intensely promoted and publicized by numerous intellectual groups. A younger generation of religious, mostly Orthodox thinkers is represented by Evgeny Barabanov, Tatiana Goricheva, Sergei Khoruzhii, and Vladislav Zelinsky.

4. Many thinkers and intellectual writers represent various trends of personalist philosophy whose supreme values are freedom and the individual. No comprehensive systematic treatises have been produced in this field, but there are numerous essays, articles and philosophical diaries by Mikhail Prishvin (1873-1954), Iakov Druskin (1902 - 1980), Lidia Ginzburg (1902-90), Alexander Esenin-Vol'pin, Grigory Pomerants, Boris Khazanov, Mikhailo Mikhailov, and Boris Paramonov. The formation and self-awareness of personality, its attitudes towards nature and society, love and death, and time and fate are the central motifs of personalist thought. This tradition of philosophical liberalism and pluralism has attracted influential supporters in the field of politics, such as academician Andrei Sakharov and historian Natan Eidel'man (1930-89), as well as outstanding proponents in poetry and fiction, including Joseph Brodsky (1940-1996) and Andrei Bitov, both of whom express personalist views in their essayistic writings and philosophical prose.

5. Nationalist ideology, which emerged in the early 1970s and escalated rapidly in post-communist Russia, has produced its own intellectual elite: writers, critics, historians, and scientists who attempt to create a philosophy of national spirit (which is routinely, though not necessarily, linked to rightist views). Its major intellectual predecessors include the Russian Slavophiles of the 19th century and the Eurasianists of the 1920s. 20th-century German and French sources, such as René Guénon (1886-1951), are also abundantly cited. The influential publicistic writings of Alexander Solzhenitsyn and the historio-ethnographic treatises of Lev Gumilev (1912-90) can be placed in this category insofar as they concern general philosophical issues, such as the relation between culture and nation, collective responsibility and guilt, biological energy and the moral patterns of ethnic groups. For example, Gumilev advances an original theory (which sometimes echoes Oswald Spengler's "morphology of culture") that explains the rise and decline of ethnic formations by biological rather than social factors, namely by disproportionate infusions of cosmic energies into the biological mass of humankind. Gumilev's key concept is "drive," or "passionality," which accumulates in the "heroic personalities" of certain nations and epochs, accounting for their historical accomplishments. Even more extreme representatives of the same conservative nationalism are critic Vadim Kozhinov and mathematician Igor Shafarevich, who have developed a pessimistic view on Russian and Soviet history as permanently threatened and undermined from within by non-Russians, particularly Jews.

6. Another important trend of the 1970s-1980s is culturology, the philosophy of cultural dialogue and self-determination through "otherness." It received powerful impetus from Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), who asserted in his later works that "a culture exists only on the border of other cultures." Another strong influence came from Aleksei Losev (1893-1988), who developed his philosophy of "dialectical idealism" and "absolute mythology" primarily on the material of classical antiquity (*History of Classical Aesthetics*, in 8 volumes, 1963-1988). Younger representatives of culturology include Vladimir Bibler who managed to create his own methodological school of "dialogical logic" in the history of sciences and humanities; and Sergei Averintsev, a brilliant scholar in the field of antiquity and Byzantine civilization who has elaborated the philosophical aspects of cultural heritage and innovation, giving special emphasis to the problems of symbol and the interaction between religious and secular types of culture.

7. Poststructuralism. The latest trend worthy of mention corresponds to the post-structuralist paradigm in the West. One of its most original versions may be identified as conceptualism. This name usually refers to a well-known movement in Russian arts and literature of the 1970s and 1980s, but it can also be aptly applied to a broad spectrum of critical and philosophical ideas that complement and highlight this movement. Conceptualism assumes that certain conceptual schemes underlie the ideological construction of reality and determine its artificial, conventionalized character. Conceptual thinking is imbued with irony, parody, and a sense of relativity, since "truth" and "reality" are considered to be empty

categories. The relationship between conceptualism and Marxism is somewhat reminiscent of the dispute between nominalists and realists in the epoch of the medieval scholastics: whereas Marxists assert the historical reality of such concepts as collectivism, equality, and freedom, conceptualists demonstrate that these notions are either contingent on mental structures or derived from linguistic structures. Every cultural form is conceived in terms of combinations of pre-established codes, such as Soviet ideological language or the code of the Russian psychological novel. The general approaches of conceptualism can be found in theoretical and artistic works by Andrei Siniavsky, Ilya Kabakov, Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, and Boris Groys.¹⁵

Another version of philosophical poststructuralism is presented by the Laboratory of Non-Classical Philosophy at the Institute of Philosophy in Moscow, in particular, by such authors as Valery Podoroga, Mikhail Ryklin, and Mikhail Yampolsky. They publish a philosophical collection *Ad Marginem* (books and an annual) which was methodologically inspired by contemporary French thinkers (Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and others). Podoroga's works represent an original combination of phenomenological, hermeneutical and deconstructionist readings of German philosophers and Russian writers, with a special emphasis on the corporeal and spatial quality of texts as "landscapes."

Of course, the above-mentioned seven philosophical movements do not exhaust the entire complexity of intellectual life in Russia, nor do they even account for the "hybrid" work of some individual thinkers. For example, Georgy Gachev has created an original holistic system including such components as "living-thinking" (*zhiznemyslie*), "national images of the world," and a "humanitarian approach to natural sciences." His thinking combines peculiar qualities of such disparate trends as culturology, personalism, and the philosophy of national spirit. Contemporary Russian thought is polyphonic, not just pluralistic, in the sense that different positions and voices interact in the consciousnesses of the most creative individual thinkers.

Rarely in the history of thought has philosophy represented such a liberating force as it did in Russia from the 1960s through the 1980s. The Soviet State had generated a rigid system of "proven" ideas that aimed to perpetuate its mastery over the individual mind. For this reason, philosophical thinking, which by its nature transcends the limits of the existing order and questions sanctioned practices, was under permanent suspicion as an anti-State activity: to philosophize was an act of self-liberation via an awareness of the relativity of the dominant ideological discourse. Philosophical ideas in the Soviet Union rarely matured into well-balanced, self-sufficient systems, because the State arrogated to itself the privilege of consummating and elaborating ideas in a systematic way. The fate of non-Marxist thinkers was to dissolve these ideocratic systems in a stream of critical, spontaneous thinking that attempted to go beyond all possible systems, in order to undermine rather than consolidate them. Since official philosophy functioned as a tool of power, it was the task and merit of non-official philosophy to advance anti-totalitarian modes of thinking, thus de-centralizing the structure of discourse and deconstructing any possible principle of systematization. Thought tried to free itself from ideocracy by putting down roots in authentic, concrete entities beyond ideology, such as faith in a living God, the existential uniqueness of personality, the organic soul of the nation, the empirical credibility of science, the symbolic meanings of culture, or, finally, by challenging the master-discourse of Soviet ideology through its parodic imitation and exaggeration. All of these trends in philosophy--neo-rationalist, religious, personalistic, national, culturological, post-structuralist--were initially and intentionally forms of intellectual self-liberation. The internal logic of development, however, has led some of these schools of thought, especially the philosophies of national spirit and religious syncretism, to renovated and "improved" projects of postcommunist ideocracy.¹⁶

3. Self-Criticism in Russian Philosophy

The newest, post-totalitarian impulses of Russian thought are most clearly recognized in the scope of its self-criticism in the late 1980s and early nineties. Such criticism has been indispensable for all three Russian philosophical awakenings and is reminiscent of Chaadaev's and *Signposts'* relentless denunciation of the entire national intellectual tradition.

It is noteworthy, first and foremost, that this self-criticism develops parallel to the unprecedented revival and influence of the Russian spiritual heritage. The rediscovery of Russian religious philosophy, or "idealism," as it had been scornfully labeled in the Soviet period, was the most significant event in the intellectual life of the late 1980s. Owing to the circulation of samizdat and emigrant publications, the works of Berdyaev, Shestov, and Rozanov had already been widely read among the intelligentsia since the 1960s, but it was only in 1987 that a special decree by the Central Committee of the Communist Party sanctioned the unfettered publication of these previously forbidden thinkers.

The reception of their legacy during the 1960s and 1970s among non-conformist intelligentsia was one of unanimous enthusiasm; in a time of atheistic and materialistic barbarism, these thinkers were seen as the bearers of a true religious and philosophical wisdom. Certainly, as compared with Soviet-style philosophers, and even with Lenin and Marx, Soloviev and Berdyaev were perceived as real thinkers, committed to philosophy as a repository of ultimate concerns and not merely as a practice of political speculation and indoctrination. This overall reverence for the domestic tradition of philosophical idealism extended through the first years of glasnost, till 1988-89.¹⁷

Almost immediately, however, upon the free circulation of their works, this philosophical consortium began to be divided, with each thinker adopted as a mouthpiece for a specific intellectual, religious, or political movement. Thus Pavel Florensky and Sergei Bulgakov were appropriated by adherents of the predominantly conservative strains of Orthodox thinking,¹⁸ while Vladimir Soloviev and Nikolai Berdyaev appealed primarily to religious liberals and ecumenists. The latter were dissatisfied with the stagnant conditions of Orthodoxy dating back to pre-Revolutionary times and sought innovations in church dogma and new sources of spiritual inspiration, in particular, the reunification of Christian churches and more open interaction between the Church and secular culture. Ivan Ilyin became the primary authority for conservative nationalists and monarchists, while Georgy Fedotov was adopted by those who wanted to combine their allegiance to Christianity with an openness towards the Western values of individual freedom. Vasily Rozanov attained the greatest popularity, partly because his chameleon-like, consciously eclectic mentality appealed to the broadest range of convictions and, more importantly, because his sincere, diaristic style justified the priority of everyday personal life, especially of sex and family, over any sort of ideological or religious conviction. Lev Shestov, as brilliant a stylist as Rozanov and even more sharply agnostic and existentialist, enjoyed less popularity, perhaps because of his predominantly critical approach and lack of any positive program.

Though his fragmented, cryptic and highly idiosyncratic writings were published only posthumously and were read by a few devotees, the most revered, even idolized, thinker was Nikolai Fedorov, the founder of Russian "cosmism" and "the philosophy of the common cause," which was regarded by his fervent followers as the greatest spiritual revelation since Christ. Another self-styled prophet, Dmitry Merezhkovsky, was greeted coldly and even with an undertone of hostility, perhaps because his revolutionary rhetoric and messianic proclamation of a new religion of the Third Testament placed him in direct opposition to the official Orthodox Church. Nikolai Lossky and Semyon Frank

attracted respect, but not too much excitement, since their writings, in particular those devoted to the theory of knowledge, are elaborated in a technically philosophical language and are restrained in their ideological and eschatological claims, which tend to appeal to a wider audience.

Following the initial, unanimously enthusiastic response to the legacy of Russian religious philosophy as a whole, and its subsequent partisan differentiation, came a third stage of reception. Again it was taken as an integral phenomenon, but now in a more critical, sometimes completely negative, interpretation. Marxist philosophers used to criticize Russian religious thought ("idealism") as the manifestation of a reactionary, bourgeois or feudalist worldview, incompatible with scientific and social progress. New critics, including Evgenii Barabanov, Sergei Khoruzhii, and Boris Paramonov, on the contrary, blame Russian idealism for its secret or unconscious complicity with the communist Revolution, by supposedly preparing the ground for this social cataclysm through the dissemination of apocalyptic forebodings. In this view, Russian society proved so receptive to the messianic revelations of Marxism and the mystique of the last bloody battle and coming golden age, precisely because Soloviev, Fedorov, Berdyaev, and Merezhkovsky had already tuned the soul of the nation to the key of eschatological expectations that would be fulfilled, or at least precipitated, by their contemporaries and compatriots-- by Russia as the vanguard of post-history. Virtually none of the great Russian philosophers (with a partial exception of Vladimir Soloviev) was an evolutionist, none of them developed a system justifying gradual improvement of existing conditions; rather, all of them were either metaphysical radicals, who valorized cataclysmic solutions for historical problems (like Fedorov and Berdyaev), or existential skeptics (like Shestov or Rozanov) who doubted the bourgeois values of rationality and productivity.

From this critical point of view, Russian philosophy was anti-Marxist and anti-communist only because it was inherently anti-bourgeois and regarded Marxism and socialism as mere extensions of capitalist, philistine ideals. Thinkers like Fedorov and Berdyaev condemned Marxism not for its revolutionary ambitions but because it seemed insufficiently revolutionary, promising only better modes of production instead of a spiritual transformation of the earth. Therefore, the anti-communist stance of these thinkers expressed even more ardent hatred for the existing world, in that the total eschatological renovation they envisioned threatened to claim even more victims than the metaphysically more moderate and materialistically motivated Marxism of Lenin and his followers.

The new criticism offered by Barabanov, Khoruzhii, Paramonov and others, of course, does not attempt to justify Marxism as such, but demonstrates that the Russian version of Marxism proved to be a much more dangerous and destructive doctrine precisely because of its synthesis with the eschatological "Russian Idea" as professed by idealist and anti-Marxist thought. The paradox of this critical examination of Russian religious philosophy is that it now comes from religious thinkers themselves, who regard the very phenomenon of *religious philosophy* with suspicion, both from religious and philosophical points of view. Soloviev advanced as the task of his philosophy a "justification of the faith of the Fathers," but does faith need rational justification? And should reason pursue the same truth that is already given in revelation? As Heidegger put it, "Christian philosophy is merely wooden iron."¹⁹

Barabanov argues that Russian religious philosophy regresses to the medieval model of syncretic unity between the two disciplines, whereas Western thought has since progressed to the point of differentiating between philosophy, with its critical analysis of the boundaries of knowledge, and theology, which deals with issues of revelation and superrational truth. What Russian thought has neglected from the very start is the necessity of analytical work that discriminates between faith and knowledge. In coming late to maturity on the world scene, Russian thought from the epoch of early Slavophiles (1840s - 1850s) was eager to emphasize its distinction and even superiority over Western

academic thought by claiming that it could achieve the "free synthesis" of religion and philosophy, as distinct from the compulsory medieval synthesis that had already been abandoned in the development of narrowly rationalistic Western thought. The result of this "neurosis of distinctiveness" (to use Barabanov's term) was the "ideologization of philosophy, as interested not so much in abstract theoretical questions as in practical problems of remaking the world and man... [...] Russian philosophy does not analyze the given but constructs an ideal, something expected, on the strength of which it attempts to 'transform' the given."²⁰

The attempt to synthesize philosophy with religion, according to Barabanov, actually led to its subordination to ideology, to utopian and eschatological visions, since, in the 20th century, it is ideology, especially totalitarian ideology, that best succeeds in uniting quasi-philosophical pretensions to rationality and quasi-religious pretensions to totality. From the standpoint of this criticism, what Russia achieved instead of religious philosophy was another version of utopian ideology cloaked in fragmented theological and metaphysical terms. Such is the origin of this false philosophical aggrandizement that, in Barabanov's view, should be held responsible for the historical misfortunes of Russia in the 20th century.

Thus the new critics offer a bitter but useful corrective to the failures of the past, calling for a sort of intellectual redemption for the future.

4. Philosophical Strategies for the Future

What then is the task of contemporary Russian philosophy? On this point, the projections of critics diverge. It is argued, on the one hand, that Russian philosophy should secularize itself, abandoning both the theological claims of pre-revolutionary idealism and the ideological claims of Marxism. Hence Russian philosophy needs to undergo the same process of epistemological self-criticism and analytical self-limitation that Western philosophy has undertaken in a variety of distinct movements over the last two centuries, with Kant, Husserl, Wittgenstein, and Derrida.

An additional measure may also be required, according to such authors as Evgeny Barabanov and Boris Groys. Since Russian philosophy has long been immersed in its neurosis of distinctiveness, these thinkers believe it must submit to psychoanalytic treatment in order to demystify its metaphysical pretensions, to expose the inferiority complex behind them and heal the birth trauma caused in the 18th century by medieval Russia's abrupt exposure to the Enlightenment. In this context, the most compelling part of the Russian intellectual legacy is not its celebrated achievements, whether those of the religious idealists (like Soloviev) or of the revolutionary materialists (like Chernyshevsky), but the work of the academic philosophers--neo-Kantians, positivists, intuitivists, phenomenologists--who may have lacked original theoretical constructions but were more modest, sober and accurate in their epistemological analyses.

Another point of view, most persistently elaborated by Sergei Khoruzhii, is that Russian religious idealism was not purely Orthodox at all, was not even Christian, but essentially idealistic in a Platonic sense. According to Khoruzhii, the "false" notion that Platonism prepared the ground for Christianity and remains its most authentic philosophical foundation, has haunted European thought for centuries, pervading neo-Platonism, Rationalism, German Idealism and other major systems. Khoruzhii states that Russian thought is not the sole victim of the Platonic distortion of Christianity, but may well be the most sorely afflicted. Thus Vladimir Soloviev's philosophy of pan-unity, which was the source of inspiration for practically all other trends in Russian religious thought, is based on Plato's vision of ideal unity,

progressively incorporated into the diversity of earthly entities, which reveals the closeness of Soloviev's theocratic utopia to Plato's ideocratic republic.

It is true that Soloviev and his philosophical followers (sometimes strongly critical about their teacher), such as Sergei Bulgakov, Pavel Florensky, and Aleksei Losev, tried to overcome or improve the one-sided idealism of Plato with notions of "religious materialism," "concrete idealism," or "Sophiology." These improvements presupposed that the world of ideas must manifest and embody itself materially in the same way that Christ-God became Christ-Man. Khoruzhii points out, however, that the relationship between God and man in Christianity is not the same as the relationship between ideas and objects in Plato. According to the teachings of Eastern church fathers, God and man are absolutely different by essence (idea), but communicate through energies (existence, volition). Therefore, genuinely Christian philosophy would abandon such Platonic and Neo-Platonic conceptions as the total unity of an ideal world and would focus instead on existential intercourse between man and God, meditating on such spiritual processes as prayer, repentance, grace, introspection, silence, the unification of mind and heart--those acts of free will that truly mediate between the human and divine as distinct entities. The Platonization of Christianity resulted in the loss of these existential truths and in utopian temptations of Russian thought: since the idea is a principle of abstraction and generalization, it was believed that the entire world should be united on the basis of universal ideas.

One cannot but agree with Khoruzhii's exposure of the Platonic origins of Russian religious idealism, though he seems to underestimate the Platonic and Neo-Platonic influences even in those Eastern church fathers who are presented in his conception as the staunchest Christian opponents of Platonism.²¹ Furthermore, it should be added that, surprisingly, the legacy of Platonism is common to such ideological antagonists as pre-revolutionary idealists and Soviet Marxists and presupposes a kind of division of intellectual labor between them. Russian communism emphasized the material and social aspects of the Platonic utopia, while religious thinkers emphasized its ideal and spiritual aspects; but the ultimate project of Platonism is not separation but unification of both worlds: the full materialization of ideal norms. Therefore, it assumes the complementarity and even fusion of idealism and materialism.

The Russian intelligentsia of the second half of the 19th century made its way from old-style idealism to fashionable materialism, and in the early 20th century strove to return from shallow materialism to religious idealism; later, these two counter-movements were repeated in the same order in the early Soviet obsession with "dialectical materialism" (1920s-1950s) and the disenchantment with materialism (1960s-1980s). But these seemingly opposite directions actually evolved within a single Platonic paradigm of socially active idealism. Materialists and Sophiologists unconsciously converge in their adherence to the Platonic ideocratic project and work together to idealize and ideologize human existence, on the one hand, and to materialize these most abstract ideas in social practice, on the other. Christianity, in opposition to Platonism, does not impose such universal goals as "Godmanhood" (Soloviev's basic concept) on all of humankind, but rather is concerned with the unique dynamic of personal volition and the acquisition of grace. For this reason Khoruzhii believes that the "energetical," or existential core of the Orthodox tradition must still be reexamined and restored, as the premise on which the future of Russian religious philosophy can be built.

Thus, two distinct and evidently incompatible projects are advanced for the reform of Russian philosophy: one (Barabanov's) calls for its complete secularization, its differentiation from theology and ideology; the other (Khoruzhii's) suggests an even closer, deeper alliance with the doctrinal and ascetic core of Orthodox Christianity. What both solutions have in common is their rejection of the Platonic dominance in the Russian philosophical tradition, both in its explicit form (religious idealism) and in its undercurrents (Marxist ideology).

It is aptly remarked that Aleksei Losev (1893-1988), considered the last representative of Russian idealism, was also the first to identify the Platonic subtexts of the Soviet ideocracy. As a contemporary commentator remarks, according to Losev "the newly evolving 'materialism' elaborated its own 'kingdom of ideas,' its own mythology and dogmatics... [...]Therefore, Platonism was for Losev the secret hero of political storms in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. [...] ...Socialist mythology... according to Losev, naturally implemented Platonism in its social-political practice..."²² Losev himself was ambivalent about the meaning of Platonism; he criticized its paganism and affiliation with the political system of slavery, but at the same time he interpreted Orthodoxy as a genuinely Christian Platonism.

One can surmise that this ambivalence was inherent not only in Losev's work, but in the entire tradition of Russian philosophy, which aspired to the Christian modification of Platonism, but actually slipped into its pagan version, the ideology of state socialism and, accordingly, the totalitarian system of state slavery. The question is: Now that Platonism, in its Marxist guise, has been overcome by Russian thought, is it still possible to find inspiration in Platonism as such, in its most sublime idealistic and religious interpretations? Or does the experience of Russian history convincingly argue that Platonism has exhausted itself as a spiritual resource for humanity and that all attempts to Christianize it are just wishful illusions?

Whatever the answer may be, it is indisputable that the ongoing relevance of Platonism for Russian thought can provide the ground for its intensive dialogue with the Western philosophy also rooted in Plato's heritage.

5. The Platonic Drama of Russian Thought

SOCRATES: The ideal society we have described can never grow into a reality or see the light of day, and there will be no end to the troubles of states, or indeed of humanity itself, till philosophers become kings in this world, or till those we now call kings and rulers really and truly become philosophers.

Plato, *The Republic*, trans. H. D. P. Lee, 473 C10

That kings should become philosophers, or philosophers kings, is not likely to happen; nor would it be desirable, since the possession of power invariably debases the free judgment of reason. It is, however, indispensable that a king—or a kingly, i.e. self-ruling, people—should not suppress philosophers but leave them the right of public utterance.

I. Kant. *On Eternal Peace*. Second Supplement, trans. Karl Popper²³

Academic scholarship in the West tends to be suspicious of the very phenomenon of Russian philosophy. At best, it is categorized as "ideology" or "social thought." But what is philosophy?

There is no simple and universal definition, and many thinkers consider it impossible to formulate one. The most credible attempt seems to be a nominalistic reference: philosophy is what Plato and Aristotle, Kant and Hegel were occupied with. Perhaps, the best-known and most widely cited—if slightly eccentric—definition belongs to A. N. Whitehead: European philosophy is a series of footnotes to Plato.²⁴

If this is true, then Russian philosophy must be viewed as an indispensable part of the Western intellectual heritage, since it provides perhaps the most elaborate footnotes to Plato's most mature and comprehensive dialogues: the *Republic* and the *Laws*. Questions of social ethics and political philosophy, of an individual's relationship to the State, of adequate knowledge and virtuous behavior, of wisdom and power, of religious and aesthetic values, of ideas and ideals as guidelines for human life—all of these are central to Russian philosophy and exemplify its continuing relevance to the Western tradition. Moreover, the very status of ideas in Russian philosophy mirrors Plato's vision of them as ontological entities, "laws," or ideal principles—as opposed to mere epistemological units, the tools of cognition.

If we try to single out the central trend of Russian philosophy that can be compared with those of "rationalism" in French philosophy or "empiricism" in English philosophy, this would be "totalism." Such diverse Russian thinkers as Chaadaev and Belinsky, Ivan Kireevsky and Herzen, Vladimir Soloviev and Vasily Rozanov all put forward the category of "integrity," "wholeness," "totality" (*tseľ'nost'*, *tseľostnost'*) or "total-unity" (*vseēdinstvo*), which presupposes, first of all, the unity of knowledge and existence, of reason and faith, intellectual and social life. Gregory Skovoroda (1722-1794) who is often dubbed "the first original Russian-Ukrainian thinker" expressed the following credo in his prayer to God on sending a new Socrates to Russia: "...I believe that knowledge should not be limited to the high-priests of science and scholarship, who stuff themselves to overflowing with it, but should enter into the life of the whole people..."²⁵

Ivan Kireevsky (1806-1856), a founder of Russian Slavophilism, sought to inaugurate "an independent philosophy corresponding to the basic principles of ancient Russian culture and capable of subjecting the divided culture of the West to the integrated consciousness of believing reason."²⁶ Characteristically, Kireevsky derived this tendency of Russian philosophy from Plato's heritage, as opposed to "the mind of Western man [which] seems to have a special kinship with Aristotle,"²⁷ that is, with "one-sided abstract rationalism." Invoking the legacy of Eastern Christian thought, Kireevsky asserts that "in Greek thinkers we do not notice a special predilection for Aristotle, but, on the contrary, the majority of them overtly prefer Plato... probably because Plato's very mode of thinking presents more integrity (*tseľ'nost'*) in the exercises of mind, more warmth and harmony in the speculative activity of reason. That is why virtually the same relationship that we notice between the two philosophers of antiquity [Aristotle and Plato] existed between the philosophy of the Latin world as it was elaborated in scholasticism, and the spiritual philosophy that we find in the writers of the Eastern Church, the philosophy that was especially clearly expressed by the Holy Fathers who lived after the defection of [Catholic] Rome."²⁸ This inclination to relate Russian thought to Plato in contrast to Aristotle became a hallmark of the Russian intellectual tradition, which assumed that "... in Plato's teaching, religion and philosophy are in the closest contact, but already in Aristotle's system philosophy breaks off with religion definitively."²⁹

This Platonic tendency to integrate philosophical and religious teachings and to implement them politically culminated in 20th century Russia. In discussing Russian philosophy, especially the Soviet period, we have inevitably to consider the practical fate of "integrative" Platonic conceptions as we explore the final outcome of an ideocratic utopia, in which philosophy was designated to rule the republic as the supreme religious and political authority.

Nowhere have Plato's teachings on the relationship of ideas to the foundation of a State been incarnated so vigorously and on such a grandiose scale as in communist Russia.

One might even say that the philosophy of the Soviet epoch is the final stage of the development and embodiment of Plato's ideas in the Western world. During this stage, the project of ideocracy came to a complete realization and exhausted itself. In a certain sense, Russian philosophy both summarizes and punctuates more than two thousand years of the Platonic tradition and points the way for a return to foundations that are not susceptible to idealistic and ideological perversions.

From the 1920s through the 1940s, the tsardom of communist ideas succeeded in equating itself with reality, but beginning in the mid 1950s, stimulated by Khrushchev's denunciations of Stalin in 1956, this "ideal republic" increasingly revealed its illusory quality in a sharp discrepancy with reality. Religious and personalist philosophy, structuralism and culturology, the philosophy of national spirit—all of these were attempts to de-ideologize social life and let it take root in some authentic reality. Ultimately, Russian philosophy, in the transition to its post-Soviet stage, came to be characterized by conceptualism, a style of thought that ironically reproduces and exaggerates the world of abstract ideas to demonstrate their artificial and chimerical nature. All that remained of the principle of ideocracy by the late 1980s was a museum of obsolete ideas, a carnival side-show of ideological oddities. A relatively short period of seventy years sums up a two-millennial adventure of Western thought that followed Plato's search for the world of pure ideas. Among these footnotes to Plato, Soviet philosophy appears to the attentive eye as the final entry, signifying "The End."

What was the role of Marxism in the Platonic drama of Russian philosophy? Marxism, which deduces all ideas from the economic basis of society, would seem to be diametrically opposed to Platonism. But let us remember that Marxism is nothing other than a reversal of Hegelian idealism, the final moment in the self-development of the Absolute Idea. What is principally new in Hegel, as compared with Plato, is the progressive historical development of the Idea, but the end of this process is postulated as the universal State, presumably conceived on the model of the Prussian monarchy, which embraces the totality of the self-cognizant mind. Both Platonic and Hegelian idealism culminate with the concept of the ideal State. Although Marx removed this ideal from the causality of the historical process, it remains in his system as a teleological motive and grows into a vision of a future communist society.³⁰

Plato, Hegel, and Marx represent three stages in the development of idealism in its progressive symbiosis with social engineering: (1) the supernatural world of ideas, (2) the manifestation of Absolute Idea in history, and (3) the transformation of history by the force of ideas. For Plato, ideas are abstracted to a transcendental realm. For Hegel, the Idea is already ingrained as the alpha and omega of the historical process: it generates, and at the same time consummates, history in the course of its progressive self-awareness. Marx abolishes the idea as the alpha of history in order to emphasize the omega-point: the prospect of a historical culmination of unified humanity in the transparent kingdom of ideas, the self-government of collective reason.

Moreover, Marxism potentially proves more staunchly idealistic than even Platonism. According to the Greek philosopher, the world of ideas exists in and of itself, without necessarily demanding historical embodiment. For Marx, ideas are inseparable from the

material process and are greedy for realization and implementation. In his own words, “theory itself becomes a material force when it has seized the masses.”³¹ The message of “militant materialism” (Lenin’s term), as realized in Russia by Lenin and his disciples, was that the power of “progressive” ideas should not be abstracted from but rather attracted to material life, even subordinating and transforming the economic basis (hence, the institution of five-year plans that subordinated the entire development of the country to ideal projections). Whereas in Plato and Hegel ideas still soared in the clouds, constituting a separate sphere of Supreme Mind or Absolute Spirit, in Soviet Marxism they were grounded in the foundation of material life, from heavy industry to everyday reality, and from the rituals of party purges to ceremonial cleansings of neighborhoods. The ruling ideology would not forgive the slightest flaw or deviation from the purity of ideas; because they had descended into the substance of Being, they demanded the complete submission of every person at every moment of his or her life. Soviet materialism proved to be an instrument of militant idealism, craving ever newer sacrifices for the altar of sacred ideas.

For these reasons, the dominant intellectual movement of the Soviet epoch should be identified not just as Marxism, but as Marxist Platonism, an idealism that asserts itself as the regulative principle of material life. If Plato, proceeding from idealist assumptions, deduced the system of the communist State, then Marx, proceeding from communist assumptions, deduced a system of severe ideocracy that was realized through the efforts of his most consistent and determined Russian followers. Materialism became an ideology, and the very phrase “materialist ideology” came to sound perfectly natural to Soviet citizens. No less natural is the term “Marxist Platonism.”

Therefore, Platonism is the underside of Marxism, and the eventual collapse of the Soviet ideocratic State could be viewed as a death sentence for both of them.

6. New Metaphysical Radicals

The development of Russian thought from the 1950s to the 1980s unequivocally testified against materialist ideology and communist ideocracy. However, the years following the collapse of the Soviet system witnessed a resurgence of the Platonic type of ideocratic discourse, which expresses even more radical tendencies than did Russian philosophy of the early twentieth century. We use here the term “radicalism” in the same sense that allowed Karl Popper to apply it equally to Plato and Marx: “[U]ncompromising *radicalism*. [...] Both Plato and Marx are dreaming of the apocalyptic revolution which will radically transfigure the whole social world.”³² The material substance of Russian historical existence is now so exhausted by ideocratic experiment, so rarefied that the kingdom of absolute ideas again rises up beneath its translucent surface, tempting thinkers to construct new systems of pan-unity, to accommodate heaven on earth. Barabanov observes: “[I]n a situation of an acute identity crisis, in the anguished attempts to restore the torn threads of forgotten traditions, the *ideological* and *utopian* paradigms of Russian philosophical thought are acquiring a second life. Again the ‘Russian idea!’ Again the ‘special way,’ again ‘originality,’ again doctrinal preaching instead of the pupil’s desk.”³³

Indeed, if we attempt to summarize the most recent developments in Russian thought (the early 1990s), we discover a general tendency for the radicalization of its metaphysical ambitions. This tendency may be identified in such diverse movements as Marxism, with the eschatological communism

of Sergei Kurginyan; nationalism, with the radical traditionalism of Aleksandr Dugin; religious philosophy, with the increasing popularity of Nikolai Fedorov's Cosmism and Daniil Andreev's "interreligious" teaching of *The Rose of the World*. Even the movements that would seem to be the most resistant to metaphysical assumptions, such as Structuralism, culturology and conceptualism, reveal a growing propensity for universalist claims. For example, the later works of Yury Lotman and Vasily Nalimov are rife with a metaphysics of chance, contiguity, indeterminism. Georgy Gachev builds much more ambitious cosmological constructions than did his predecessors in culturology, Bakhtin and Likhachev. The conceptualist group "Medical Hermeneutics" is much more concerned with metaphysical generalizations than were the conceptualists of the 1970s and 80s. Is it a coincidence that this proliferation of new, radical metaphysical discourses has arisen with the degradation and collapse of the ideocratic system of Soviet power?

I must reiterate that the Soviet system was not merely a political and legislative entity but was founded on a metaphysical, even eschatological, vision, officially called Marxism but stemming also from the prophetic philosophizing of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Hence the collapse of the Soviet regime left something more than just a need for governmental reform: it left a metaphysical vacuum, eager to be filled. If the prevailing mood among intellectuals in the late Soviet period was to challenge and demystify ideocracy, then the collapse of that ideocracy generated numerous emulations and simulations among various intellectual groups, which attempted, at least in theory, to build a new ideocratic regime on a more firm, nationalistic, technological and/or religious foundation. Traditionally in Russia, political platforms have been constructed on a framework of the most general, "filosofical" ideas; in the early 1990s, competing metaphysical theories were rushing in to fill the demolished and excavated site with a foundation for a new political architecture. The death of one "big" totalitarianism gave birth to a number of smaller ones. Many politicians, of both leftist and rightist orientation, such as Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, Aleksandr Rutskoi, and even the new communist leader Gennady Zyuganov more or less consistently wielded metaphysical ideas to justify their ambitions for intellectual leadership.

This overall tendency, characteristic of the Russian mentality in general but aggravated in the early 1990s by increasing political instability, can be called "metaphysical radicalism." Political radicalism flows from the very core of this type of metaphysics, which, following Marxist paradigm, does not limit itself to explaining the world but attempts to change it. At the same time, any politics with pretensions to radically transforming the world cannot limit itself to the social, economic, and legislative dimensions, but must entail metaphysical assumptions. In the contemporary West, politics usually pursues less expansive goals of partially improving existing systems, and therefore, it is divorced from metaphysical considerations, or at least pretends to be. Since Russia's historical dynamics are not evolutionary but disruptive and catastrophic, each break in political continuity necessitates renewed metaphysical speculation and indoctrination designed to justify the entirely new social order. It is the privilege of metaphysics to address the world as a whole, as it is the objective of political radicalism to transform this whole completely. Thus metaphysical and political radicalism are mutually dependent, as the totalitarian experiments of the 20th century have shown: both communist and fascist radicalism advanced strong metaphysical claims and implications. Russian philosophy, which during the 1950s-80s had resisted the stranglehold of Soviet ideocracy, may now be preparing the foundation for a new type of ideocracy, potentially based on the ideas of Cosmism, universal theocracy, radical traditionalism or eschatological communism. The options are varied.

Metaphysical radicalism is a specific type of philosophical discourse that ignores the Kantian critique of metaphysics and claims to "transcend" the epistemological limits imposed on human cognitive capacities. It relies on 'revealed', 'self-evident' or 'generally accepted' truth or values that are directly

accessible for human mind. However, this philosophical mode cannot be identified with the naive metaphysics that Kant criticized; it aspires not to adequate knowledge but to the practical transformation of the world, not to truth but to power. For metaphysical radicalism, epistemological limits remain effective, but irrelevant, since they can be transcended politically, volitionally, as the projection of a different world is implemented by the forces of social, national and technological revolution. This is not a pre-critical, descriptive but a post-critical, prescriptive metaphysics, one that draws on suppressed desires and taps the collective unconscious. Western intellectuals are familiar with this type of fiery speculation through the works of New Left thinkers such as Herbert Marcuse, but the principal distinction of the majority of contemporary Russian "New Right" thinkers is their appeal to the absolute past, to the resurrection of ancestors or the restoration of Tradition.

It is known that sentences in the imperative mood cannot be subjected to the criteria of verification. As Roman Jakobson puts it, "The imperative sentences cardinally differ from declarative sentences: the latter are and the former are not liable to a truth test."⁶⁴ "Do this!" as distinct from "S/he has done this" or "This is done," cannot be challenged by the question "Is it true or not?" The same may be said of "metaphysics in the imperative mood," which, unlike the "indicative mood" of pre-Kantian metaphysics, evades critical challenges to its truthfulness. Kant's critique of philosophical dogmatism was crucially conclusive in respect to metaphysical "declarations," but to what extent can it help to demystify the metaphysical "imperatives" that began proliferate in the 19th and 20th centuries precisely as a result of Kantian limitations on theoretical reason?

The alliance between metaphysics and politics has benefits for both of them: as practice, it concentrates on one goal, on one direction of change; as philosophy, it posits itself beyond truth and falsehood. A diversity of positions is possible in philosophy only insofar as it interprets the world, but the task of changing the world leaves one position -- the one that is sanctioned as correct and mandatory. One of the most famous Karl Marx's statements on the tasks of philosophy is his 11th thesis on Feuerbach: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it." There is a curious asymmetry in this proposition: the transition from "interpreting" to "changing" is achieved at the price of "variability" which is dropped in the second part of the thesis. It is possible to *interpret* the world *in various ways*, but presumably there is only one way or direction of its practical transformation. This is how totalitarian implications are inherent in the very project of the philosophy as the practical/political action.

There are strong tensions, originating from diverse ideological sources, among the representative trends of metaphysical radicalism. For example, radical traditionalists inspired by such extreme rightist thinkers as René Guénon (1886-1951) and Julius Evola (1898-1974), condemn Fedorovian Cosmism as a leftist, technocratic heresy obsessed with the idea of progress and active, self-governed human evolution. Neo-fascist ideologists of Zhirinovskiy's camp condemn radical traditionalists for their romantic alienation from the contemporary scene and their obsession with the past.³⁵ Nonetheless, these antagonisms serve to underscore the substantial unity of metaphysical radicalism, not in the specific contents of the individual projects that fall within its scope, but in the very mode of projective thinking that establishes a set of ideas about what the world *should* be, while utterly rejecting the world as it is. Fedorov, the founder of Russian Cosmism, wrote: "...philosophy must become the knowledge not only of what is but of what ought to be, that is, from the passive, speculative explanation of existence it must become an active project of what must be, the project of universal action."³⁶ Not only Fedorovians but radical traditionalists and Neomarxist utopians could subscribe to this statement of what philosophy should do in the face of the world problems and what the world should become in the name of philosophical ideas. The formula for the political implications of this metaphysical radicalism can be

found in Nietzsche's prophecy: "The time of the struggle for domination of the globe is upon us; it will be undertaken in the name of basic philosophical teachings."³⁷ Russian metaphysical radicals invoke as model the fate of Nietzsche's own teachings: German recruits going into the trenches of the first World War with volumes of *Zarathustra* in their rucksacks.

The ideological incompatibility among Marxist, nationalist and religious discourses, which sharply divided them in the Soviet period, now becomes more and more irrelevant as these positions merge in the overarching type of radical discourse. Consider the words of Sergei Kurginyan, one of the chief ideologists of post-Marxist revival of communism who was the principal political advisor of the conservative, pro-communist forces in the Soviet leadership that organized the failed putsch of August, 1991, and attempted to preserve the Soviet Union as a communist superpower: "We regard communism not only as a theory but as a new metaphysics which leads to the creation of a new, global religious teaching... It contains many fundamental features vitally important for civilization, features of a new world religion with its own saints and martyrs, apostles and creed. ...Among the indisputable predecessors of communism we identify Isaiah and Jesus, Buddha and Lao Tse, Confucius and Socrates... [...] Today there is no alternative to the communist meta-religion..."³⁸ Further, Kurginyan insists that Russia, since its ancient history has experienced a need for an idea with global-messianic potential capable of unifying Eurasia. She found this in communism. [...] The red field, Communist eschatology and Communist mysticism existed, exist and will exist in Russia and, most probably, these ideas... will find their place within Eurasian expanses, merging with Orthodox, Sufi, Buddhist, and possibly, Catholic mysticism.³⁹

This example of the discourse of "metaphysical radicalism" reduces or even erases any difference among communist, nationalist and religious rhetoric. Another example comes from the head of the renovated Communist party, Gennady Zyuganov, the strongest contender for Russian political and ideological leadership in Russia today: "From the standpoint of ideology and world view, Russia is the keeper of the ancient spiritual tradition: its fundamental values are *sobornost'*⁴⁰ (collectivism), the supreme power of the State [*derzhavnost'*], sovereignty [literally: self-sufficiency of statehood], and the goal of implementing the highest 'heavenly' ideals of justice and brotherhood in earthly reality."⁴¹ Within a single sentence, phrases imbued with religious meaning--"spiritual tradition," "*sobornost'*" and "heavenly ideals," merge together with "*derzhavnost'*" and "statehood," taken from the vocabulary of nationalists, and with "collectivism" and "brotherhood," the key words of communist jargon.

Thus we can single out metaphysical radicalism as one of the most powerful tendencies in contemporary Russian thought, as a kind of metadiscursive strategy transcending the ideological differences among previously oppositional movements.

7. Conceptualism

Another major strategy that shares the contemporary intellectual scene with metaphysical radicalism is conceptualism.⁴² Like its counterpart, it suggests a universal mode of speculation: a critical attitude towards traditional notions of reality and an ironic playfulness with regard to the sign systems of various ideologies that empties all metaphysical assumptions of their contents to reveal the bare skeleton of abstract discourse contingent on a system of arbitrary beliefs. Conceptualism exposes the "realistic fallacy" of all "master discourses," discloses the contingency of all concepts and refuses to ground itself in any reality. As Ilya Kabakov, the leading representative of Russian conceptualism in art and theory, puts it, "Precisely because of its self-referentiality and the lack of windows or a way out to something

else, it [the concept] is like something that hangs in the air, a self-reliant thing, like a fantastic construction, connected to nothing, with its roots in nothing."⁴³

Initially, the name "conceptualism" was borrowed from the international aesthetic school founded in late 1960s by the American artist Joseph Kosuth. Conceptual art from the very beginning was connected with philosophy and even claimed to be more intrinsically philosophical than academic philosophy itself. Kosuth insists that, "The twentieth century brought in a time which could be called 'the end of philosophy and the beginning of art.' [...] Art is itself philosophy made concrete."⁴⁴

Two lines of argument intersect in this statement. On the one hand, it implies that 20th century art is no longer limited to the creation of material forms but begins to question the very nature of art and to redefine it with each specific work. Art, therefore, becomes an articulation of ideas about art. "...Conceptual Art' merely means a conceptual investigation of art."⁴⁵ On the other hand, analytical philosophy, as Kosuth proposes, has refuted any claims by philosophy to enunciate the truth, to make verifiable propositions about the world, and reduced the task of philosophy to the analysis of its own language. Therefore, philosophy has lost its privileged "scientific" status and its claims to universal truth; in our "post-philosophical" age, its function passes to art, which creates new concepts, signs and languages without assuming their credibility. These two processes, the conceptualization of art and the aesthetization of philosophy, contribute to a mutual rapprochement and the redefinition of conceptual art as a concrete philosophy that objectifies and relativizes its own ideas.

Another source of the term "conceptualism," less evident but perhaps more decisive for the fate of this movement in Russia, is the medieval philosophical school of the same name. Among the European scholastics of the 13th and 14th centuries, conceptualism functioned as a moderate version of nominalism, which asserted that all universals have their being not in reality itself but in the sphere of purely mental concepts. As such, this school was opposed to realism, which posited one continuum of physical and conceptual reality, insisting on the ontological being of such universals as love, soul, beauty, goodness and other general concepts. Strange as it may seem, an analogous confrontation of two intellectual trends occurred in the late Soviet period, with Marxism insisting on the historical reality of such general ideas as "class," "the people," "collectivism," "equality," "history," and "progress," while conceptualism argued for the purely nominative and mental basis of these ideological constructions. Like its medieval counterpart, conceptualism attempts to expose the realistic fallacy that attributes objective existence to general or abstract ideas. Whereas the Soviet system gave the status of historical reality to its own ideological pronouncements, conceptualism attempted to expose the contingent nature of these concepts by unmasking them as constructions proceeding from the human mind or generated by linguistic practices.

The origins of Russian conceptualist discourse can be traced to the works of the philosopher, writer, and literary critic Andrei Siniavsky, particularly to his treatise "On Socialist Realism" (1959). Instead of either praising socialist realism as the "truthful reflection of life" (in the words of official Soviet criticism) or condemning it as a "distortion of reality and poor propagandistic art" (in the words of dissident or liberal Western criticism), Siniavsky suggested the artistic utilization of the signs and images of socialist realism, while maintaining a playful distance from their ideological content.

Among leading representatives of Russian Conceptualism in the 1970s-1990s one could name, in addition to Andrei Siniavsky and Ilya Kabakov, artists and essayists Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, poet and theorist Dmitry Prigov, and philosopher and art critic Boris Groys. Conceptualism may be viewed as a Russian version of postmodern and poststructuralist discursive strategy which undermines the credibility of any system of thought by exposing it as a self-enclosed chain of significations with no outlet to reality. From a conceptualist standpoint, a "concept" is any idea--

political, religious, moral--presented as a pure idea, without reference to its real prototype or any possibility of its actual implementation. That is why conceptualism, as a philosophy, is so closely connected with art: the idea is used in its aesthetic capacity, as a playful and self-sufficient verbal statement or visual projection whose practical or political application are revealed as delusions. With conceptualism, any fact, gesture, object, or work of art is exposed as a "concept," i.e., a mental act which ironically contemplates its own materialization as contingent on speculative conventions. Thus the field of philosophical reflection expands infinitely, subsuming all kinds of concrete objects and facts and treating them as mental constructions, as general concepts, in such a way that these concepts claim their existential and material status and simultaneously expose the counterfeit behind these claims.

Conceptualists view totalitarian thinking, with its claims of all-encompassing truthfulness, as a kind of madness: a network of internally connected though arbitrary propositions presumed to coincide with external reality. When considering more properly philosophical ideas, conceptualism playfully paraphrases metaphysical discourse using Hegelian, or Kantian, or Marxist rhetorical models for the description of such trivial objects as flies or garbage. This is not merely an attempt at the ironic deconstruction of traditional philosophy--it is also a project for the proliferation of new, multiple metaphysics, each of which consciously demonstrates the contingency of its central concept, be it Absolute Spirit in Hegel's work or a fly in Kabakov's treatise "The Fly as a Subject and Basis for Philosophical Discourse."

In contrast to radical metaphysics "in the imperative mood," conceptualist simulative systems of thought could be called "metaphysics in the subjunctive mood," which also serves to distinguish it from pre-Kantian dogmatism, or "metaphysics in the indicative mood," with its claims of adequately describing reality as such. Kabakov argues that any object, however ordinary and trivial, can rightfully be placed in the center of a philosophical discourse, becoming its master concept, the universal "first principle": "The work presented here, the treatise 'The Fly with Wings' almost visually demonstrates the nature of all philosophical discourse--at its base may lie a simple, uncomplicated and even nonsensical object--an ordinary fly, for example. But yet the very quality of the discourse does not suffer in the least as a result of this. In this very way it is proven (and illustrated) that the idea of philosophizing and its goal consists not at all in the revelation of the original supposition (if this can turn out to be an ordinary fly), but rather in the very process of discourse, in the verbal frivolity itself, in the mutual suppositions of the beginnings and ends, in the flow of connections and representations of that very thing."⁴⁶

In addition to demonstrating the contingency of metaphysical systems, Kabakov accomplishes two other closely related philosophical tasks. By contrasting the superficiality of the topic with the gravity of his chosen genre, Kabakov not only deconstructs the methodology of serious philosophy, but elevates the trivial to the status of a topic worthy of philosophical meditation. The same device that allows him to deconstruct traditional philosophy, also serves to construct a new range of philosophies that can assimilate the words and concepts of ordinary language in all its infinite richness. This pan-philosophical approach can also be applied to such concepts as "chair" or "table" or "wall," identifying them as potential universals that may provide a more vivid elucidation of the world than such traditional and almost empty concepts as Spirit or Life or Being. The proliferation of metaphysical systems within conceptualism is conceived as a way to overcome the metaphysical dimension of discourse, not by the means of serious analytical criticism (as in Wittgenstein or Derrida), but through the self-ironic, self-parodic construction of systems that deliberately disclose their own contingency.

Conceptualism, as postmodernism on the whole, is sometimes criticized for its aesthetic snobbery and moral indifference (consider Solzhenitsyn's invectives against "spiritually impotent" postmodernism in the early 1990s). But Russian conceptualists, not unlike their Western allies,

emphasize the moral implications of philosophical contingency, which undermines totalitarian and hegemonic discourse and promotes self-irony as a mode of epistemological humility. Russian culture proved to be a fertile ground for the application of conceptualist theory, owing to the prevalence of ideological schemes and stereotypes throughout its history, especially during the Soviet period. In the West, the correlation between sign systems and observable reality has been persistently validated through scientific research and economic practice; while in Russia, reality itself has traditionally been constructed from ideological signs generated by ruling minds. For this reason, conceptualism may be viewed as the predominant Russian-Soviet mode of thinking, as the self-awareness of nominalist and conceptualist practice underlying Russian history, especially its ideocratic institutions.

The Russian version of conceptualism established a theoretical distance between itself and a great number of metaphysical schemes, potentially totalitarian and hegemonic discourses that dominated late Soviet and early post-Soviet culture, including Marxist, nationalist, mystical-esoteric and other "grand" and "fundamental" discourses. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, as the official ideology lay in ruins, the critical sharpness and topicality of conceptualism diminished for a while, but conceptualists did not remain jobless for long: other ideologies (religious fundamentalism, national messianism, etc.) came to contend for the "yawning heights" of the State ideocracy, and their rhetoric escalated to such a degree of automatization and self-repetition that conceptualism could set about "working" with them.

If in the 1970s-1980s conceptualism was neatly opposed to more academic and serious types of humanistic discourses, such as neo-rationalist or culturological, the 1990s have witnessed a strong tendency for their consolidation. Just as Marxism, nationalism and religious fundamentalism have begun to gravitate toward a unified discursive strategy of metaphysical radicalism, so do structuralism, culturology and conceptualism, which were clearly divided in the 1970s-80s, tend to comprise a unity in opposition to metaphysical radicalism. This unity is based, first and foremost, on the poststructuralist notion of the cultural relativity and contingency of all discourses--the theoretical tenet that was not alien to structuralism and culturology but was most consistently and convincingly articulated in conceptualism.

Thus, in the mid-1990s, one can see a sharp polarization of radical and post-structuralist (or conceptualist, in the broadest sense) types of discourses with simultaneous neutralization of the internal ideological differences within both of them.

8. Conceptualism vs. Metaphysical Radicalism

One can compare the relationship between Russian conceptualists and metaphysical radicals with the division of "ironists" and "metaphysicians" among Western intellectuals, as described by Richard Rorty. "...The metaphysician is someone who takes the question 'what is the intrinsic nature of (e.g., justice, science, knowledge, Being, faith, morality, philosophy)?' at face value. He assumes that the presence of a term in his own final vocabulary ensures that it refers to something which has a real essence. [...] The ironist, by contrast, is a nominalist and a historicist. She thinks nothing has an intrinsic value, a real essence." The position of ironists is summarized in this way: "never quite able to take themselves seriously because always aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change, always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies, and thus of their selves."⁴⁷ If the metaphysician's "final vocabulary" includes such concepts as "true," "good," "right," "the Church," "the Revolution," "professional standards," "progressive," "creative," etc., then the terms preferred by the "ironist" are those that denounce the very possibility of "final vocabulary," including "perspective," "conceptual framework," "historical epoch," "language game," "redescription,"

"vocabulary" and "irony." The ironists share the conceptualist position in relation to "eternal values," "self-evident truths," and "global imperatives" as advanced by metaphysical radicals.

However meaningful, this parallel with Western intellectual types needs certain corrections. Russian metaphysical radicals are not just "metaphysicians" in Rorty's sense, i.e. "realists" opposed to "ironists" as "nominalists." Metaphysical radicals not only believe in "real essences," they summon us to transform the world in accordance with their vision of these essences. As for conceptualists, they are not only "aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies, and thus of their selves"; they purposefully and sometimes aggressively eliminate and ridicule all existing vocabularies, directing their "redescriptions" against both "rightist" and "leftist" metanarratives whenever these lay claim to "intrinsic values."

This "extremity" on both sides, metaphysical radicalism and conceptualism, certainly deepens the split between these intellectual positions and diminishes the chances of their mediation and neutralization in the framework of a purely scientific or scholarly discourse. On the surface, metaphysical radicalism and conceptualism seem wholly incompatible, even antagonistic, since the former pushes the seriousness of metaphysics to the extreme of prophecy and propaganda, while the latter reduces it to an act of linguistic buffoonery. Indeed, metaphysical radicals have nothing but contempt for "futile" and "foolish" conceptualist games, whereas conceptualists pointedly ridicule "dangerous" pretensions of philosophically intoxicated radicals.

But, essentially, the current radicalization and conceptualization of metaphysical discourse may be regarded as two aspects of the same process. The more radical metaphysical assumptions become, the more they reveal their potentially conceptualist nature. It is not by chance that Russian conceptualism emerged as the ironic duplication of the totalitarian discourse of Soviet Marxism: as new, post-Marxist modes of radical discourse become politically influential, conceptualism easily assimilates them for its ironic repertoire of empty cultural codes.

The conceptualist component in contemporary Russian thought cannot be reduced to a merely parodic gesture. The point is that radical discourse itself increasingly reveals internal conceptual qualities; the more an idea is pushed to extremes, the more it exposes its lack of referent and the pure schematism of its abstract speculation. For example, on the political scene, the Zhirinovskiy phenomenon may be explained as an intersection of radical and conceptualist modes, making him the equivalent of a "postmodern Hitler." The title of Zhirinovskiy's autobiography-manifesto, *The Last Rush to the South*, could easily have been taken from the *oeuvre* of Dmitry Prigov's conceptualist verses. The very idea of Russian soldiers washing their boots in the Indian Ocean presents a combination of political radicalism (the Russian Empire stretched to the continent's Southern margin) and the aesthetics of conceptualism (an idea that is ruthlessly consistent in logical or ideological terms demonstrates its ridiculous irrelevance and folly).

The regeneration of totalitarianism after the death of totalitarianism cannot but incorporate a conceptualist self-subversive mediation. That is why new radicalism, from the very start, is doomed to be conceptually loaded, though rarely to the point of self-realization, unlike conceptualism in a proper sense. Some subtle observers find even in Zhirinovskiy's extremist escapades a kind of conscious buffoonery that plays with the signs of aggressiveness rather than actually pursues it.⁴⁸ In most cases, however, radicalism acquires a conceptual dimension unintentionally, whereas conceptualism quite purposefully engages into radical discourse and demonstrates both luxury and poverty of thus constructed metaphysical systems.

Such a deliberate symbiosis of radicalism and conceptualism may outline the perspective for a new Russian metaphysics, which will give a postmodern dimension to a traditionally Russian holistic,

potentially totalitarian, way of thinking.⁴⁹ While Western postmodern discourse remains predominantly critical and self-critical, as seen in the pervasive influence of deconstruction with its demystifying and anti-metaphysical claims, Russian postmodern thought tends to emphasize its metaphysical disposition, finding the antidote to metaphysical indoctrination in its very excesses. Where Western thought prefers to mediate opposites and ground itself in "neutral," scientifically sound terms, Russian thought deliberately moves in the polar directions of excessive prophecy and relentless irony, pendulating between two opposites instead of attempting their rapprochement and stable synthesis.

One can imagine a kind of monolithic, though ambivalent, metaphysical discourse where the seam between radical and conceptualist ingredients becomes indistinguishable. The tendency for such symbiotic philosophizing is now evident both on the side of metaphysical radicalism, which cannot but locate itself in postmodern, post-totalitarian space, and conceptualism, which demonstrates an increasing proclivity for almost sincere, invariably grandiose and self-derisive, self-erasing metaphysical speculation⁵⁰.

* * *

Russian intellectual history is a history of thought that fights desperately to escape the prison of an ideocratic system created by the strenuous and sacrificial efforts of thought itself. What makes Russian thought so unique is its internal tension, its struggle against itself, against its own ideational constructions and social extensions.

In the West, the field of philosophy is more or less clearly divided into ontology, the philosophy of being, and epistemology, the philosophy of knowledge. In Russia, such a division is almost irrelevant since philosophy addresses a conception of being that is itself constructed by thinking. Beginning with Chaadaev, and the Westernizers and Slavophiles, Russian philosophy focused on the secondary reality, one created by ideas. In Russia, thought tried to confront the triumph of thought. One speculative capacity, "intelligentsia," opposed itself to another speculative capacity, "ideocracy," -- but the former also created the latter. This self-contradictory movement of thought, shattering its own foundations, gives an unprecedented, sometimes "suicidal" quality to Russian philosophy. It may have been "derivative" and "secondary," but not so much in respect to Western thought, as in relation to properly Russian, utterly artificial, fabricated, and fantastic reality.

Till now, Russia never played an important role in world philosophy, but philosophy did play an enormous role in Russia, especially in the 20th century. Now that the system of ideocracy is not only theoretically deconstructed but, hopefully, historically transcended, one can envision the reversal of these tendencies. As philosophy will play a lesser role in a Russian society increasingly motivated by materialistic, economic goals, Russian philosophy, rethinking its unique experience of self-denial and self-liberation, will assume a more prominent role on the international scene.

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²The article "Michurin," in *Philosofskii slovar'*, ed. by M. Rozental and P. Yudin, Moscow: Politizdat, 1963, p. 274.

³Ivan Michurin. *Sochineniia*, in 4 volumes, Moscow, 1948, vol.2, p.515.

⁴It was usual during the post-revolutionary epoch to speak about the Party as "the collective reason [razum] of the people," or about the Politbureau as "the collective reason of the Party."

⁵I am thankful to Dr. Eve Adler of Middlebury College who drew my attention to this dialogue and provided additional useful information on its participants.

⁶Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny*, Including the Strauss-Kojeve Correspondence, ed. by Victor Gourevich and Michael S. Roth, New York: The Free Press, 1991, p.173.

⁷*Ibid.*, p.211.

⁸*Ibid.*, p.175.

⁹Rev. Georgy Florovsky. *Puti russkogo bogosloviia* (1937). 4th ed. Paris: YMCA-PRESS, 1988, pp. 234, 235.

¹⁰According to Florovsky, for the previous generation of Russian intelligentsia, of the 1810s - 1820s, it was poetry (Zhukovsky, Batyushkov, Griboedov, Pushkin) that played the role of cultural magnet. The same is true about Soviet intelligentsia which in the late 1950s - early 1960s was obsessed with poetry and whose idols were Evtushenko, Voznesensky, Akhmadulina, and Okudzhava. Already in the late 1960s - early 1970s they surrendered their influence not to other poets, but to thinkers and scholars, such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Yury Lotman, and Sergei Averintsev. Florovsky has coined a formula for such a process of maturation: "From the *poetical* stage Russian cultural-creative consciousness transfers into the *philosophical* stage" (Florovsky, *op.cit.*, p. 236).

¹¹In his younger years, 1875 - 1881, Soloviev lectured at Moscow University but, symptomatically, was forced to retire from teaching after he concluded his public lecture with a political statement: he condemned revolutionary activities and simultaneously called the Tsar to forgive the terrorists who recently murdered his father, Alexander II.

¹²Gary Saul Morson & Caryl Emerson. *Mikhail Bakhtin. Creation of a Prosaics*. Stanford (California): Stanford University Press, 1990, p.37.

¹³There is an irony to be discussed later in the rapprochement of Marxism, Orthodoxy and nationalism within metaphysical radicalism.

¹⁴A leading exponent of this movement, Svetlana Semyonova, is one among very few women engaged in contemporary philosophical debates in Russia. Characteristically, Fedorov's system which she advocates is based on extremely patriarchal views and denigrates the role of women as "seducers" of men preventing them from fulfilling their duties of resurrection toward the "fathers." There are many historio-cultural factors accounting for a lesser role of women in Russian philosophy than in Russian literature. This unexplored field is covered in Vasily Vanchugov's unpublished book, "Zhenshchiny v Filosofii: Iz istorii filosofii v Rossii kontsa XIX - nach. XX vv." [Women in philosophy: from the history of philosophy in Russia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries].

¹⁵Philosophical aspects of conceptualist movement will be treated more extensively in the last sections of this article.

¹⁶These projects will be briefly discussed in the section 5 of this article ("New Metaphysical Radicals").

¹⁷See, for example, the "commemorative" and "resurrective" articles on Russian philosophers published in 1987 and 1988 in *Literaturnaia gazeta* and translated into English in *Russian Literature - Russian Thought: From the History of Twentieth-century Russian Philosophy*, a special issue of *Soviet Studies in Literature*, Spring 1990, v.26, No.2 (articles on Soloviev, Rozanov, Florensky, and others).

¹⁸A reservation would be appropriate here that the most fundamentalist circles of Orthodoxy blame Bulgakov and Florensky, especially their teachings on Sophia, the Wisdom of God, for particularly sophisticated and dangerous heresies introduced into the very heart of Christian dogmatics.

¹⁹M.Heidegger. *Phänomenologie und Theologie*. Fr.a.M., 1970, S. 32.

²⁰E.V.Barabanov. Russian Philosophy and the Crisis of Identity. *Russian Studies in Philosophy*. Fall 1992, vol.31, No.2, pp.25, 46.

²¹Thus, for Khoruzhii, the most authoritative source of Christian existentialism as opposed to Platonic idealism is Gregory Palamas (1296-1359), Orthodox monk, theologian, and intellectual leader of Hesychasm, an ascetical method of mystical prayer. One should not forget, however, that in his youth Saint Gregory mastered the classical philosophies of antiquity at the imperial university; according to Encyclopaedia Britannica, "in his fusion of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy, used as a vehicle to express his own spiritual experience, Palamas set a definitive standard for Orthodox theological acumen."

²²L. A. Gogotishvili. Mifologiya khaosa (o sotsial'no-istoricheskoi kontseptsii A. F. Loseva), in *Voprosy filosofii*, 1993, No.9, 48, 49.

²³I. Kant. *Werke*, ed. by E. Cassirer, 1914, vol. 6, p. 456.

²⁴Antony Flew refers to this definition in the introduction to his work *A Dictionary of Philosophy*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979, p.yiii.

- ²⁵ Gregory Skovoroda. Socrates in Russia, in *Russian Philosophy*, ed. by James M. Edie, James P. Scanlan, Mary-Barabara Zeldin with the collaboration of George L. Kline. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987, vol. 1, pp. 17-18.
- ²⁶ Ivan Kireevsky, On the Necessity and Possibility of New Principles in Philosophy, *ibid.*, p. 213.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 182.
- ²⁸ I. V. Kireevsky. O kharaktere prosveshcheniia Evropy (On the Character of European Enlightenment), in his book *Kritika i estetika*, Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1979, p.272.
- ²⁹ *Sbornik statei v pamiat' stoletii Imperatorskoi Moskovskoi Dukhovnoi Akademii*, Sergiev Posad, 1915, part 1, p.153. Cited in the article: A.I.Abramov, "Otsenka filosofii Platona v russkoi idealisticheskoi filosofii" published in the collection *Platon i ego epokha (Plato and his Epoch)*, Moscow: Nauka, 1979, p. 222.
- ³⁰ On the totalitarian implications of Platonism and its connection with Marxist philosophy, see Karl R. Popper. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966. Comparisons of Marx and Plato are scattered throughout the book and can be followed in the Index of Subjects. In particular, Popper remarks: "The whole idea - which was not Marx's invention - that there is something behind the prices, an objective or real or true value of which prices are only a 'form of appearance,' shows clearly enough the influence of Platonic Idealism with its distinction between a hidden essential or true reality, and an accidental or delusive appearance."(vol. 2, p. 165).
- ³¹ K.Marx, Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. by Robert C.Tucker, New York: W.W.Norton&Co., 1972, p.18.
- ³² K. R. Popper. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol. 1, *The Spell of Plato*, London: Routledge&Kegan Paul, 1966, p.164.
- ³³ E. V. Barabanov. *Russian Philosophy and the Crisis of Identity*, ed. cit., 48.
- ³⁴ Roman Jakobson. *Language in Literature*, ed. by Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy. Cambridge, Mass., London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987, p. 68.
- ³⁵ See, for example, the criticism of radical traditionalism in the neo-fascist journal *Ataka* (no date and place, No. 12, pp. 32-34) whose editor Sergei Zharikov is the main ideologist and the minister of culture in the "shadow" government of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy.
- ³⁶ N.Fedorov. *Filosofiiia obshchego dela*. Cited in V. V. Zenkovskiy. *Istoriia russkoi filosofii*, Paris: IMKA-PRESS, 1950, Vol. 2, s. 135.
- ³⁷ F. Nietzsche. *Schriften und Entwürfe 1881-1885. Werke/Hrsg. von F.Koegel. 2. Abt. Bd.12. Leipzig, 1897, S.110.*
- ³⁸ S. E. Kurginian, B. R. Autenshlius, P. S. Goncharov, Yu. V. Gromyko, I. Yu. Sundiev, V. S. Ovchinsky. *Postperestroika*, Moscow: Politizdat, 1990, pp. 59-60, 66.
- ³⁹ Sergei Kurginian. *Sed'moi stsenarii*. Moscow: Eksperimental'nyi tvorcheskii tsentr, 1992, vol.3, pp. 201, 228.
- ⁴⁰ In Russian, the term "*sobornost*" means "togetherness," "the spirit of communality" and has theological origin and connotations (the spiritual experience of Russian Orthodox church). By adding "collectivism" as its synonym, Zyuganov wants to equate religious and communist views which is one of the central points of his ideological program ("Christ as the first communist").
- ⁴¹ Published in the newspaper "Soviet Russia," September 24, 1994.
- ⁴² On Conceptualism see Mikhail Epstein, *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture*, with an introduction and transl. by Anesa Miller-Pogacar, Amherst: Massachusetts University Press, 1995, pp. 30-37, 60-70, 200-203; Mikhail Epstein, *The Philosophical Implications of Russian Conceptualism*, forthcoming in Duke University press, 1997.
- ⁴³ Ilya Kabakov. Conceptualism in Russia, in his book *Zhizn' mukh. Das Leben der Fliegen. Life of Flies*. Kolnischer Kunstverein. Edition Cantz. 1992, p.249.
- ⁴⁴ Joseph Kosuth. *Art after Philosophy and After*. Collected Writings, 1966-1990. Cambridge (MA) and London: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1991, pp. 14, 52.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 84.
- ⁴⁶ Kabakov, "The Fly as a Subject and Basis for Philosophical Discourse", in: *Zhizn' mukh. Das Leben der Fliegen. Life of Flies*, p. 224.
- ⁴⁷ Richard Rorty. Ironists and Metaphysicians, in *The Truth about Truth. De-confusing and Re-constructing the Postmodern World*, ed. by Walter Truett Anderson, New York: A Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam Book, 1995, pp. 101, 102.
- ⁴⁸ Elena Zheltova, "Vladimir Zhirinovskiy: Carnival Barker" (a manuscript).
- ⁴⁹ Already, a recent trend in Russian intellectual prose, exemplified by Dmitry Galkovsky's novel-treatise, *Endless Dead End (Beskonechnyi tupik)*, indicates potential directions for the radicalist-conceptualist mode of thinking.
- ⁵⁰ It is on the crossroads of radicalist and conceptualist discourses that this author situates some of his own writings, such as *New Sectarianism: The Varieties of Religious-Philosophical Consciousness in Russia*, Holyoke, New

England Publishing Co., 1993 (2nd edition: Moscow: Labirint, 1994); *Great Sov'. A Philosophical-Mythological Essay*, New York: Slovo/Word, 1994 (both books are in Russian).