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978-0-521-88450-1 - A History of Russian Philosophy 1830-1930: Faith, Reason, and the Defense of Human Dignity

Edited by G. M. Hamburg and Randall A. Poole

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## Introduction

THE HUMANIST TRADITION  
IN RUSSIAN PHILOSOPHY

G.M. HAMBURG AND RANDALL A. POOLE

This book is a history of Russian philosophy from roughly 1830 to 1930, that is, from the genesis of a distinctively Russian philosophical humanism during the Slavophile–Westernizer controversy of the 1830s and 1840s to the formation of a Russian “philosophical emigration” in the wake of the Russian Revolution. This century – call it Russian philosophy’s “long nineteenth century” – confronts scholars with a vast, unusually forbidding intellectual terrain, its ground demarcated by a deep chasm between idealist and materialist thinkers, pockmarked by political disagreements, and riven by strife between amateur and professional philosophers.

Previous students of Russian philosophy have tried to traverse this terrain by sticking to accustomed pathways: the development of religious philosophy,<sup>1</sup> or appearance of historical materialism;<sup>2</sup> the symbiotic relationship between philosophy and literature,<sup>3</sup> or between philosophy and social thought;<sup>4</sup> the

<sup>1</sup> Probably the best-known essay on Russian religious philosophy is Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea* (R.M. French (trans.), London: Geoffrey Bles, 1947). Since perestroika and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, much of the corpus of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russian religious philosophy has been reprinted in new editions, in most cases for the first time since the Revolution. The new Russian scholarship on the history of religious philosophy is also remarkable, including, to take two prominent examples, Sergei Khoruzhii [Horujy], *O starom i novom* (St. Petersburg: Aleteia, 2000), which connects Russian religious thought in the “long nineteenth century” to its Byzantine and Orthodox roots, and P.P. Gaidenko, *Vladimir Solov'ev i filosofii Serebriannogo veka* (Moscow: Progress-Traditsiia, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> The standard work from the late Soviet period is V.E. Evgrafov *et al.* (eds.), *Istoriia filosofii v SSSR*, 5 vols. (Moscow: Nauka, 1968–1988).

<sup>3</sup> Among the many books in this genre, see the classic Thomas Garrigue Masaryk, *The Spirit of Russia: Studies in History, Literature and Philosophy*, 2nd edn., 2 vols. (Eden and Cedar Paul (trans.), London: George Allen and Unwin, 1955). A recent sophisticated consideration is Edith W. Clowes, *Fiction's Overcoat: Russian Literary Culture and the Question of Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Here the classic works are Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism* (Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka (trans.), Stanford University Press, 1979), which has recently appeared in a revised and expanded Polish edition, *Zarys myśli rosyjskiej od oświecenia do renesansu religijno-filozoficznego* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2005); and Andrzej Walicki, *Legal Philosophies of Russian Liberalism* (Oxford University Press, 1987).

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dialectical relationship between Russian “national” philosophy and western cosmopolitan influences;<sup>5</sup> or the self-transformation of philosophy into an academic discipline situated mainly in universities.<sup>6</sup> Intrepid scholars have sometimes explored several of these pathways in the same book, though there has been a tendency to exaggerate the significance of Marxism and its forerunners while underestimating the importance of idealist philosophical approaches – for understandable historical reasons.

We have learned much from our predecessors’ achievements. We think that no reductive approach to the history of Russian philosophy can succeed in communicating the richness of the subject; that a proper appreciation of Russian philosophy must take into account its profound connections both with Russian literature (both narrative fiction and poetry) and Russian politics (the populist, social-democratic and liberal traditions alongside the Byzantine or Russian Orthodox discourse on politics and human nature); and that professional academic philosophy, which appeared in inchoate form in the universities by the 1870s and matured in the first decade of the twentieth century, never displaced the robust “amateur” philosophizing that was typical of the early period from 1830 to 1870 but was also largely characteristic of “Silver Age” culture from 1890 to 1920. Consequently, we decided to undertake a book that would foreground the formal and conceptual complexities of our subject, without neglecting the peculiarities of Russia’s changing historical context. To execute our plan, we solicited contributions from intellectual historians, philosophers, and literary critics, each of them expert on a particular feature of the philosophical landscape.

The present volume, in spite of its chronological sweep and thematic breadth, does not pretend to be an encyclopedic history of modern Russian philosophy, but it does aim to comprehend what we think is most characteristic and best

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *Russia and the West in the Teaching of the Slavophiles: A Study of Romantic Ideology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952); and Andrzej Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth-Century Russian Thought* (Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka (trans.), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

<sup>6</sup> This transformation is one of the main themes in two standard histories of Russian philosophy: Nicholas O. Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy* (New York: International Universities Press, 1951), and V.V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, 2 vols. (George L. Kline (trans.), New York: Columbia University Press, 1953). More recently, see the remarkable reference work by V.F. Pustarnakov, *Universitetskaia filosofii v Rossii. Idei. Personalii. Osnovnye tsentry* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Russkogo Khristianskogo gumanitarnogo instituta, 2003). Other good reference works include M.A. Maslin (ed.), *Russkaia filosofii: Slovar'* (Moscow: Respublika, 1995); A.I. Abramov et al. (eds.), *Russkaia filosofii: Maliy entsiklopedicheskii slovar'* (Moscow: Nauka, 1995); and P.F. Alekseev (ed.), *Filosofii Rossii XIX–XX stoletii: Biografii, idei, trudy*, 3rd edn. (Moscow: Akademicheskii Proekt, 1999).

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about Russian philosophy in this period: its humanist tradition.<sup>7</sup> A few philosophical thinkers, such as the panslavist theorist Nikolai Danilevskii and the Byzantine enthusiast Konstantin Leont'ev, clearly do not belong to that tradition and are not considered here.<sup>8</sup> Nor are certain other Russian philosophers who worked mainly in specialized areas such as epistemology, logic, and philosophy of science: for example, the critical positivist Vladimir Lesevich, neo-Kantians such as Aleksandr Vvedenskii and Sergei Hessen, the Hegelian logician Nikolai Debol'skii, and scientist-philosophers such as Vladimir Vernadskii.<sup>9</sup> Finally, some figures relevant to Russian philosophical humanism were excluded or given relatively little attention because of considerations of space: they include the conservative critic Nikolai Strakhov,<sup>10</sup> the Christian naturalist Nikolai Fëdorov,<sup>11</sup> the "concrete" idealist Sergei Trubetskoi,<sup>12</sup> the religious existentialist Lev Shestov,<sup>13</sup> and the religious, moral, and social philosopher Boris

<sup>7</sup> The prominent British historian of ideas Aileen M. Kelly has written two volumes on important aspects of Russian philosophical humanism: *Toward Another Shore: Russian Thinkers Between Necessity and Chance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) and *Views from the Other Shore: Essays on Herzen, Chekhov, and Bakhtin* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> See Robert E. MacMaster, *Danilevsky: A Russian Totalitarian Philosopher* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967); on Leont'ev, see Nicolas Berdyaev, *Leontiev* (George Reavey (trans.), London: Geoffrey Bles, Centenary Press, 1940), and George L. Kline's classic study, *Religious and Anti-Religious Thought in Russia* (University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 35–54.

<sup>9</sup> On these thinkers see *Studies in East European Thought* 47, nos. 3–4 (1995), special issue devoted to "Neo-Kantianism in Russian Thought" (Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (ed.)); Thomas Nemeth, "Debol'skij and Lesevič on Kant: Two Russian Philosophies in the 1870s," *Studies in East European Thought* 45, no. 4 (1993), 282–305; Andrzej Walicki, *Legal Philosophies of Russian Liberalism*, ch. 7 (on Hessen, whose significance, as Walicki shows, goes well beyond neo-Kantian epistemology and value theory); Kendall E. Bailes, *Science and Russian Culture in an Age of Revolutions: V.I. Vernadsky and His Scientific School, 1863–1945* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990); and Randall A. Poole, "Vernadskii, Vladimir Ivanovich (1863–1945)" in Edward Craig (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1998–), online version (2002).

<sup>10</sup> Linda Gerstein, *Nikolai Strakhov: Philosopher, Man of Letters, Social Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

<sup>11</sup> George M. Young, Jr., *Nikolai Fedorov: An Introduction* (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1979); Irene Masing-Delic, *Abolishing Death: A Salvation Myth of Russian Twentieth-Century Literature* (Stanford University Press, 1992), pp. 76–104; and Michael Hagemeister, *Nikolaj Fedorov: Studien zu Leben, Werk und Wirkung* (Munich: Verlag Otto Sagner, 1989).

<sup>12</sup> Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak, *Sergei N. Trubetskoi: An Intellectual Among the Intelligentsia in Pre-revolutionary Russia* (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1976), and Randall A. Poole, "Trubetskoi, Sergei Nikolaevich (1862–1905)" in Edward Craig (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1998–), online version (2002).

<sup>13</sup> Shestov is briefly considered in chapter 11. See Louis J. Shein, *The Philosophy of Lev Shestov (1866–1938): A Russian Religious Existentialist* (Lampeter, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1991); Andrius Valevičius, *Lev Shestov and His Times: Encounters with Brandes, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Ibsen, Nietzsche, and Husserl* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993); Clowes, *Fiction's Overcoat*, ch. 5; Kline, *Religious and Anti-Religious Thought in Russia*, pp. 73–90; and A.A. Kudishina, *Ekzistentsializm i gumanizm v Rossii: Lev Shestov i Nikolai Berdiaev* (Moscow: Akademicheskii proekt, 2007). The bibliography at the end of this volume lists Shestov's works in translation.

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Vysheslavtsev.<sup>14</sup> Even a large volume such as this one cannot avoid a degree of selectivity. Nonetheless, we believe that “philosophical humanism” constitutes an inclusive, powerful framework for a new, interpretive history of Russian philosophy. Our goal has been to treat the most important thinkers and developments in some depth, rather than trying to survey everything.

The central theme of our book is that Russian philosophers in the long nineteenth century concerned themselves almost obsessively with the importance of human dignity, conceived either as an intrinsic property of the individual or as a project to be realized as the final goal of social development. At some risk of oversimplifying, we would claim that Russian philosophy as a whole constitutes an extended dialogue on human dignity, with many philosophers defending it against those political institutions and ideas that were not adverse to reducing human beings to mere instruments, that is, to means for achieving large political or social objectives. These philosophical thinkers either regarded human beings as ends-in-themselves, and thus as precious, autonomous beings endowed with inviolable rights, or (and these were not necessarily incompatible positions, though sometimes there was tension between them) as creative beings possessing the capacity to shape the world through the free exercise of will.

This picture of Russian philosophy may at first seem counterintuitive to some readers who may understand Russian thought as a congenial locus of social utopias or dystopias.<sup>15</sup> Here the Slavophiles’ fabrication of Old Russia as a “golden age,” Vladimir Odoevskii’s dystopian fantasy *Russian Nights* (1844), the Petrashevskii circle’s embrace of French utopian socialism in the late 1840s, Nikolai Chernyshevskii’s landmark novel of the early 1860s *What Is To Be Done?*, the Bolshevik Aleksandr Bogdanov’s propagandistic science fiction novel *Red Star* (1908), and Lenin’s treatise *State and Revolution* (1917) may come to mind as examples of the utopian genre in Russia. Our contention, however, is that utopian literature can be properly understood only as part of a cultural dialogue about human dignity in which Russian utopian writers made or responded to claims about how to achieve a just society in which human beings may live a dignified existence and realize their full potential.

<sup>14</sup> B.P. Vysheslavtsev, *The Eternal in Russian Philosophy* (Penelope V. Burt (trans.), Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> Lately, we have benefited from the first systematic surveys of utopianism in Russian thought. See Léonid Heller and Michel Niqueux, *Histoire de l’utopie en Russie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995), translated into Russian as Leonid Geller, Mishel’ Nike, *Utopiia v Rossii* (St. Petersburg: Giperion, 2003); and the marvelous B.F. Egorov, *Rossiiskie utopii. Istoricheskii putevoditel’* (St. Petersburg: Iskustvo and SPB, 2007). Also, T.V. Artem’eva, *Ot slavnogo proshlogo k svetlomu budushchemu: Filosofii istorii i utopiia v Rossii epokhi Prosveshcheniia* (St. Petersburg: Aleteiia, 2005).

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As we shall demonstrate, the deepest and broadest current in Russian philosophy was the Russian humanist tradition, whose best representatives recognized that individual human beings are absolute in value and that there are no higher ends – social, political, historical, or religious – for which they could be sacrificed or treated merely as means. The core of the Russian humanist tradition is the idea of *lichnost'*, which can mean person, personality, individual, or self.<sup>16</sup> Its richest philosophical meaning is personhood, a term emphasizing the absolute value and dignity that make human beings persons or, in Kant's terminology, ends-in-themselves. In the Russian humanist tradition, personhood and human dignity are closely related concepts, for personhood implies the capacity to recognize one's own dignity and that of others.

Certain thinkers in the Russian humanist tradition, perhaps most notably Alexander Herzen, resisted drawing metaphysical conclusions from the dignity of the individual; in fact, Herzen feared that metaphysical systems pose a danger to moral autonomy and responsibility. Other Russian humanists, beginning with the Slavophiles, thought that the moral idea of personhood entails a theistic conception of human nature. In 1909, Semën Frank called this second current in Russian thought “religious humanism.”<sup>17</sup> This phrase may seem paradoxical, given the common tendency to think of humanism as privileging human values over the absolute claims of religion and metaphysics. Frank and other Russian idealist philosophers believed, however, that the very idea of being human (that is, possessing reason, free will, and the capacity for morality) leads to certain general theistic or metaphysical conclusions. For them, “religious humanism” was a just a fuller expression of the term “humanism.”

#### RELIGIOUS HUMANISM IN THE RENAISSANCE AND IN RUSSIA

The humanism of the European Renaissance was also religious. In his classic study *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, Charles Trinkaus argues that Genesis 1:26 – “And God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness’” – was the critical text in the development of Renaissance humanism.<sup>18</sup> Following a wide range of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin sources, Italian humanist thinkers gave the Genesis text a

<sup>16</sup> See Derek Offord, “*Lichnost'*: Notions of Individual Identity” in Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd (eds.), *Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution: 1881–1940* (Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 13–25.

<sup>17</sup> S.L. Frank, “The Ethic of Nihilism: A Characterization of the Russian Intelligentsia's Moral Outlook” in Marshall S. Shatz and Judith E. Zimmerman (eds. and trans.), *Vekhi/Landmarks: A Collection of Articles about the Russian Intelligentsia* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), p. 155.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 2 vols. (University of Chicago Press, 1970; University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

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dynamic, synergetic interpretation: human beings are graciously created in God's image, but we must assimilate to God's likeness by our own efforts, through moral striving and self-realization. Trinkaus stresses that man's "similitude" to God "connoted the dynamic process of becoming like God, or Platonic 'assimilation.'"<sup>19</sup> According to Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), the leading figure in the Florentine revival of Platonism, human beings are rational, free, and therefore responsible for progressively realizing God's likeness in themselves. In the view of Ficino and other Renaissance humanists, salvation cannot be attained without human participation. Salvation itself was increasingly understood not merely as a divine gift to depraved humankind, as in the Augustinian framework, but as the self-realization of our divine-human potential – as deification, or, in the Greek patristic expression, *theosis*. This new emphasis on human freedom, agency, and responsibility formed the core of the Renaissance idea of human dignity. The two main themes of Ficino's philosophy – "the dignity of man in his pursuit of deification, and the universality of all human traditions in this pursuit" – were central, Trinkaus believes, to Renaissance culture as a whole.<sup>20</sup>

The importance of these themes can be seen in Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's splendid oration, *De hominis dignitate* (1486), often regarded as the manifesto of the Italian Renaissance. In it Pico recounts how God made man a "creature of indeterminate nature" and said to him:

The nature of all other beings is limited and constrained within the bounds of laws prescribed by Us. Thou, constrained by no limits, in accordance with thine own free will, in whose hand We have placed thee, shalt ordain for thyself the limits of thy nature . . . We have made thee neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that with freedom of choice and with honor, as though the maker and molder of thyself, thou mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer. Thou shalt have the power to degenerate into the lower forms of life, which are brutish. Thou shalt have the power, out of thy soul's judgment, to be reborn into the higher forms, which are divine.<sup>21</sup>

Ernst Cassirer wrote in a seminal essay on Pico that this idea of man as a free "maker and molder" of himself, with the power to ascend to divine heights, "adds a new element to the basic religious notion of 'likeness to God.' . . . The

<sup>19</sup> Charles Trinkaus, "Renaissance Idea of the Dignity of Man" in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas: Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas*, 4 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), vol. 4, p. 137; Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, vol. 1, pp. 181–188.

<sup>20</sup> Trinkaus, "Renaissance Idea of the Dignity of Man," p. 144; on Ficino's idea of deification, see Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*, vol. 2, pp. 487–498. More generally, see Paul Oskar Kristellar, "Renaissance Concepts of Man," part 4 of his *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources* (Michael Mooney (ed.), New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), pp. 165–210, esp. ch. 9, "The Dignity of Man."

<sup>21</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, "Oration on the Dignity of Man," E.L. Forbes (trans.), in Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr. (eds.), *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man* (University of Chicago Press, 1948), pp. 223–227.

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likeness and resemblance to God is not a gift bestowed on man to begin with, but an achievement for him to work out: it is to be brought about by man himself.”<sup>22</sup> Pico believed that freedom, the capacity for self-determination, exalts human beings above not only “beasts” but also above purely “spiritual beings,” to whom perfection had been granted at the creation. Since human perfection must be freely achieved, Pico apparently thought it to be of a higher order than one that is bestowed.<sup>23</sup> For Pico, Cassirer suggests, our likeness to God consists in freedom and the perfectibility that it makes possible.<sup>24</sup> Through freedom, we are not only related to God, “but actually one with Him. For human *freedom* is of such a kind that any increase in its meaning or value is impossible . . . Thus when Pico ascribes to man an independent and innate creative power, he has in this one fundamental respect made man equal to Divinity.”<sup>25</sup>

In short, for Pico, the source of human dignity is the capacity for self-determination and perfectibility. As he puts it, the human condition is that “we can become what we will.” Cassirer notes the striking contrast between the medieval worldview, which valued what is immutable and eternal, and the new world of the Renaissance. “Here,” in the world of human freedom, “there is an independent setting of a goal: man *chooses* the form he will bring forth . . . Thus man is not merely subject to a passive becoming; he rather determines his own goal and realizes it in free activity.”<sup>26</sup> Almost exactly three centuries after Pico’s oration, Immanuel Kant published his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785). In it he derives human dignity from autonomy or self-determination,<sup>27</sup> just as Pico had done – a fact that the neo-Kantian philosopher Cassirer could not have failed to appreciate.

Ficino, Pico, and other Renaissance humanists were convinced that faith and reason were compatible. At the beginning of *De hominis dignitate* Pico refers to man as “a great miracle.” This was no mere rhetorical flourish. Human freedom and creativity, the ability to pose ideals and realize them, transforming ourselves and the world, were for Pico the grounds not only of human dignity but also

<sup>22</sup> Ernst Cassirer, “Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: A Study in the History of Renaissance Ideas,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 3, nos. 2–3 (1942), 123–144, 319–346 (here, 320–321).

<sup>23</sup> Cassirer “Giovanni Pico della Mirandola,” 323.

<sup>24</sup> Thus it is not surprising that “Pico reaffirms the basic Pelagian thesis” against original sin and the dogma that salvation is possible only through God’s grace (Cassirer, “Giovanni Pico della Mirandola,” 329). Tzvetan Todorov, *Imperfect Garden: The Legacy of Humanism* (Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 43, writes that “humanism takes up the tradition attributed to the name Pelagius, for whom the salvation of men is in their own hands.” Todorov considers Pico in his second chapter, “The Declaration of Autonomy.”

<sup>25</sup> Cassirer, “Giovanni Pico della Mirandola,” 336. <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 332.

<sup>27</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (H.J. Paton (trans.), New York: Harper & Row, 1964). “Autonomy,” Kant writes, “is . . . the ground of the dignity of human nature and of every rational nature” (p. 103).



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of faith in divine reality. The direction of movement here was characteristic: the humanists tended to proceed from the human up to the divine (by reason), rather than from the divine down to the human (by revelation). For them, the very presence of the free, creative human spirit in the physical world implied God's existence. Their faith was justified by a natural theology of the "great miracle" of man. Since the humanist approach to faith was premised on and affirmed human autonomy and dignity, it logically excluded coercion. Pico's views are again characteristic. For him, Cassirer writes, "any compulsion in the things of faith is . . . not only to be rejected on moral and religious grounds: it is also ineffective and futile."<sup>28</sup>

These Renaissance themes – human dignity in self-determination and perfectibility, ultimately culminating in deification, and the compatibility of faith and reason – were also central to Russian philosophical humanism, as our volume will show.

One of the sources of Renaissance humanism was Greek patristic theology. Werner Jaeger, at the end of his book *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*, emphasizes the Greek influence: "From the Renaissance the line leads straight back to the Christian humanism of the [Greek] fathers of the fourth century A.D. and to their idea of man's dignity . . . With the Greeks who emigrated after the fall of Constantinople (1453) there came to Italy the whole literary tradition of the Byzantine East, and the works of the Greek fathers were its choicest part."<sup>29</sup> If Byzantine theology helped to shape the development of Italian humanism, then we might expect the Greek impact to have been even stronger on Russian humanism, given the cultural preeminence of Eastern Orthodoxy in Russia.

Patrick Lally Michelson makes this very argument in his 2007 essay, "In the Image and Likeness of God: The Patristic Tradition of Human Dignity and Freedom in Nineteenth-Century Russia."<sup>30</sup> He notes that the Greek monk Maximos (Michael) Trivolis (c. 1470–1556), known in Russia as Maksim the Greek and remembered for his Slavonic translations of *Psalms* and his liturgical reforms, studied with Pico in Ficino's Platonic Academy in Florence. Maksim was a learned exponent of the Greek patristic anthropology of "image and likeness" (in its hesychastic, ascetic interpretation).<sup>31</sup> He propagated these ideas in Muscovy until 1525, when he was accused of heresy by a Russian church

<sup>28</sup> Cassirer, "Giovanni Pico della Mirandola," 328.

<sup>29</sup> Werner Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), pp. 100–101. Also see, more generally, Kristellar, "Renaissance Thought and Byzantine Learning," part 3 of his *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources*, pp. 135–163.

<sup>30</sup> The essay is the first chapter of his excellent doctoral dissertation, "The First and Most Sacred Right": *Religious Freedom and the Liberation of the Russian Nation, 1825–1905* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2007), pp. 29–92. His account is informed by the works of Trinkaus, Cassirer, and Jaeger, among many others.

<sup>31</sup> On hesychasm, see chapter 1.



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council. After Maksim, patristic and other theological texts of the Eastern Orthodox tradition were known to other Russian churchmen and intellectual elites, but the texts did not enter the Russian public sphere until the nineteenth century, when they were finally translated into vernacular Russian.<sup>32</sup>

The translations were undertaken at the empire's four theological academies. (The theological academies laid the foundation for the growth of university philosophy in the nineteenth century, and also played an important role in the Russian reception of Kant.<sup>33</sup>) In 1821, the St. Petersburg Theological Academy began to translate various writings of the fourth-century Cappadocian Fathers Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa.<sup>34</sup> The youngest and most philosophical of the Cappadocians, and the one who probably exercised the most influence on Italian humanism,<sup>35</sup> was Gregory of Nyssa. In 1840, one of his essential exegeses of Genesis 1:26 was published in Russian translation. "For the first time in Russian history," Michelson avers, "members of educated society unfamiliar with ancient Greek, Latin, or Church Slavonic could read in contemporary vernacular that Orthodox believers were personally responsible for aspiring to the likeness of God, a concept that implied sanctity of the individual."<sup>36</sup>

Three years later the Moscow Theological Academy began to publish *Works of the Holy Fathers in Russian Translation*, a massive project that eventually comprised forty-eight volumes.<sup>37</sup> By the 1860s, Russian theological studies, including several on Gregory himself, were advancing a moral-philosophical (rather than strictly mystical) understanding of *theosis*: a "theological anthropology of moral perfectibility, human dignity, and theocentric freedom," in Michelson's formulation.<sup>38</sup> These studies were greatly facilitated by the translation projects, which over several decades had introduced educated Russians to patristic anthropology and had played an important role in the birth and development of Russian philosophical humanism.<sup>39</sup>

## THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Russian philosophy's long nineteenth century began with the patristic translation projects and the reception of German philosophical romanticism and idealism. The eminent Russian philosopher Sergey Horujy opens Part I of our

<sup>32</sup> Michelson, "The First and Most Sacred Right," pp. 48–52.

<sup>33</sup> A.I. Abramov, "Kant v russkoi dukhovno-akademicheskoi filosofii" in Z.A. Kamenskii and V.A. Zhuchkov (eds.), *Kant i filosofii v Rossii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1994), pp. 81–113.

<sup>34</sup> Michelson, "The First and Most Sacred Right," p. 61.

<sup>35</sup> Trinkaus, "Renaissance Idea of the Dignity of Man," p. 137.

<sup>36</sup> Michelson, "The First and Most Sacred Right," p. 62. <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 62–63.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 79, 84, 73–92 passim. <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* p. 63.

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Excerpt

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book with his chapter on the Slavophile–Westernizer controversy. This seminal debate formulated some of the basic positions in Russian philosophy of history, national identity, social and political thought, and religious philosophy. As Horujy shows, the problem of personhood (*lichnost'*) was central to the whole discussion. His overall framework of analysis is synergetic anthropology, which he has done much to revive in post-Soviet Russian philosophy.

The problem of “Russia and the West” was first given powerful philosophical formulation by Pëtr Chaadaev. His eight *Philosophical Letters*, written in French between 1828 and 1830, helped to set the terms of the debate between the future Slavophiles and Westernizers. In 1836, the first letter was published in the Russian journal *Teleskop*, the only letter published during Chaadaev’s lifetime. *Les lettres philosophiques* outline a religious philosophy of history, according to which Christianity is the source of universal historical development and the western church is the embodiment of human unity. Chaadaev believed that divine reason acts through the church, that the church was guiding humanity to the Kingdom of God, and that the Kingdom of God had already been partly established in the West. Unfortunately, Russia had derived its Christianity from “miserable, despised Byzantium”; its “religious separatism” had thus closed the country off from universal historical development. “Isolated in the world,” Chaadaev wrote in his first letter, “we [Russians] have given nothing to the world, we have taught nothing to the world; we have not added a single idea to the mass of human ideas; we have contributed nothing to the progress of the human spirit. And we have disfigured everything we have touched of that progress.”<sup>40</sup> For these views the Russian government declared Chaadaev insane. His response was *Apology of a Madman* (1837), in which he claimed that Russia’s lack of history could turn out to be an advantage. Russia was a type of *tabula rasa*; without the burdens of the past, nothing held the country back from rapid progress. Russians could learn from European history, avoid its mistakes, and rationally create a better future not only for themselves but for all of Europe.

Chaadaev’s ideas spurred the formation of two groups of thinkers who would soon view themselves as Slavophiles and Westernizers. The excitement was captured by a contemporary (and Westernizer), Pavel Annenkov, who called the period between 1838 and 1848 a “marvelous decade” in Russian intellectual life.<sup>41</sup> The main Slavophile thinkers were Ivan Kireevskii, Aleksei Khomiakov, Konstantin Aksakov, and Iurii Samarin. As a group, they retained Chaadaev’s

<sup>40</sup> Pëtr Chaadaev, “Philosophical Letters” in James M. Edie, James P. Scanlan, and Mary-Barbara Zeldin (eds.), with the collaboration of George L. Kline, *Russian Philosophy*, 3 vols. (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965; Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1976), vol. 1, pp. 117, 116.

<sup>41</sup> *The Extraordinary Decade: Literary Memoirs by P. V. Annenkov* (Irwin R. Titunik (trans.), Arthur P. Mendel (ed.), Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1968).