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Mikhail Epstein

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RUSSIAN PHILOSOPHY

### Summary

A. N. Whitehead defined Western philosophy as a series of footnotes to Plato. If this is true, then Russian philosophy must be viewed as an indispensable part of the Western intellectual tradition since it provides perhaps the most elaborated footnotes to the most mature and comprehensive dialogues of Plato: the *Republic* and the *Laws*. 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. In discussing Russian philosophy, especially that of its Soviet period, we will inevitably consider the practical fate of many Platonic conceptions as we explore the final outcome of an ideocratic utopia, wherein philosophy was designated to rule the State.

By this criteria, Russian philosophy, and especially that of the Soviet period, plays a significant role in the history of world philosophy. Nowhere else were the teachings of Plato regarding the relationship of ideas to the foundation of a State incarnated so literally and on such a grandiose scale as in communist Russia. The goal was not to invent abstract systems, but rather to philosophize reality, to transform it into a transparent kingdom of ideas. In the Soviet Union, philosophy, more than anywhere else in history, became a supreme legal and political institution, acquiring the power of a superpersonal, universal reason, which in its unrestricted dominion was equivalent to madness--since, being a State philosophy, it ruthlessly victimized individual thinkers.

Russia has suffered not from a lack, but from an excess of philosophy. In other countries the supreme value and the highest level of authority is assigned to religious or mythological beliefs, or to economic profits, while in communist Russia it was philosophy that served as the ultimate criterion of truth and the foundation of all political and economic transformations. Loyalty to the teachings of dialectical and historical materialism was the prerequisite of civil loyalty and professional success. Neither worker nor peasant, scientist nor politician, writer nor artist, could succeed in their respective fields without a specific philosophical preparation, at

least an understanding of the ABC's of "the dialectical forms of matter's motion."

Philosophical ideas in Russia very rarely matured into well-balanced, self-sufficient systems, because it was the privilege of the State to consummate and elaborate them in a systematic way. The fate of Russian thinkers was to dissolve these ideocratic systems in a stream of capricious, spontaneous thinking which attempted to go beyond the systems, to undermine them rather than to consolidate them. Since the 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 intellectual structure and deconstructing any possible principle of systematization.

The philosophy of the Soviet epoch may be regarded as the final stage of the development and embodiment of Plato's ideas in the Western world. At this stage, the project of ideocracy came to a complete realization and exhausted itself. The czardom of ideas arrived at the threshold of self-destruction because the substance of Being resisted the yoke of practical idealism, and it is now in the process of returning to its primordial identity. Thus Soviet philosophy both summarizes and punctuates more than two thousand years of the Platonic tradition and points the way for a return to foundations which are not susceptible to ideologic perversions.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RUSSIAN PHILOSOPHY

Mikhail Epstein

### I

Russia was never considered to be a great philosophical nation, and many historians of Russian philosophy have pointed to its excessive susceptibility to Western influences. Indeed, Russia seems not to have produced a plethora of original philosophical ideas; however, it is a philosophical nation in a deeper and more comprehensive sense of this phrase. Perhaps no other nation in the world 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. To trust the testament of ancient chronicles, Russia adopted its religious faith from a Greek philosopher who persuaded Prince Vladimir of the superiority of Orthodoxy to all other Christian and non-Christian denominations. Although some small Christian communities already existed in Kiev by this time, Vladimir sanctioned Orthodoxy not because it corresponded to the way of life of Russian natives but as an imported philosophical gift—one that predetermined the identity of the Russian nation for the next millennium. Thus, an entire new civilization evolved out of the enactment of a single inspired idea, not by a gradual and spontaneous development of economic and social integration. Similarly, many consequent turning points in Russian history often hinged upon the enthusiastic ideas of the country's rulers, rather than arising by a natural and organic national evolution. The most compelling example of this phenomenon occurred during the reign of Peter the Great, who ruthlessly adjusted the nation to suit his own vision of progress. Moreover, such "vision" was often susceptible to outside influences; for example, in the 18th century, in spite of the fact that Russians had only quite recently come to apprehend the spirit of the Enlightenment, Catherine the Great became the most thorough personification of the "philosopher on the throne," as she followed—at least in her intentions—the intellectual guidance of such European thinkers as Voltaire and Diderot. Historically, Russia proves to have been a juvenile, "blank" nation that again and again

sought the kind of philosophical instruction that might organize the diverse aspects of its existence into one self-conscious whole.

When the czars, after Alexander the First, failed to provide intellectual leadership by turning to a platform of conservative Orthodoxy, the task of philosophizing society's goals fell to the intelligentsia, beginning with revolutionaries from the nobility, called Decembrists, and later with descendants of middle and bourgeois classes, known as *raznochintsy*. It is only in Russia that such an abstract notion as *intelligentsia*, nurtured as it was by the speculative philosophy of Kant and Hegel, could come to signify a specific social stratum. The speculative 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 by force of thinking the entire country and, finally, all of human kind. The succeeding generations of Russian intelligentsia differed in terms of their particular political goals and methods, but what remained invariable was the attempt to intellectualize the very substance of history. In our consideration of the Russian *intelligentsia* as a social class, we should bear in mind that the original meaning of the word is derived from the Latin *intellegentia*, which designated "the speculative capacity of human mind, the ability to perceive logical relationships and general concepts"; thus the social stratum of the same name is a tangible extension of this capacity, formed to exert the power of ideas to transform reality.

It was the most speculative kind of *intellegentia* that came into dominance after the Bolshevik revolution. In a sense, the revolution was a transformation of a living historical society into a philosophical entity that thereafter would develop according to transparent laws of the mind as embodied in the ideocratic state and "the ideological activity of the Party." Immediately after the civil war, when the Bolsheviks had mastered the country they had wanted to "philosophize," almost all Russian philosophers were violently exiled to the West and the few who remained were persecuted, killed or silenced. It is not because philosophy was no longer needed; on the contrary, the entire country had to be merged under a uniform set of philosophical concepts; thus, almost paradoxically, individual philosophers, as distinct from the ideological transformation of the entire country, proved to be obsolete.

Another paradox concerns the so-called "dialectical materialism." Marx claimed to turn Hegel's entire system from its head (idealism) onto its feet (materialism), but the Soviet version of Marxism leaned backwards toward idealism. Materialism, though nominally an official doctrine, became only an expression of materialistic *ideology*, a new tool of the *intellegentia* for mastering the material world. As Andrei Bely ironically remarked in the early 1930's, "the triumph of materialism has led to the devastation of material life," implying that material conditions in the "materialist" USSR were impoverished as compared with a more "idealistic" prerevolutionary Russia. Thus, the nation as an historical body "dematerialized" in order to become fully transparent to ideocratic rule and vision. The philosophy of dialectical materialism was the core of all practical decision making, guiding the political and economical course of the country and determining even the rules of everyday life. For instance, dialectical materialism informed the argument in favor of communal apartments, to be shared by several families, which were said to embody the philosophy of "collectivism", since "social being determines social consciousness." Even such questions as the ratio of epical and lyrical components in literary works, or decisions regarding the hybridization of vegetables, had to be treated in the last analysis as philosophical problems, with respect to the conditioning of the "subject" by the "object" or the inferiority of inborn qualities to outside influences (naturism versus nurturism). It became a characteristically Russian manner to deduce absolutely all practical and theoretical issues from the "highest" philosophical considerations, and there was nothing more sacred in the world for a conventional Soviet man or woman than "the unity and the struggle of opposites" or "history as a form of the movement of the matter." This philosophical faith was the ground of all other beliefs and opinions, and even the October revolution was fundamentally justified as "a qualitative leap in quantitative social changes" or by some other law of "materialistic dialectics." The Soviet Union was the only great power in world history to be totally ruled by philosophical assumptions, as distinct from religious and occult preoccupations of other ideocracies, like orthodox Byzantium or Nazi Germany.

Thus the importance of Russian philosophy, even during the Soviet period, cannot be overestimated. To approach philosophy merely as epistemological self-analysis of mind or language means taking too narrow a view--and one that has prevented Western scholars from



giving Russian philosophy its due and including it within the spectrum of substantial academic disciplines.

## II

The period under investigation stretches from the apex of the Soviet philosophical empire (which by 1950 had embraced one third of the world's population and established itself as "the global socialist system"), to its downfall in 1991. These dates are not just political markers, but outline an integral stage of Russian philosophical development, and one that still remains unmapped in the West.

Russian philosophy before 1950 has been explored more or less systematically in the historical surveys of Zenkovsky, Lossky, Levitsky, and Copleston. All of these works, regardless of the time of their writing, end abruptly in the middle of the 20th century, as if to imply that nothing significant occurs thereafter. The last names usually mentioned in these works are those of the emigrant thinkers Nikolai Berdiaev and Sergei Bulgakov who died in the 1940's.<sup>1</sup> Typically, discussions of postrevolutionary Russian philosophy focus on two mainstreams: (1) religious and idealistic thought of emigre authors, and (2) dialectical materialism in the Soviet Union. However, none of these extensive histories considers a

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<sup>1</sup>Lossky, Nikolas O., *History of Russian Philosophy*, New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1951; Zenkovsky, Vasily V., *A History of Russian Philosophy*, Transl. by G.L. Kline, 2 vols., London and New York, 1953; Levitsky, S.A., *Ocherky po istorii russkoi filosofskoi i obshchestvennoi mysli*, 2 vols., Frankfurt/Main, Posev, 1968, 1981; Copleston, Frederick C., *Philosophy in Russia From Herzen to Lenin and Berdyaev*, Search Press, University of Notre Dame, 1986.

These four most comprehensive investigations end with Sergei Bulgakov (1871 - 1944), Vladimir Lossky (1903 - 1958), Lev Shestov (1866 - 1938), and Boris Vysheslavtsev (1877 - 1954), respectively.

The same is true of all existing anthologies and collections of Russian philosophy. To cite a few examples: *Russian Philosophy*, ed. by J.M. Edie, J.P. Scanlan and M.-B. Zeldin with the collaboration of G.L.Kline, 3 vols., Chicago, 1964, ends with a section on Russian and Soviet Marxism; *Ultimate Questions: An Anthology of Modern Russian Religious Thought*, ed. by Alexander Schmemmann, Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977, ends with Sergei Bulgakov; Frank S.L., *Iz istorii russkoi filosofskoi mysli kontsa XIX i nachala XX veka. Antologiya*, Inter-Language Literary Associates, Washington - New York, 1965, ends with Semyon Frank (1877-1950).

third major constituent: non-Marxist thought inside the Soviet Union. It is true that official Soviet Marxism strived to squelch all independent philosophical thought in the domestic arena and that few such works survived the Soviet period. Nevertheless, from the 1920's-1940's Russia possessed many brilliant thinkers, a few of whom even managed to publish substantial portions of their work in their life-time: Pavel Florensky, Aleksei Losev, Mikhail Bakhtin and his circle, Gustav Shpet, Aleksandr Meier, Lev Vygotsky, Mikhail Prishvin, Vladimir Vernadsky, Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, Iakov Golosovker, Olga Freidenberg, Viktor Shklovsky, Sergei Eizenshtein... We find among them, besides professional philosophers, scientists, writers, literary scholars, a film director, a psychologist, some of whom are celebrated in their respective fields; but a coherent history of Russian *non-Marxist and non-emigre* thought of this period has still to be written.

This deficiency becomes more prominent with the transition into the second half of the century. As Russian "philosophy in exile" disintegrates with the deaths of its outstanding representatives, most notably the survivors of the pre-revolutionary Silver Age of Russian culture (Berdiaev, Merezhkovsky, Frank and others), all existing investigations of Russian philosophy after 1950 turn to elaborating "Sovietology", which explores the doctrines of dialectical materialism, in its various thematic divisions and inner discussions, as a part of official ideology. Almost all Western investigators discussing post-Stalinist Russian philosophy focus on Soviet Marxism,<sup>2</sup> while non-Marxist philosophy, with rare exceptions,<sup>3</sup> is

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<sup>2</sup>See Bochenski, J.M., *Soviet Russian Dialectical Materialism [Diamat]*, Dordrecht, Holland, D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1963; Blakeley, T.J., *Soviet Philosophy: A General Introduction to Contemporary Soviet Thought*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1964; Laszlo, Ervin, ed., *Philosophy in the Soviet Union: A Survey of the Mid-Sixties*, Dordrecht, Holland, 1967; Jeu, Bernard, *La philosophie soviétique et l'Occident: Essai sur tendances et sur la signification de la philosophie soviétique contemporaine (1959-1969)*, Mercure de France, 1969; Callinicos, A., *Marxism and Philosophy*, Oxford, 1983; Scanlan, James P., *Marxism in the USSR: A Critical Survey of Current Soviet Thought*, Ithaca and London, 1985; Dahm, Helmut, Blakeley, Thomas, and Kline, George L., eds., *Philosophical Sovietology: The Pursuit of a Science*, Dordrecht et al., D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1987. There is an obsolete if consistent tendency in the West to take seriously the claims of Soviet Marxism for philosophical leadership and to equate all post-revolutionary and non-emigrant Russian thought with dialectical materialism.

simply ignored or relegated to an adjacent, narrow field, such as poetics, where Marxism had not established any definite views. Even the growing influence and world-wide recognition of Mikhail Bakhtin (1895 - 1975), whose works represent a small fragment of the Russian philosophical scene, failed to bring attention to the coherent development of non-Marxist thought. For the first time Russian philosophical thought of the second half of the 20th century will be covered in a single systematic investigation. The book I have undertaken will include the most important trends and key figures of Russian philosophy both within the Soviet Union and without. Russian philosophical thought of this period, especially in the 1970's and 1980's, cannot be divided mechanically into geographical zones. Thinkers in the Soviet Union and in the Russian Diaspora were either the same people, going through different periods of their biographies (like Solzhenitsyn and Sinyavsky who were forced to emigrate in the middle of their careers), or belonged to the same intellectual trends and participated in the same discussions (thus Sinyavsky in Paris and Pomerants in Moscow represent pluralistic thought while Solzhenitsyn in the USA and Shafarevich in Moscow are the proponents of an authoritarian national state).

The inquiry encompasses a broad range of philosophical problems and interests not normally treated in traditional metaphysical speculation. Russian philosophy has never isolated itself from the neighboring social, religious, ethical and literary areas. It is generally understood that Russian philosophy was to a great degree stimulated and expressed by writers of fiction, such as Feodor Dostoevsky and Leo Tolstoi. This tradition of blending philosophy and literature in one synthetic discourse has been preserved up to our time, in the

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<sup>3</sup>See, for example, Peter Seyffert, *Soviet Literary Structuralism: Background, Debate, Issues*, Columbus, Ohio, Slavica Publishers, Inc., 1985; George L. Kline's article "Recent Uncensored Soviet Philosophical Writings", devoted to three Russian "non-official" thinkers, in *Dissent in the USSR: Politics, Ideology, and People*, ed. by Rudolf L. Tokes, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1975, pp. 158-190. Several chapters on non-Marxist currents in Soviet philosophy are found in Graham, Loren R., *Science, Philosophy, and Human Behavior in the Soviet Union*, Columbia University Press, New York, Guildford, 1987; Goerdts, Wilhelm, *Russische Philosophie: Zugänge und Durchblicke*, München: Verlag Karl Alber Freiburg, 1984, pp. 94-112; Jeu, Bernard, *La philosophie soviétique et l'Occident. Essay sur tendances et sur la signification de la philosophie soviétique contemporaine (1959-1969)*, Mercure de France, 1969.

philosophical prose, poetry and criticism of Boris Pasternak, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Mikhail Prishvin, Daniil Andreev, Joseph Brodskii, Andrei Siniavskii, Aleksandr Zinoviev, and Andrei Bitov.

Russian philosophy of the 19th century can credit literary critics and journalists, such as Ivan Kireevskii or Belinskii, for promoting its principal movements. The same criteria should be applied, perhaps even with greater relevance, in the 20th century. Since the title of "philosophy" in the Soviet Union was designated only for orthodox Marxism-Leninism, many Russian thinkers came from and retreated into different fields of the humanities, such as literary studies, history, linguistics, ethnology, psychology, aesthetics, and theology. This explains my preference for the broader term "philosophical and humanistic thought" as distinct from the narrower term "philosophy." Philosophical thought, as an outcome of the Russian spiritual tradition, encompasses various fields of the humanities insofar as they contribute to the universal systems of ideas and respond to the most general and "absolute" demands of the human mind. For this reason the study of Russian thought may prove equally valuable to specialists in philosophy and to those who have broader interests in the history of ideas.

### III

On the whole, one can characterize the period under consideration as a "philosophical awakening", to use the felicitous expression of the Russian theologian, Georgy Florovsky. "Philosophical life begins as a new mode or a new step of national existence... One can feel in the generation of the time some irresistible attraction to philosophy, a philosophical passion and thirst, like a magical gravitation toward philosophical themes and issues."<sup>4</sup> Florovsky refers to the span of years from 1825 to 1840, about the generation of Chaadaev, Belinsky, Hertsen, Khomiakov, and the brothers Kireevsky.<sup>5</sup> The second philosophical

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<sup>4</sup>Rev. Georgy Florovsky, *Puti russkogo bogosloviia* (1937), 4th ed., Paris, YMCA-PRESS, 1988, pp. 234, 235.

<sup>5</sup>According to Florovsky, for the previous generation of Russian intelligentsia, of the 1810s-early 1820s, it was poetry that played the role of cultural magnet. The same is true about Soviet

awakening of Russia, succeeding the influence of revolutionary and sociological theories of the late 19th century, occurred in the first two decades of the 20th century. With Berdiaev, Rozanov, 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 occurs in the Russia of the 1970's and 80's. At this stage, philosophical works which were circulated by various kinds of "*samizdat*" ("self-publishing"), "*tamizdat*" ("there-publishing" - in the West) and "*togdaizdat*" ("then-publishing" - in prerevolutionary Russia), contained some mysterious charm which could not be explained in terms of "truth or falsity", "persuasiveness or dubiousness". The very touch of these books made one feel involved in the joy and mystery of self-conscious existence.

Rarely in the history of thought did philosophy represent such a liberating force as in Russia from the 1960s through the 1980s. The point is that the Soviet State was generated by a definite system of philosophical ideas which tried to perpetuate materially its mastery over the individual mind. That is why thinking was treated officially as an anti-State activity: it was an act of self-liberation via an awareness of the relativity of the dominant ideology. Thinking tried to free itself from ideocracy by rooting itself in authentic, concrete entities beyond ideology, such as faith in a living God, or in the existential uniqueness of personality, or the organic soul of the nation, or the empirical credibility of science, or the symbolic meanings of culture, or, finally, by parodying the ideological clichés themselves. All of these trends in philosophy-- religious, personalistic, national, structuralist, culturological, conceptualist--were initially and intentionally forms of intellectual self-liberation.

Academic scholarship in the West is usually suspicious about the very phenomenon of Russian philosophy, especially during the Soviet period. In the best case, Russian philosophy is categorized as ideology or social thought and is studied in Slavic departments, never in philosophical ones. Such an approach demonstrates a rather narrow and superstitious

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intelligentsia which in the late 1950s-early 1960's was obsessed with poetry and whose idols were Evtushenko and Voznesensky. Already in late 1960's-early 1970's they surrendered their influence not to other poets, but to thinkers and scholars, such as Bakhtin and Averintsev. Florovsky coins a formula for this process of maturation: "From the *poetical* stage Russian cultural-creative consciousness transfers into the *philosophical* stage" (Florovsky, op.cit., p. 236).



definition of philosophy. Why are Wittgenstein's reflections on language considered to be a hallmark of modern philosophy while Soloviev's reflections about Sophia or Rozanov's reflections on sex and marriage are considered to be divorced from philosophy as such? What is philosophy? There is no simple and universal definition and many thinkers consider the task of such a definition to be impossible. The most credible attempt is a nominalistic reference: philosophy is what Plato and Aristotle, Kant and Hegel were occupied with.

Perhaps, the single most famous and broadly cited--if slightly eccentric--definition belongs to A. N. Whitehead: philosophy is a series of footnotes to Plato.<sup>6</sup> If this is true, then Russian philosophy must be viewed as an indispensable part of the Western intellectual tradition since it provides perhaps the most elaborated footnotes to the most mature and comprehensive dialogues of Plato: the *Republic* and the *Laws*. Questions of social ethics and political philosophy, of an individual's relationship to a 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 vis-a-vis Plato's legacy and the Western tradition in its broadest sense. 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. In discussing Russian philosophy, especially that of its Soviet period, we will inevitably consider the practical fate of such Platonic conceptions as we explore the final outcome of an ideocratic utopia, wherein philosophy was designated to rule the republic.

By this view, Russian philosophy, and especially that of the Soviet period, deserves one of the most honored places in the history of world philosophy. Nowhere else were the teachings of Plato regarding the relationship of ideas to the foundation of a State incarnated so literally and on such a grandiose scale as in communist Russia. Russian thought always exerted itself in the task of embodying the most general ideas in social relationships and in the substance of everyday life. The ideal was to philosophize reality, to transform it into a transparent kingdom of ideas -- that is why the thought, in the very moment of its triumph,

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<sup>6</sup>Antony Flew refers to this definition in the introduction to his work: Andrew Flew, *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1979, p. viii.

became a prisoner of the Crystal Palace established on philosophical foundation. In the Soviet State, philosophy, more than anywhere else in history, became a supreme legal and political institution, acquiring the power of a superpersonal, universal reason, which in its unrestricted dominion was equivalent to madness--since, being a State philosophy, it ruthlessly victimized individual thinkers. Russia has suffered not from a lack, but from an excess of philosophy. In other countries the supreme value and the highest level of authority is assigned to religious or mythological beliefs, or to economic profits, while in communist Russia it was philosophy that served as the ultimate criterion of truth and the foundation of all political and economic transformations. Loyalty to the teachings of dialectical and historical materialism was the prerequisite of civil loyalty and professional success. Neither worker nor peasant, scientist nor politician, writer nor artist, could succeed in their respective fields without a specific philosophical preparation, at least an understanding of the ABC's of "the dialectical forms of matter's movement."

Philosophical ideas in Russia very rarely matured into well-balanced, self-sufficient systems, because it was the privilege of the State to consummate and elaborate them in a systematic way. The fate of Russian thinkers was to dissolve these ideocratic systems in a stream of capricious, spontaneous thinking which attempted to go beyond the systems, to undermine them rather than to consolidate them. Since the 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 intellectual structure and deconstructing any possible principle of systematization.

Thus, if we measure the philosophical character of thinking by its debt to Plato, who opened the speculative czardom of ideas, then Soviet thinkers belong to this tradition perhaps to even a greater degree than Western thinkers. 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. The czardom of ideas arrived at the threshold of self-destruction because the substance of Being resisted the yoke of idealism, and it is now in the process of returning to its primordial identity. Thus Soviet philosophy both summarizes and punctuates

more than two thousand years of the Platonic tradition and points the way for a return to foundations which are not susceptible to ideologic perversions.

Religious and personalist philosophy, structuralism and culturology, the philosophy of national spirit -- all of these were attempts to de-ideologize thinking and to root it in some authentic and ineluctable reality. In the end, Russian philosophy, in the transition to the post-Soviet stage, comes to conceptualism, which ironically reproduces the world of abstract ideas to demonstrate its artificial and chimerical nature; conceptualism is the last and highest stage of Soviet Platonism. In the 1920's-40's the czardom of ideas succeeded in identifying itself with reality, but beginning in the 50's it revealed more and more its discrepancy with reality and its illusionary quality: at first by struggling against alternative modes of thinking and finally by embracing parodic meta-thinking. What remains of this philosophy in the 1980's is a museum of obsolete ideas, a carnival side-show of ideological oddities. A relatively short period of seventy years sums up a two-millennium adventure of Western thought which escorted Plato in his 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 this Platonic drama of Russian philosophy? Marxism, which deduces all ideas from the economic basis of society, seems to be diametrically opposed to Platonism. But let's remember that Marxism is nothing other than a reversal of Hegelian idealism, which proceeded from the self-movement of the Absolute Idea. It's true that the novelty in Hegel, as compared with Plato, is the progressive historical development of the Idea, but the end of this process is postulated also as the State, the Prussian monarchy, which embraces the totality of the self-cognizing mind. Both Platonic and Hegelian idealism culminate with the concept of the ideal State. This ideal, which was removed by Marx from the causality of the historical process, remains, however, as its hidden potential and teleology and grows into a vision of a future communist society. Plato, Hegel and Marx--these are three stages in the development of idealism in its progressive symbiosis with historical reality: the supernatural world of ideas - the manifestation of Absolute Idea in the world - the transformation of the world by the force of ideas. For Plato ideas are abstracted to a transcendental realm. For Hegel, the idea is already ingrained



in the historical process as the alpha and omega: 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, as the final prospect of history erecting a transparent kingdom of ideas.

Moreover, Marx proves to be more staunchly Platonic than Plato himself. According to the Greek philosopher, the world of ideas exists on its own and doesn't demand necessarily its social embodiment. In Marx, ideas are inseparable from the material process and are greedy for embodiment. In his own words, "when ideas master the consciousness of people, they become a material force." The message of dialectical materialism, as it was realized in Russia by Lenin and his disciples, was that the dialectics of ideas cannot be divorced from social life and must be introduced even into the economic basis; hence, the institution of five-year plans, which subordinated the material development of the country to ideal projections. Whereas in Plato and Hegel ideas were still soaring in the clouds and comprised a separate sphere of Supreme Mind or Absolute Spirit, in Soviet Marxism they were grounded in the foundation of material reality, from heavy industry to everyday life, and from the rituals of party purges to ceremonial cleansings of neighborhoods. Now ideas would not forgive the slightest faults and deviations from their purity; since they descended into the substance of Being, they demanded the complete submission of every person at every moment of his or her life. Dialectical materialism proved to be an instrument of militant idealism, craving for newer and newer sacrifices on the altar of sacred ideas.

That's why the dominant intellectual movement of the Soviet epoch should be identified not just as Marxism, but as Plato-Marxism, that is, as an idealism which asserts itself as the regulative principle of material life. If Plato, proceeding from idealist assumptions, came to the system of communist State, then Marx, proceeding from communist assumptions, inevitably came to a system of severe ideocracy that was realized by the efforts of his most coherent disciples. Materialism became an ideology and the very phrase "materialist ideology" sounded very natural for Soviet people. No less natural is the term "Plato-Marxism". Platonism is the underside of Marxism, which was hardly concealed from the very beginning, and the subsequent collapse of the ideocratic State was a death sentence for both of them.

Now how can one claim that Soviet philosophy drives on the shoulder of the highway of Western thought? If it is a margin at all, it is one that signs, "DEAD END," and what lies beyond is the blank space of post-Soviet, hence post-Platonic, thought.

That is why contemporary Russian thought assimilated Platonism not only from Plato himself, not only through the neo-Platonic teaching of Orthodox Christianity, not only through the impact of Hegelian absolute idealism, but most of all through Marx himself.

