

The Place of Russian Philosophy in World Philosophical History – A Perspective

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Верю я ночь пройдет – сгинет страх
Верю я – день придет, весь в лучах
Он пропоет мне новую песню о главном . . .
Bravo (Sukachev, Khaftan, Aguzarova), 1986
Строго говоря, в философии сознания (. . .)
метатеория занимает место теории.
Aleksandr Pyatigorski, (1996: 207).¹

Introduction

History of philosophy is not only a respectable specialization within the disciplinary architectonics of academic philosophy. It is also the recurrent retrospective reflection of philosophical culture, in its present-day state, upon its own past. It is, so to speak, its historical self-awareness. Philosophy always has its own past as part of its present. However, the representation of that past, made possible by the professional discipline of history of philosophy – where would we be without reliable editions and minute analyses? – is always and by definition incomplete and selective. It is, generally speaking, the present state of philosophy's representation of its past. The present-day state of philosophy is both global and plural. It does not have a clear centre or core (it never did, but in the past this illusion could come into existence more easily), but rather consists of a multitude of overlapping, interacting, and criss-crossing lines and strands. Consequently, there is not a single vantage point from which the 'historical autobiography' of philosophy can be written, but rather a multitude of points and perspectives. A retrospective can only be articulated from one such point. Philosophical thought is, at the same time, absolutely individual in its existence and absolutely universal in its claim, and it necessarily takes place, concretely, in a historically, politically, and socio-economically determined situation. The

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dynamic of philosophy in its development as a philosophical culture, individually and collectively, is the effect of the tension between these extremes.

The history of philosophy is not an 'object' that can be studied: what can be studied are individuals, texts, events. History of philosophy in general, however, whether on a local – 'national' – or on a global scale, exists only as the object of a meta-theory that constitutes 'philosophy' as its object. The only possible source of such a meta-theory is, obviously, present-day philosophy itself, i.e. one of the numerous 'thought points' that constitute it and from which it is constituted. Consequently, my present perspective on the place of Russian philosophy in the development of philosophy at a world-historical scale is emphatically *one* perspective among many possible ones. It is, hopefully, well-informed, but it does not, itself, pretend to offer more than a number of elements for a more complete perspective. This is not a matter of feigned modesty – much rather, my positive claim is that objective historical truth is *not* what the historical self-awareness that is part of every philosophical culture is about. The landscape of any philosophical culture looks very different from an insider's perspective than from that of an outsider – and each of these exist in the plural as well. My perspective is that of a relative outsider. In spite of protracted and intensive contact with and participation in Russian philosophical culture, both during the Soviet and the post-Soviet period, I do not feel as if Russian philosophy is 'mine' – much rather, I have arrived at the conclusion that philosophy as such cannot be 'Russian' any more than it can be French or German, and my acquaintance with it is one of the reasons why I think that a present-day retrospective must include the reality of Russian philosophy, i.e. address it as a historical phenomenon and give it a place. In this contribution, therefore, I want to offer, in the first section, some elements of an assessment of the actual presence of Russian philosophy in the history of philosophy. In the second section, I suggest an explanation for the relative, and undeserved, absence of Russian philosophy from the historical self-perception of philosophical culture. In the third and last section, finally, I shall set a few steps towards a renewed assessment of Russia's philosophical tradition in the framework of present-day, global but not unitary philosophical culture.

1. *The Presence of Russian Philosophy*

In stark contrast with its place in art history or musical history, not to mention literature, where the inclusion of Russian painters and filmmakers, composers and musicians, novelists, playwrights and poets, is obvious, general surveys and accounts of the history of philosophy at a world historical scale often barely mention Russian philosophy or Russian philosophers (van der Zweerde, 2007: 172–173). Randall Collins, for example, in his well-known *The Sociology of Philosophies*, included a scanty discussion of Dostoyevsky and a few remarks on nineteenth century academic philosophy in Russia (Collins, 1998: 770–772); apart from that, Collins mentions, but barely more than that, Bakunin, Berdyaev, Madame Blavatsky [sic], Chernyshevski, Herzen/Gertsen, Kojève and Koyré, Lobachevsky, Pisarev and Turgenev. This is the more unfortunate as the history of Russian philosophy offers excellent material for his novel approach, which concentrates on networks and shifts of location. In the field of

comparative philosophy, the monumental project *Comparatieve filosofie* by the Belgian orientalist Ulrich Libbrecht (1995–2005) works towards a synthesis of Western, i.e. Greek and then Modern West European and Eastern, i.e. Indian and Chinese philosophical thought, completely omitting Russian philosophy. This is not a reproach – rather it is an expression of regret concerning the fact that, for example, the neo-Palamist synergic anthropology [синергийная антропология] elaborated by Sergei Khoruzhi (2005) would fit very well into his project, which likewise turns around the replacement of essences by energies (<http://www.synergia-isa.ru>). There are, to be sure, exceptions to this rule. For example, the Flemish-Dutch intercultural project ‘Filosofie Oost-West’ (<http://www.filosofie-oostwest.nl/>) does take into account Russian philosophy and Russian philosophers, paying attention to, for example, Lev Shestov. Also, an attempt has recently been made to connect the philosophical endeavours of Vladimir Solovyov and Silver Age thinkers like Nikolay Berdyaev and Semyon Frank to present day holistic theory (Kochetkova, 2007). However, despite these and similar exceptions, e.g. in the works of Bonnie Honig (2001: 57 ff) or Steven Rockefeller (1994: 96), it is safe to state that, on the whole, Russian philosophy and philosophers are little more than marginally present in contemporary philosophical culture outside Russia itself and outside specialist circles.

This general omission or oblivion of Russian philosophy does not match historical reality, as I shall try to show in the remainder of this section. Russian philosophical thought has, in point of fact, been rather influential. A first example is, of course, Alexandre Kojève/Aleksandr Kozhevnikov (1902–1968; emigrated 1920). His impact on French philosophical culture is difficult to exaggerate – it has even been suggested that with his mixture of Hegel, Marx, Heidegger, and Nietzsche he has determined, single-handedly, the thought of generations of French philosophers (van Middelaar, 1999: 25, 46–53). No single intellectual could have had such an impact if there was not more at stake, but it is clear, of course, that Kojève has been very influential with his historicist interpretation of the Hegelian idea of an ‘end of history’.

It is true that Kojève did not take his version of the ‘end of history theorem’ from Vladimir Solovyov, whom he studied intensively: he was critical of Solovyov’s perception and rightly diagnosed his thought as being profoundly a-historical (Jubara, 2001: 152–155; Auffret, 1990: 220–240). It is, however, through his rejection of Solovyov’s vision that Kojève revised and refined the left-Hegelian interpretation of Hegel’s philosophy of history that, in nineteenth century Russia, had obtained religious – or pseudo-religious – colourings: as a result, Kojève’s version is much more consistently atheist and much less Hegelian than that of, say, Aleksandr Herzen, but just as anti-Hegelian as Solovyov’s: instead of Solovyov’s separation of the history of mankind from eschatology, he arrives at a full identification of the history of Humankind and of *Weltgeist* which culminates in a construction of Napoleon-cum-Hegel as ‘perfect Man [*l’Homme parfait*]’, a dyad that both is the completion of humankind *and* knows that it is, coming to full *Anundfürsichsein* in the mind of the philosopher (Kojève, 1979: 195; Jubara, 2001: 159). Paradoxically, Kojève’s atheistic and historicist interpretation of Hegel’s philosophy matches Solovyov’s negative evaluation of Hegel in his one-sided diagnosis of absolute idealism as objective idealism: in both cases, absolute idea and history are situated at the same level (Solovyov, 1989: 437–441). This is not to say, of course, that the same misinterpretation could not have occurred

without the 'Russian connection', but it remains the case that this is how it took place historically.

Isaiah Berlin (1909–1997) was too young, and too Jewish to be called a Russian philosopher when he left Petrograd in 1920 at the age of eleven, but his cultural Russian background played an important role in his life and his intellectual output. As his biographer, Michael Ignatieff (1998: 291 ff), wrote: 'For the Jerusalem Prize, awarded before his seventieth birthday, he wrote what turned out to be his only venture into extended intellectual autobiography, detailing the three strands in his life – Russian, English, Jewish – which he had braided into the single skein of his identity'. Besides, his direct experience of the revolutions of 1917 and of the early Soviet regime left their mark on his thought (Ignatieff, 1998: 20–32). Berlin not only determined, through his own writings, especially *Russian Thinkers*, and those of his pupils, e.g. Eileen M. Kelly, much of the perception of Russian intellectual history in the West, but also played an important role in Western political philosophy as one of those who issued warnings against any attempt to install a political regime that would realize man's positive freedom – Berlin (1969: 121 ff), by contrast, elaborated a liberal political philosophy which put emphasis on negative freedom, i.e. the absence of barriers and hindrances.

A third example of the lasting influence of Russian philosophical thought is presented by Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), who not only worked, in Soviet Russia, for over thirty years in 'internal exile' in the provincial town of Saransk, influencing generations of Russian intellectuals (van der Zweerde, 1997: 89), but beyond that exerted an influence on literary theory worldwide that is hard to overestimate, but barely noticed, it seems, by philosophers.

In sum, we can draw the first conclusion that the actual or 'real' impact of Russian philosophical thought and of Russian philosophers is not, or insufficiently, part of the historical consciousness of global philosophical culture. The question then is, of course, why this is so.

2. Explanation

A first, often heard explanation of the discrepancy between the actual importance of the Russian tradition of philosophical thought and its presence in historical works and university curricula is language. Russians like to claim that their language is very difficult – which is not true: Russian is not significantly more difficult, for a West European or North American, than Greek or French, and certainly less difficult than Japanese or Arabic – or that their philosophy is closely connected to their language – which is not true either, at least not more, and probably less, than is the case with German or Ancient Greek. The reason for this is, quite simply, that the two major sources of Russian philosophical vocabulary – Ancient Greek through Byzantine theology, and German through the influence of German idealism – have led to a situation in which Russian philosophical texts are a relatively easy read. Due to structural similarities with German (the use of grammatical cases and the possibility to use suffixes and prefixes), Russian lends itself easily to the construction of compact sentences and to the creation of abstract and complex notions. Philosophical

terms in Russian usually display a one-to-one correspondence with French, English, and especially German philosophical terminology (Ballestrem, 1964).

Language cannot possibly be a major barrier, if it is not excessively difficult to learn the language in which a certain philosophical tradition expresses its thought. The interest, for example, in so-called continental European philosophy among US American intellectuals has led to a host of translations of thinkers such as Giorgio Agamben, Jacques Derrida, or Hans Georg Gadamer, to name only three. If the initial interest is there, translations follow. Besides, there already exist reliable translations of works of many major Russian thinkers, from Vladimir Solovyov and Semyon Frank to Aleksandr Bogdanov and Evald Ilyenkov, and the journal *Russian Studies in Philosophy* has published a wide variety of philosophical texts of Russian origin during several decades in English translation. The problem apparently lies elsewhere.

An important factor that partly explains the relative silence that surrounds Russian philosophy is, paradoxically, a certain lack of exoticism and difference. Russian philosophy is hard to identify as a separate philosophical tradition because, in all crucial respects, it is part of the European philosophical tradition from the very beginning. Like in painting, literature, or music, there are a lot of 'Russian elements' and there certainly are accents and differences, but on the whole Russian philosophy is European philosophy – which at the same time means that we have to broaden our conception of European philosophy to include its Russian branch (just as we must include Eastern Orthodoxy if we care to understand Christianity). Similarly, it is impossible to understand the discussions between 'Slavophiles' and 'Westernizers' without being aware of the development of German idealism and the opposition of Hegel and Schelling – but then this implies that we have to broaden our conception of idealism to take into account the Russian reception. Finally, it is impossible to understand the thought of Aleksandr Kozhevnikov without taking into account his studies of Solovyov – but this implies that we have to broaden our perception of the historical development of philosophy in France and include this 'Russian connection'. If there is any point at all in Alfred N. Whitehead's famous statement that the entire European philosophical tradition can be safely understood as a series of footnotes to Plato,² Russian philosophy participates in the writing of those footnotes: it is impossible to understand, for example, a philosopher like Solovyov without Plato – in fact one of his key texts, *Жизненная драма Платона*, is about Plato's 'disappointed betrayal' of Socrates.

The main factor, however, that explains the general lack of familiarity with Russian philosophical thought is undoubtedly its political history, mostly, albeit not exclusively, the Soviet period. Not exclusively, because in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, too, conditions for the free development of philosophical thought, and particularly its professionalization, were far from ideal. It is no exaggeration to say that Russian philosophy, for a very long period, was the province of learned nobleman and radical intellectuals who always risked censorship and exile – only towards the end of the nineteenth century was something like an autonomous and, to employ Niklas Luhmann's concept, autopoietic, academic philosophical culture politically possible. And it lasted only a few decades. The flourishing of philosophy presupposes freedom, including political freedom, and this has been a rare commodity throughout Russian history. However, it is obvious to both participants and

| | PI | VE | IG | FP | Note |
|---------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|--|
| Askoldov [Alekseev], S.A. (1871–1945) | × | | X | | repressed 1927 |
| Berdyayev, N.A. (1874–1948) | X | X | X | X | |
| Bulgakov, S.N. (1871–1944) | X | X | X | X | |
| Frank, S.L. (1877–1950) | X | X | X | X | |
| Geshenzon, M.O. (1869–1925) | | X | | | accepted Soviet power |
| Ivanov, V.I. (1866–1949) | | | X | | emigrated 1924 via Azerbaidzhan |
| Izgoev [Lande], A.S. (1872–1935) | | X | X | X | |
| Kistyakovski, B.A. (1868–1920) | X | X | | | [died 1920] |
| Kotlyarevski, S.A. (1873–1939) | | | X | | accepted Soviet power |
| Lappo-Danilevsky, A.S. (1863–1919) | X | | | | [died 1919] |
| Muravyov, V.N. (1885–1932 [?]) | | | X | | died in camp 1930 or 1932 |
| Novgorodtsev, P.I. (1866–1924) | X | | X | | emigrated 1920 via Ukraine |
| Oldenburg, S.F. (1863–1939) | X | | | | accepted Soviet power |
| Pokrovski, I.A. (1868–1920) | | | X | | died 1920 |
| Struve, P.B. (1870–1944) | X | X | X | | emigrated 1920 via Crimea |
| Trubetskoy, S.N. (1862–1905) | X | | | | [his son Nikolay emigr. 1919] |
| Trubetskoy, E.N. (1863–1920) | X | | | | [his son Sergej exiled by FP] |
| Zhukovski, D.E. (1868–1945 [?]) | X | | | | accepted Soviet power, arrested 1930, died in camp |

Figure 1: Fate of the Silver Age Philosophical Generation

observers, I think, that the ‘Soviet factor’ has had an incomparably disastrous effect on philosophy in Russia, even if the picture is less bleak than it is sometimes represented. I want to elaborate this claim in three points.

First of all, it is an empirical fact that the philosophical – and more broadly: intellectual – elite that gave shape to the Silver Age left Soviet Russia, voluntarily or involuntarily, and that by 1922 the Silver Age itself was over. A picture of this situation is yielded by the following scheme of the authors of three major non-Marxist publications from the 1900–1920 period, *Проблемы идеализма* (1902) [PI], *Вехи* (1909) [VE], and *Из глубины* (1918) [IG] [Figure 1]. Gathering biographical data from different sources (Alekseev, 1995; Emelyanov, 2004; Kazakova, 1991; Kolerov and Plotnikov, 1990; Poole, 2003), we obtain the result that the majority of them were exiled or repressed (or would have been if they had not died a natural death or left on their own initiative, like Vyacheslav Ivanov or Pyotr Struve), and that the three philosophers who published in all three volumes, Berdyayev, Bulgakov, and Frank, all were exiled with the notorious ‘Philosophy Steamer [Философский пароход]’ [FP] in 1922 (Khoruzi, 1994; Chamberlain, 2006).

This generation of Russian thinkers who had left Soviet Russia was, of course, highly critical of the regime in their country of origin. Since both communism and the Soviet Union enjoyed considerable popularity among intellectuals in Europe, especially in France where many of the émigrés landed, their ‘negative press’ went largely unnoticed outside émigré and conservative circles. Despite individual influ-

ences – Berdyaev and Shestov (who left Russia in 1920) in existentialist philosophy, Bulgakov in Orthodox theology abroad – the Silver Age generation as a substratum of philosophical culture was destroyed. In Soviet Russia itself, there were individual voices – Gustav Shpet, Pavel Florensky, Aleksei Losev – but they either were silenced before World War II (Shpet and Florensky were both executed in 1937) or were incorporated and known in very small circles only (Losev).³ Marxist pluralism, finally, which at least in part also continued the Silver Age philosophical culture and could have provided, under more favourable conditions, the basis for creative development, was reduced to a генеральная линия by the beginning of the 1930s.

In the second place, the principled subordination of philosophy to political goals – in a sense little more than the logical conclusion of Leninist ‘instrumentalization’ of philosophy for the aims of revolution and the construction of socialism – has been a determining factor from the late 1920s to the end of the Soviet era, i.e. for indeed 70 years, not only in terms of the actual suppression of philosophical discussion or of the repression of dissident voices, but also in terms of its ‘public image’. The vast majority of Western philosophers, particularly after World War II, when Soviet philosophy became visible again through publications (the major Soviet philosophical journal, *Вопросы философии*, was founded in 1947) and through ‘delegations’ at international congresses (since 1954), have identified Russian philosophy with what they came across in their academic practice. In this respect, the Soviet regime’s public relations policies were rather effective, as was its restrictive management of philosophical culture with a combination of centralization (small number of journals and publishing houses, small number of philosophy faculties), separation of academic research and university teaching, and a system of privileged access to sources and to the international scene that wryly resembled the economic privileges of the *nomenklatura*.

On top of this regimentation, and bearing directly on the topic of this paper, the Soviet period has led to a systematic distortion of the historical dimension of Russian philosophy. Broadly speaking, the history of philosophy had to be rewritten in such a way that its current, Soviet Marxist-Leninist version could be represented as a synthesis and continuation of all the valuable elements of past, including Russian, philosophy (van der Zweerde, 1997: 115–140). This led not only to a broad diachronic division of the history of philosophy into a ‘prehistory’ until Marx and Engels, and a synchronic division of the post-Marxian period into, on the one hand, the development of the philosophy of Marxism-Leninism, and, on the other, so-called критики современной буржуазной философии [critique of contemporary bourgeois philosophy]. It also yielded distorted pictures of nineteenth century philosophical thought in Russia, which was interpreted beyond recognition into a forerunner of Russian Marxism – so-called ревдемократизм depicted figures like Herzen, Belinsky, or Pisarev like ‘revolutionary democrats’ – of Silver Age philosophy, loathed as ‘bourgeois idealism’ (following in this the politicization of philosophy in class-struggle terms by Lenin in, among others, his 1909 reaction against *Вехи* and its authors (Ilyin [Lenin], 1909)), and of Soviet philosophy itself, which in its ideologized self-narrative appeared much smoother and much more Bolshevik-partisan than it actually was.

This leads, thirdly and finally, to an important ‘corrective’ that should to my mind be made at this point: one should resist any temptation to ‘demonize’ the Soviet

period and the Bolshevik regime. In fact, to think that it *was* the realization of the ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin is to believe in ideocracy as such (only with a negative instead of a positive evaluation), and it is, as far as philosophy is concerned, to believe Soviet philosophical culture at its ideological word. It is certainly correct, as Boris Groys (2006: 15) recently did, to qualify Soviet Marxism-Leninism as a 'modern form of practical Platonism', but it is only if one adds to this the mistaken 'logician' idea that 'Platonism' – or any other -ism, for that matter – actually can determine social reality instead of merely dominating the ideological discourse about it, that one can arrive at the absurd conclusion that the introduction of capitalism by the CPSU itself must be seen as the ultimate victory of communism (Groys, 2006: 94). Such 'logicism', exemplified by the works of Aleksandr Zinovyev, omits that ideological regimes, like all regimes, entail a dynamic compromise between certain political objectives and obstinate social realities, and is deluded by the fact that this dynamic itself must, of course, be accommodated in terms of the domineering discourse.

The fact of the matter is that, due precisely to the fact that the Soviet regime pretended to have a 'philosophical foundation', viz. in the transition of philosophy from theory to praxis heralded by Marx, the *inner* logic of philosophy deployed itself within Soviet philosophical culture. Philosophical culture not only was preserved and revived by relics from a pre-revolutionary past, such as Aleksei Losev, or by dissidents and marginal figures, but also and, I venture, mainly, by the fact that the regime itself generated its own 'subversive' factors. A clear example is the need to replace dogmatic materialist dialectics by more sophisticated and, in fact, more adequate theories: formal logic as a neutral instead of a 'bourgeois' discipline, philosophy of language, made possible through Stalin's 1950 'order' that language was a class-neutral phenomenon, and philosophy of science, made legitimate by the similar argument that the means of material production, including technology and science, serve capitalism as well as they do the construction of socialism (van der Zweerde, 1997: 43 ff). The fact that these developments had to be legitimized ideologically does not make them any less manifestations of *realism* and of compromise with reality.

Another example is the necessity, already indicated, to 'rewrite' the history of philosophy so as to serve as the prehistory of Soviet philosophy itself. This has led to a series of general histories of philosophy, beginning with works like Grigory F. Aleksandrov's *История западно-европейской философии* (1946) which, published shortly after World War II, served clear ideological and propagandistic purposes, but at the same time legitimized the serious study of the history of philosophy. Because Soviet historians of philosophy were given the task of proving the superiority of Soviet philosophy in this respect, too, they had to know what they were writing about; this points to a truly fascinating process of self-sophistication which, ultimately, led to gradual improvement of Soviet philosophical culture at large and to large-scale projects to cover the entire philosophical history of mankind (Dybnik, 1957–1965). This, to be sure, is not to deny that this immanently generated process contained substantial distortions of the history of philosophy – quite the contrary, these were essential parts of the same picture. A comparison with the four-volume *История философии* led by Nelli Motroshilova (1995–1999) shows the repair work

under way: in its fourth volume, on twentieth century philosophy, it omits Russian and Soviet philosophy as if we were, in the 1990s, waiting for a brighter future.

3. A Brighter Future?

If the assessment of the situation in the preceding section is to the point, the question is whether there are any signs of change. A well-known joke used to tell us that in Russia nothing is more difficult to predict than the past. Even though the future certainly has become a lot less predictable than it was in Soviet times, it is still difficult to say what the past will be like. This applies to history in general. It is impossible to say, for example, what will be the status of Vladimir I. Lenin 10 years from now: a professional revolutionary who almost single-handedly broke off Russia's modernization, and founded a criminal regime that lasted seven decades, or a great statesman who prevented the colonization of the Russian empire by global capital and guided it into a process of alphabetization, industrialization and urbanization, forging, in the meantime, the multi-national 'Soviet people', now reduced to the still multi-national people of the Russian Federation. But it applies to Russian philosophy as well. It is equally impossible to predict which place will be given to that other Vladimir, contemporary of the first, Vladimir S. Solovyov: an important mediator, in philosophy (only *one* of the fields in which he was active), who laid the foundations for a blooming philosophical culture in Russia by bringing together major strands in Western philosophy in a sometimes original, sometimes too schematic system, and by forging a philosophical language of high professional standard, or a misrecognized philosophical genius, the depth of whose thought can only be fathomed by those who are outside mainstream Western philosophy either by being Russian and thus essentially different or by participating in the West's philosophical counter-culture (anthroposophy, holism, etc.).

Are we not, in a case like this, facing a double phenomenon? One is the returning necessity, in a philosophical tradition, to return to the major philosophers from the past, to reinterpret their thought, to reassess its salience in terms of present-day, always 'new' circumstances? Philosophy is like art and religion, and unlike science or technology, in that it can always find something new in its own past, and that its historical figures always remain contemporaries (despite the fact, of course, that canons and creeds are established) – it is in this sense, I think, that Hegel was right in qualifying philosophy, with art and religion, but in a more fundamental sense, as *absolute* spirit: it is possible to be entirely at home with a philosophical text from the fourth century BC. The 'eternal hermeneutic' that stems from this is an indispensable element of philosophical culture in its historical development. But the case of Russian philosophy is only partly explained by this 'natural' phenomenon: it also is the necessity to undo the systematic distortions of the past, and also to undo the new distortions that stem from the first undoings. Russia is not unique in this respect, but it is extreme in its history, in politics as well as in philosophy, of dethronements and rehabilitations, a back-and-forth process that exceeds the alternation of philosophical fashions that marks Western philosophical culture, where the basic model obviously is the market.⁴

Assuming, however, that for some time to come at least, a more moderate and realistic approach will predominate in which the politicization and ideologization of philosophy will stay within acceptable boundaries, and also assuming that Russian philosophers will continue to have, as they do now, the opportunity to travel abroad, to participate in conferences and projects, and to integrate, gradually, into the global philosophical culture that is taking shape more rapidly than most of us realize, the question remains what is the place of the Russian philosophical tradition in the whole picture. From my present vantage point, i.e. that of a political philosopher with some familiarity with the Russian tradition of philosophical thought, I see at least three important and underestimated figures.

The first of these is Semyon Frank, one of the Silver Age philosophers who had to leave Soviet Russia in 1922. Living in poor conditions with his family, he did not really get a foot into the academic world in either Germany or France, but he is beginning to be recognized as an important thinker in his own right. Perhaps more than any other of the passengers of the *Философский пароход*, Frank personifies the transnational character of philosophical culture in Russia in his day. Of Jewish-German Russian descent, Frank had to leave Germany, where he had first settled, for Paris, and then the United Kingdom. He thus belongs, with Walter Benjamin and Hannah Arendt, to a generation of thinkers who fled totalitarian regimes and, for that reason alone, cannot be identified with any 'national' philosophical culture. This certainly applies to Frank, who is much more a European than a 'Russian' philosopher, despite the fact that he did take some of his key concepts, All-Unity [всеединство] and communality [соборность], from Solovyov and the early Slavophiles respectively. Particularly Frank's notion of communality can be brought in, as a new impulse, into the field of attempts, in social philosophy, to think community without ending up in a reactionary communitarianism or in a totalitarian communist vision.

A second example, partly going in the same direction, is Sergei Khoruzhi (b.1941), already mentioned in the first section of this paper. His highly original conception of a synergic anthropology is a continuation of, on the one hand, the neo-Palamist tradition that goes back to Gregory of Palamas (1296–1359), the 'Orthodox Thomas Aquinas', and, on the other hand, of post-modern and, more specifically, post-humanist thought in France (Foucault and Deleuze in particular). Given his primary interest in the Orthodox mystical tradition, especially in hesychasm, Khoruzhi has elaborated this anthropological conception in the direction of man's 'ontological border (онтологическая граница)' where synergic – not synergetic, the parallel phenomenon in physical processes – processes come to the fore in what he labels 'extreme human manifestations', viz. the encounters with three 'big Others': God, the Unconscious, and the Virtual (Stöckl, 2007: 118–119; Stöckl, 2006). The truth of the 'human condition', namely that 'the subject' must no longer be conceived as having a centre, but as being fundamentally ex-centric, can certainly be found in these 'extreme' cases (the case from which the subject-as-absolute-centre emerged, viz. Descartes' experiment of radical doubt, was an extreme case, too), but this does not exclude a fruitful elaboration of the same idea with respect to less-than-extreme cases, i.e. the everyday experiences of individual and community life. Here, Khoruzhi's ideas can be linked, for example, to the notion of being-with [*être-avec*]

prior to the being of a self, elaborated by Jean-Luc Nancy, or to the anti-essentialist and anti-subjectivist 'assemblage theory' advanced by Manuel de Landa (Nancy, 1996; De Landa, 2006).

As a third example, the philosophical work of two 'Soviet' thinkers, Aleksandr Pyatigorski (b.1929, emigrated 1974) and Merab Mamardashvili (1930–1990) deserves, to my mind, much more attention than it has hitherto received outside Russia – inside Russia, of course, Mamardashvili's thought has been studied and discussed widely, e.g. by Nelli Motroshilova (2007). Mamardashvili's reputation is largely based on his role as a cult-figure in the 1980s, but wrongly limited to that: the few translations of his work into, among others, French, Italian, and English, make clear that his highly original and 'radically philosophical' way of thinking has significance not only as a meta-philosophical theory, but also as a political philosophy: the insistence on the absolute individuality of philosophical thought and, at the same time, its connectedness with the entire tradition of philosophical thinking is not only a break with the parameters of Soviet philosophical culture, but in addition to that a political statement in its own right (there are interesting parallels to be drawn here with the equally radical and equally non-egoistic individualism of Hannah Arendt) (van der Zweerde, 2006b). Pyatigorski, well-known as a buddhologist and novelist – *Философия одного переуллка* (1989) remains a most revealing peep into Soviet philosophical culture – is less known as a philosopher. The possible parallel to Arendt comes to the fore with even greater force in the 'interactive' publication *What is Political Philosophy?* consisting of a series of lectures held in Moscow, but with interruptions and questions – and answers – included. Like Mamardashvili, Pyatigorski believes that philosophy 'in principle . . . is not about a topic [предмет], which ever it might be, but about the *thinking* about a topic' (Pyatigorski, 2007: 8). Since 'politics' also does not exist as a 'topic', but only as 'thinking [мышление]', the link between the two, as old as Aristotle and revived in Arendt's idea of the republic, is obvious: politics is discursive by definition, the subject [субъект] of politics and of political reflection are identical (Pyatigorski, 2007: 19) and the Soviet regime was the least political of all: it was the limit-case of an authoritarian, i.e. a *totalitarian* political system that excludes politics as discourse and as thought (Pyatigorski, 2007: 86).

While these and other examples demonstrate that there are good grounds to readdress the place of Russian philosophical thought within the context of the 'global' development of philosophy, there also is every reason to oppose the idea that such an endeavour would yield elements of as yet unknown philosophical wisdom – the very idea that wisdom must come from a particular place is a mistake. This sets a limit to the 'importance' of attempts to readdress the history of philosophy in Russia, too: there is a lot to be investigated there, but there is nothing to be restored in terms of philosophical content. In the remainder of this section, I want to indicate three subjects which, to my mind, do have 'world-historical philosophical significance', not, however, because they point out theories or ideas that have unjustly been forgotten, but because they reveal important meta-philosophical insights that need to be remembered.

Starting with the most recent period, there still is, I think, a need to rewrite the history, in many variants, from different perspectives, of the Soviet period in Russian philosophy. As an episode in philosophical world history it is unique, because the

Soviet regime is the only *totalitarian* regime that lasted for a period of several decades. Only a totalitarian regime, as opposed to 'ordinary' oppressive and authoritarian ones, of which there have been, and are many, is aimed at the determination of *every* social phenomenon, including philosophy: philosophy was not *simply* oppressed or marginalized, the Soviet system generated *its own* philosophical culture as an integral part of itself. This is crucially important if we want to understand, for example, the role of a figure like Aleksei Losev (1893–1988). Losev was not a 'white raven' from pre-revolutionary times who miraculously managed to survive under Soviet conditions and continued a thread of non-Marxist, neoplatonic-idealist, and Russian-religious philosophical culture. He certainly did all that, and fortunately so, only not miraculously: it would have been very easy, for 'the system', to crush both him and his intellectual activity, which means that the existence, in the very centre of Moscow, of an intellectual centre of non-Marxist-Leninist profile, performed a *positive* function. We can, of course, understand this as a compromise with 'stubborn' social reality, but *not*, however, with a social reality that as it were was external and pre-existent, but, precisely, with a reality that was generated *from within*. As all students of Soviet philosophical culture know, the Soviet system contained numerous niches and loopholes (or, in another vocabulary: valves), but the question remains how these must be understood: neither, I suggest, as integral elements of a 'smart' and ever more sophisticated system, nor, however, as the effects of a compromise with a social reality that was *independent* of the 'system', but rather as a 'symptom' of the very impossibility of a totalitarian system itself. The paradox is, I venture, that the 'perfect' totalitarian system destroys the very 'matter' of which it is to be the political form, and therefore, once it is established (in the 1930s), must generate its own 'object'. A totalitarian system thus is, by definition, an impossibility and hence an illusion; however, illusions are realities and they can assess their own impossibility *only* in their own, illusory terms. The difficulty is to understand Soviet philosophy as the effect of a specific logic, without ending up in 'logicism'.

Farther back in time, Silver Age philosophical culture stands in need of a 'de-sovietizing' reassessment, too. First of all, we can make good use, at this point, of the model developed by Randall Collins (who largely remains silent about Russian philosophy). One of the categories that he uses is that of an 'argumentative network' and one of his claims is that 'the number of active schools of thought which reproduce themselves for more than one or two generations in an argumentative community is of the order of three to six' (Collins, 1998: 81). When trying to explain the birth of Western philosophy on the Greek coast of Asia Minor, he points out that, for a number of reasons that may be hard to trace, there were, in and around Miletus at around 600–500 BC, a large number of 'intellectuals'. It takes, one could argue, a certain 'density' or a 'critical mass' of creative thinking to bring about something like a blooming philosophical culture. In a sense, major philosophical centres in the world, such as the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, the University of Chicago, the Sorbonne, or the *Institut Filosofii* in Moscow (the list is not exhaustive), are organized according to this principle. At the same time, given this quantitative basis and given favourable conditions, a pattern with a limited number of positions and schools emerges. The number of places where 'things really happen' is always limited, in philosophy as much as in the arts. Moscow and St.Petersburg in the first decades of

the twentieth century were such a place, in philosophy as much as in the arts, and the model developed by Collins can be connected to the research into the philosophical 'associations' of that period done by others (Scherrer, 1973; Burchardi, 1998). The philosophy of the Silver Age period in Russia shows an enormous concentration of philosophical talent, a very substantial basis of sources and competences (it is not a wild guess, I think, to claim that the knowledge of both Ancient and Modern languages among Russian intellectuals during that time was hard to beat) and . . . a lot of serious issues to think about and discuss. One of these issues was that of the role of the intelligentsia and of the relationship between philosophical theory and socio-political change. Here, again, the Silver Age has world-historical significance because it was ended by the victory of a regime that based itself, in part at least, on a meta-philosophical position with respect to the very issues that publications like *Вехи* and *Из глубины* were about. For that reason alone, the fate of the *Вехи*-authors deserves a place not only in the narrative of Russian philosophy, but of world philosophy *tout court*, comparable in relevance to the fate of Socrates in Athens or condemnations in the period of late Scholasticism. It should be remembered, however, that the Leninist position which ultimately 'destroyed' Silver Age philosophical culture, would have been, under different circumstances, a marginal position among many: the fact that it rose to political power should not lead to retrospective demonization.

In the third place, finally, there is ground for a reassessment of the 'revolutionary democrats' of the nineteenth century: Herzen, Belinsky, Chernyshevsky, etc. Here, the point is not simply the need to 'undo' Soviet ревдемократизм which tended to reduce these thinkers to forerunners of a Russian variant of Marxism, a history that existed only as a retrospective reconstruction. More important, it seems to me, is to readdress the common ground of the Soviet perception and the received view in Western scholarship, namely its interpretation in terms of Slavophiles vs. Westernizers, portraying the first group as Romantic, conservative, and Russian-Orthodox, and the second as rationalistic, progressive (or revolutionary), and atheistic or free-mason. With respect to the later period, this opposition later returned as that between populists [народники] and Marxists. The opposition of Slavophiles vs. Westernizers is, however, a dichotomizing category that was part of the philosophical culture of that time, organizing its network structure, and not necessarily a tool in analysing it. Here, again, the approach developed by Collins can be a very good tool if his primarily sociological conception is supplemented by a philosophical reflection. Also, the revision of the opposition of Enlightenment and religion has yet to be applied to Russian philosophical history. Three perspectives, at least, thus have to be combined for a reassessment of this important episode in world history of philosophy: the sociological perspective, the history of ideas perspective, and the philosophical perspective.

In these three cases, not only the distortions that were the effect of the Soviet rewriting of the history of Russian philosophy and of the ideologized representation that it generated of Soviet philosophical culture itself need to be undone, but also the 'first generation undoings' of these distortions. Marx's statement that history has always to take place twice seems true in the reverse as well.

Conclusion

It is hard to evade a certain sense of tragedy when it comes to the fate of Russian philosophy. In its heyday or Silver Age, around the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth century, it was connected in many ways with continental European philosophical culture, of which it was in fact an integral part. Having been expelled, suppressed, and in some cases murdered, the representatives of Russian philosophical thought were unable to continue 'Russian philosophy' and it fragmented into a large number of individual thinkers. Around the turn of the twentieth into the twenty-first century, it has become clear that any such thing as a specifically 'Russian' philosophy is bound to be just as provincial as 'Dutch' or 'Swedish' or 'Italian' philosophy would be. This means that, at the moment in history when the reconstitution of Russian philosophy has become politically possible, it has become philosophically pointless. After a boom in philosophical journals in Russia in the 1980s and 1990s, their number is now down to two solid academic philosophical journals, the same number as in Dutch philosophy.⁵ This, I argue, is a rather 'normal' situation, given the fact that the global language of philosophy is English (which may change in future, of course). If the members of an older generation, raised in the Soviet period, still have difficulty, sometimes, in reaching an international audience (not only because of language, but also because of a heavy style, basically linked to the idea of philosophy as a form of 'positive knowledge' rather than as a form of creative thought), this does not apply to their younger colleagues, who find their way into global philosophical culture, be it analytical, hermeneutic, or post-modern, just as easily as their more materialistically inclined fellows do in business.

Looking at the contents of the two main periodicals, one finds that *Вопросы философии* is more traditional and more national, while *Логос* is the more universally oriented one of the two. Although the majority of Russian philosophers still publish in Russia and in Russian, and although, moreover, their writings continue to practice a heavy and often apodictic style that concentrates on statements and assertions rather than on questions and problems, and although, finally, their discussions tend to turn around Russian rather than general philosophical issues, this situation is changing rapidly. It is, I think, a matter of time and, of course, political development, before Russian philosophers will participate in international discussions in much the same way as their Mexican, Italian, or US American colleagues, i.e. against the background of their own philosophical tradition, but no longer hindered by either politically imposed isolation or parochial fixation. For example, the reactionary philosophies of 'national spirit' recently highlighted by Mikhail Epstein, obviously have their legitimate place in Russian philosophical culture, but are to be understood, I think, as part of a post-Soviet 'counter-effect' which, like all counter-effects, continues much of what it rejects: 'To a great degree, traditionalist thinking follows the patterns of the Soviet ideological imagination with its exaltation of heroism, courage, technological and political power, the cult of personality, and the revolutionary transformation of the world. It is as if the structures of Soviet rhetoric have merely changed their contents from Leftist to Rightist, like a reflection in a mirror' (Epstein, 2006: 216). This process, it is to be expected, will lead to a situation in which the concept of 'Russian philosophy' will lose its particular meaning other than

in an historical sense – Russian philosophy as a contemporary phenomenon will simply disappear, a marginally surviving ethno-philosophical tradition aside (van der Zweerde, 2006a: 178–183).

What then, finally, explains the disregard of Russian philosophy and Russian philosophers in the historical retrospective self-awareness of a growing global philosophical culture? Paradoxically, it is the provincialism of that global culture itself, which sees itself too exclusively as the continuation of the Ancient Greek, Western Christian, and then Modern Western European philosophical tradition that gradually spread across the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean and encountered indigenous philosophical cultures in some of its colonies and in the Far East that it could not colonize. In the post-colonial era, local philosophical traditions, notably African philosophy, but also Caribbean, Arabic, etc., philosophy, have asserted themselves. Russian philosophy, too close to Western philosophy to be considered as an ‘other’, and too sophisticated and modern to obtain the status of a mere ethno-philosophical tradition, has had, one might say, the double disadvantage of not being part of a colonial empire, and of being isolated by the Soviet system from those parts of the world that the USSR did not itself dominate. As a result, it is ‘there’, and rather substantially, as I have argued in this article, but it is not recognized as such. It will be recognized, again paradoxically, to the extent to which it actually disappears, i.e. merges into the multilayered and multifaceted global philosophical culture that currently is taking shape, and that is made up of a multitude of what Thorsten Botz-Bornstein, following Arjun Appadurai, has aptly labelled ‘scapes’, imaginary constructs which, in contrast with closed ‘spheres’, are ‘open, evolving, and merging’, some of which can be called ‘ethnoscapes’ and must be opposed to an intercultural philosophical ‘mindscape’ (Betz-Bornstein, 2006: 393). While a ‘sphere’ of Russian philosophy is doomed to marginality, a ‘scape’ of Russian philosophy can make sense against the broader background of a ‘mindscape’ – made up of a multitude of more concrete ‘scapes’ – that encompasses ‘local’ philosophical traditions as only relatively independent elements or episodes within a ‘global’ and ‘world-historical’ philosophical culture.

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Notes

1. From ‘Заметки об одной из возможных позиций философа’.
2. ‘The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato’, Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 1929.
3. There are only *very* few Western publications on Losev.
4. It would require a special investigation as to how such ‘models’ as free market or politically imposed consumption fit, on the one hand, in the broader social systems in which they predominate, and, on the other hand, how they are transferred from one philosophical culture to another.
5. The two major philosophical journals in Russia and in Russian are *Вопросы философии* and *Логос*; in Flanders and the Netherlands, the two major philosophical journals in Dutch are *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* and *Algemeen Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Wijsbegeerte*.

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