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Historical Culture: Russia in Search of Itself

Boris Paramonov

Russia's 75 year-long experiment with communism is over, but the question persists as to whether the Soviet regime was a historical aberration or an expression of the country's destiny. This question is as old as the Bolshevik revolution. It has produced a voluminous literature and will no doubt continue to attract attention in the near future. Alas, it can not be answered conclusively, for it is grounded in the questioner's ideological a priori and tells us more about the historian's biases than about Russian history.

Still, it would be wrong to dismiss this question as purely theoretical. The point is not so much to fathom some impersonal logic determining Russia's fate as to understand how its history has been construed by those caught in its web and how this self-understanding has shaped the nation's historical landscapes. We can talk in this regard about "historical culture" or a set of beliefs about the nation's destiny entertained by its subjects in a particular era. Tradition informs the ways people think and act, but concrete historical individuals reproduce their tradition according to the personal knowledge about its hidden logic, ultimate meaning, and final destination. A concrete historical culture is rarely uniform; it contains diverse, even contradictory, precepts that could gain prominence for a time and leave their mark on the course of national development. There is a choice to be made, a legacy to be claimed, and it is up to concrete historical subjects to grasp the alternatives and realize them in their historical practice.

Our task here is to understand Russian historical culture in its internal contradictions, to delineate the guideposts it offers to historical actors, and to assess the impact these broad orientations might have on the development of postcommunist Russia. I start with the main themes and symbols informing Russian historical culture, show how these key insights have been appropriated in the Soviet and post-Soviet period of Russian history, and conclude with some speculations about Russia's future.

The Images of the National History in Pre-Revolutionary Russia

Central for Russian historical culture is the question of Russia's relation to the West. Westernizers believe that Russia is fundamentally a European country, that it shares with the West basic values and institutions, and

that in spite of unfortunate historical detours, it evolves according to Western historical blueprints. Slavophiles, by contrast, are convinced that Russia's historical path is unique, that its spiritual values are at odds with the Occidental tradition, and that its historical destiny is loftier than the fate ordained for Western countries. The conflict between westernizers and slavophiles was fully articulated in the 19th century. In many ways, it reflected the spirit of the time, notably the Romantic reaction to the French Revolution and the Enlightenment. But the political fissures on which this division was based go back to the origins of the Russian state.

The oldest Russian chronicle narrates a story about the Slavs calling on the Normans to come to Russia and reign over its unruly subjects. The debates about the veracity of this account are as interminable as about the origins of Russian communism. We have nothing to add to this controversy, except to point out how profoundly ingrained it is in the nation's psyche. If it is a myth, it is a productive one, and we should grasp it in the Jungian sense, i.e., not as a legend or fable but as a formative element of the collective unconscious where many features determining the national character and the nation's spiritual potential are formed. The story about the Scandinavian warriors invited to bring order to Russia hints at the Western roots of Russian statehood. In the westernizing reading, it is primarily a story about the relationship between the leaders and the populace in which the dominant role is accorded to the state and state power.

According to S. M. Soloviev, a 19th century Russian historian, the Russian knights from the Rurik house founded by the Normans were originally collective owners of Russian land. [1] Each nobleman was assigned to a particular estate or domain given to the knight according to his seniority and the place in the patrimonial hierarchy. The relationship between the nobleman and his abode was a tenuous one. The knights frequently moved to new locations according to their seniority. The older the knight and the greater his prominence, the more central and desirable his domain. With such a pattern of mobility, no strong relationship could be formed between the entrusted territory and a particular knight and his family. It was certainly not the relationship of ownership, insofar as the nobleman owed to the state his fortunes and had to be prepared to move onto a new location on a moment's notice. You can discern in this social order a vague prototype of communist nomenclature with its life-long security and requisite perks: dedicated servants of the ruling house are sent to represent the central powers in a region where they lord over a given domain and its people for as long as they retain the ruler's trust. It was not until the 12th century, when Andrey Bogoliubsky, the oldest

nobleman at the time, refused to move to the central Kiev 's principality and announced his decision to stay in his old Vladimir-Suzdal domain, that a more enduring bond was being formed between the knight and his estate.

This train of thought was further developed by another 19th century historian, B. N. Chicherin, who argued that the state dominated civil society in Russia : the state used its power to elevate or downgrade individuals into social strata, to institutionalize certain social processes which might be alien to the popular impulses. Thus, Russian gentry first appeared not as a class of warriors spontaneously settling the land but as a special service stratum whose members were summoned to fulfill certain state-appointed duties. The same was the case with the Russian peasantry that was assigned to work for the gentry in lieu of payment from the state to its noble servants. By the mid-17th century, most peasants were pressed into bondage to the gentry, which in turn was rewarded for its military service with bigger and more populous estates. As time went by, the state again took initiative in creating new social estates and groups. In 1762, the state decree freed the nobility from the obligation to serve in state institutions, turning it into a landed gentry proper. Next, came the turn of urban craftsmen and merchants who were pressed into a kind of third estate and encouraged to evolve into a Russian bourgeoisie. Finally, in 1861, the serfs were freed from bondage and permitted to function as free peasants tilling the local land. [2]

Both Chicherin and Soloviev were westernizers by the 19th century standards, their ideas inspired by Hegel's teaching about the state as a pinnacle of socio/historical development. Their message to the authorities and the educated Russian class was that all historical states, including the Russian one, evolve according to the same blueprint, pass through similar stages, and end up in a legal, rational, ideologically neutral state that embodies the world-historical wisdom. Notice that this westernizing mentality was largely secular. Westernizers refused to acknowledge a special relationship that was formed between state and church in Russia . And this is where slavophiles took them to task.

Indeed, the Russian state was never ideologically neutral. From the start, the paternalistic powers of the Tsars were inextricably linked with the religious authority of the Russian Orthodox Church. The latter comprised a crucial element in the triangular structure of power in Russia, captured in the famous slogan "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Populism [*narodnost*]." Up until the 17th century, the state power retained its unmistakably sacred character conferred on it by Russian Orthodoxy. The desacralization of the

Russian state began in the middle of the 17th century, under Tsar Alexander Mikhailovich, when the Russian Orthodox Church split into the "old-believers" who advocated the autonomy of the Church and the proponents of the Patriarch Nikon, who pressed for changes in the traditional Orthodox liturgy and bowed to the state as a supreme authority in spiritual matters. [3] The schism within the Church marked the beginning of the secularization process during which the state increasingly emancipated itself from the religious influence and eventually subordinated Eastern Orthodox Christianity to its needs. The secular reforms undertaken by Tsar Alexander Mikhailovich were continued and deepened in the early 18th century by Peter the Great, who did more than any other Tsar to cut the clerical influence down to size and establish the Russian state as a secular entity similar to the absolute states found in European countries at the time. However, the secularization of state power was never complete, nor was it as auspicious a development in Russian history as westernizers thought.

If westernizers saw the state as a conduit for the Western spirit and credited it with the civilizing effect on Russia, slavophiles considered it a necessary evil, a legal-rational political form alien to the people's ethical sensibilities and inimical to the nation's historical destiny. Nineteenth century slavophilism is reminiscent of Jean Jacques Rousseau, with his deep mistrust of science, technology and progress. The place of the noble savage in the slavophile teaching was assigned to the Russian peasants whose simplicity, endurance, and faith defeated the enlightened emperor Napoleon -- "the revolution on the horse." Leo Tolstoy's novel War and Piece was perhaps the best literary rendering of slavophilism. [4]

It was an article of faith with slavophiles that the endogenous form of political and spiritual life in Russia was the peasant commune (*obshchina*): "A commune is a union of people who shed their egoism and renounced their personality; it is an expression of collective consensus, a high Christian act of love," wrote Konstantin Aksakov, a prominent slavophile. "Thus, commune is a moral chorus . . . a chorale celebrating the soil, while personality is like a false note in a choir." [5] Slavophiles liked to dwell on the fact that "peasant" and "Christian" in the Russian language were kindred words (*krestianin* and *khristianin*). "Commune" was for them not so much social as a religious category. A repository of non-secular consciousness, commune embodied the pristine qualities of sacred Russia, the qualities preserved by the old-believers rather than by the established and state-controlled church. K. Aksakov deepened the schism by juxtaposing the Folk (*narod*) to the state and the public (the educated, westernized class). "State" and "Land" were radically opposed in

Aksakov's interpretation, with "Land" symbolizing the folkways, the heaven, the truth, the virtue, and the beauty, while "State" connoting everything secular, mundane, willful, and immoral. The history of the state was here intricately tied to the story of the original sin. Both represented the fall from grace and pointed to the inevitability of suffering and redemption in the post-Eden history. However, people were believed to be loftier than the state, for they were closer to the pristine conditions of the paradise lost. Although people must submit to the state power, they also have to stay aloof from it, resist its contaminating influence. No legal rational category could do justice to the folkways -- the very notion of law was deemed below the dignity of Russian people. "Render unto State the unlimited right to act and set laws; give to Land the right to free opinion and speech . . . external rightness belongs to State, inner truth -- to Land; give unlimited power to the Tsar but full freedom of spirit to the people; the freedom of law and legal action goes to the Tsar, the freedom of opinion and word -- to the people." [6]

Under the mask of resignation, we find here a rejection of legal-rational institutions represented by the state, which was denied any moral sanction. This mistrust of the state and the rejection of legal institutions would profoundly influence Russian consciousness. It accounts for the strong inclination on the part of Russian intellectuals to define concrete socio-political problems in ideological and quasi-religious terms.

The authorities were aware of this deep-seated resentment that slavophiles harbored toward the state and paid it back with suspicion. Under Nikolai I, slavophiles were treated rather harshly. His successor, Alexander II, tried a different tactic: he incorporated some of the slavophile premises into his political program. The slavophile influence could be seen in the fact that the 1861 reform which freed the Russian peasants from bondage preserved intact the commune as a social unit around which village life would evolve after the emancipation. [7] By making a concession to slavophilism, the state authorities sought to preserve and strengthen their paternalistic image. As a result, the great masses of Russian people, most notably the peasantry, had not been exposed to the westernizing influence.

The state's concern for its image among Russian people was in part due to the authorities' fear of a new social force emerging in the Russian political arena -- the intelligentsia. In the Russian context, intelligentsia signified not a professional class or an intellectual elite but a radical group of ideologues who styled themselves as guardians of the people protecting the simple folks against the tyranny of the state and the exploitation of

the ruling classes. At first, the intelligentsia's members were recruited among the ruling strata. These were the so-called "repentant noblemen" troubled by a sense of guilt about the serfdom. Then, a socially diverse group of educated individuals joined the ranks of intelligentsia and carried out the torch of struggle against the oppression. What distinguished this group's outlook was the ideologically super-charged, quasi-religious perception of the Russian people as the embodiment of everything good and the rejection of the godless state as a callous institution unsympathetic to the plight of its meek subjects and willing to use naked power to assert its will. The Russian intelligentsia was the first group to embrace socialist teachings and make a strenuous attempt to bring socialism to Russia. Although more pragmatic and sociologically-minded than the 19th century intelligentsia, the Bolsheviks would inherit this lofty, paternalistic vision of people as a toiling mass led to freedom and happiness by the revolutionary intelligentsia. In sum, the historical culture in pre-revolutionary Russia was informed by the ongoing debate about Russia's relation to the West. While westernizers saw nation building in the country as a part of world historical evolution, slavophiles drew attention to the unique properties of Russian history manifest in the sharp split between the power-wielding, law-giving, secular state and the pristine, religious, communally-minded people. Both readings reflected some historical realities, yet both were highly selective in what their proponents chose to highlight or ignore. Westernizers tended to overlook that the Russian state did not completely sever its ties with the church, that it never became a genuinely secular institution, that it paid more than lip service to slavophile sentiments, and that it often carried out pro-Western reforms in a brutal fashion undermining their liberal spirit and reflecting the heritage of native despotism. By the same token, slavophile intellectuals conveniently overlooked the fact that state authorities made genuine strides in building a civil society in Russia and relieving the plight of its people. Indeed, it was the Russian state that freed Russian peasants from bondage in 1861 and was behind the 1909 Stolypin reforms designed to create strong farmers tilling their own land. Again, it was the state that initiated liberal reforms in the Communist era, such as Lenin's New Economic Politics in 1920s, Khrushchev's anti-Stalinist campaign in 1956, and Gorbachev's perestroika in the late 1980s. The question about the role of the state and commune in Russian history was not settled in the 19th century, and it reemerged with a new force after the October Revolution of 1917.

The Early Images of Communism and Its Place in Russian History

Did the Bolshevik-led uprising move Russia into or away from mainstream

European history? According to Vladimir Lenin and other Marxists who embraced the bolshevik premises, the Russian revolution was firmly grounded in the world-historical (read "Western") process. The fact that the first "proletarian revolution" occurred in a largely peasant country where capitalism was still in the nascent stage did not bother bolsheviks. They expected the Russian revolution to be followed by an uprising in the more economically developed Western countries, which could help solidify the revolutionary gains in Russia .

But there were also other commentators, including some Marxists, who rejected this interpretation of the Bolshevik revolution. Perhaps the most remarkable among the doubters on the left was Peter Struve. A prominent Russian intellectual who came under the spell of Marx's teaching in his youth, he formulated a far-reaching critique of bolshevism from the standpoint of "scientific Marxism." [8] Struve pointed out that Marxism gave its seal of approval to capitalism and bourgeois institutions as historically superior to the relatively undifferentiated precapitalist conditions. In contrast to the bolsheviks, Struve touted Marxism as a paeon to the Western bourgeois values and not to primitive communism, which Marx had explicitly denounced in his writings. Yet, it was precisely this primitive communism willed into being by the toiling masses under the guidance of the communist party that Lenin and his followers distilled as the essence of Marxism. Having raised political expediency over economic necessity, the party's will over evolutionary gradualism, Lenin had unwittingly succumbed to the old Russian tradition, where individual rights had been routinely sacrificed to state imperatives and force routinely used to accomplish political goals. Lenin's emphasis on the cleansing role that the wholesome proletariat plays in revolutionary transcendence also seemed to have dovetailed with the slavophile sensibilities rather than with Western political dynamics.

We should note here that Marx's teaching partially justified the "romantic" interpretation of revolution. There was a strong utopian component in Marx, which he never fully overcame and which was embedded in his notion of the proletariat as the class-messiah called upon to cleanse the world from the original sin of alienation to which humans succumbed when they embraced culture, science, and technology. This Rousseauistic element nourished the crypto-slavophile leanings of Russian communists. We could see that in the case of Nikolai Berdiaev, an outstanding Russian philosopher who read Marx in a romantic, if not messianic, fashion. Many years after he lost his youthful enthusiasm for Marxism, Berdiaev recollected in his autobiography his early infatuation with the Marxist

notion of the proletariat:

Class truth is indeed a non sequitur. But [back then I thought that] there could be a class lie, which is evident in the bourgeois classes who sinned by exploiting other human beings. The proletariat is free from the sin of exploitation; it is socio-psychologically ripe for the message of truth and justice determined by the transcendental consciousness. That is to say, both psychological predisposition and transcendental necessity are intimately intertwined in the working class. [9]

This testimony suggests that at least some Russian communists took "proletariat" to be a Marxist code word for the slavophile communal man, i.e., a holistic, natural being transcending the alienated conditions of his time. The toiling people were cast here as a transhistorical force destined to redeem Russia's, and by implication, humanity's sins. The Western rhetoric masked the peculiarly Russian sensibilities, incompatible with a positivistic reading that Marxism would be given in much of Western Europe.

Now, if we turn to the slavophile-inspired response to the revolutionary movement in Russia, we could see that it was far more reserved than that of Marxists, though it was not entirely unsympathetic. Slavophiles, you may recall, harbored a deep suspicion about the state as a foreign entity on the native Russian soil. They also shun liberalism because, they feared, it could breed violence. (Dostoyevsky expressed this fear in his famous novel "Demons," where he depicted a liberal-idealist father and his radical nihilist son). From this vantage point, slavophile intellectuals could not possibly be enamored with orthodox Marxism and its westernizing influence in Russia. But communism's egalitarian spirit appealed to slavophiles. They also entertained a mystic belief in the sacred calling of the Russian people and the special role of native commune, which could be construed as an analogue of the liberating class and authentic harmonious community envisioned by the communists. Alexander Blok, a talented poet particularly sensitive to the slavophile ethos, hailed the revolutionary movement in Russia as a spontaneous popular uprising guided by the primeval instincts and yearnings for justice. He transformed the familiar slavophile polarity of State and Land into the titanic struggle between culture and nature, civilization and the organic historical elements, with the revolution signifying the ultimate triumph of the natural man over flabby civilized humanity. "The Folk could not be base," intoned Blok, "this elemental force which cannot and should not become aware of itself will never deserve a bad word from the poet. You do not call the rabble people who came from the soil they till, who resemble the

morning fog from which they crystallized, the beast which they hunt." [10] Block's musings about the Folk qua elemental force sweeping artificial political institutions in its path would provide a basis for an account of the revolution as the victory of nature over culture. The uncontrollable torrent engulfing the islands of civilization in the vast Russian sea -- this is how the Bolshevik revolt appeared to the slavophile-minded Russian intellectuals in the early revolutionary era. The westernizer Peter Struve saw the revolution along similar lines, even though his judgment on it was negative: "The bolshevik uprising and the bolshevik reign represent the social and political reaction of egalitarian masses against centuries-old efforts to Europeanize Russia , both socially and economically." [11] Here is another statement by the Russian philosopher S. L. Frank: "In its socio-political essence, the Russian revolution is nothing else than the painful crisis of the rapid democratization in Russia ." [12] This accelerated democratization had little to do with democracy as the term is understood today. Rather, the term meant the revolt of the elements against the encroachment of the social forces. But what Alexander Pushkin decried as the "Russian insurrection, senseless and merciless," acquired in the early twentieth century a new and higher cultural value. Again, Alexander Block led the way here (though not without the influence of Nietzsche) by sharply contrasting culture and natural force to "civilization."

Very symptomatic in this respect is a group that named itself after the ancient nomadic tribes of the Southern steps -- "Scythes." This artistic/political current dates back to the first days of the Bolshevik uprising, and besides its spiritual leader, Alexander Block, absorbed within itself first-rate Russian "peasant" poets, Nikolai Kliuev and Sergei Esenin. This connection is significant because it points to the missing link between bolshevism (or at least the way it was perceived by some cultured Russians immediately following the revolution) and the slavophile tradition. The group's chief ideologist, R. V. Ivanov-Razumnik, belonged to the party of left Social Revolutionists who formed a coalition with Bolsheviks in the period between November 1917 and July 1918. Social Revolutionists, in turn, traced their origins to the populists -- a powerful intellectual/political movement that came into being in the last third of the nineteenth century and that advocated a kind of "peasant socialism" to be built around the familiar slavophile "commune." "Scythes" could be best understood as a movement that gave artistic and intellectual sanctity to the populist sentiments expressed in the twentieth century by extreme Social Revolutionists. They thought -- quite mistakenly -- that the bolshevik crowd was part of this primeval revolt of Russia 's peasants against their ancient oppressors. The "nativist" October Revolution that

brought bolsheviks to power appeared to them as an antithesis to the "westernizing" February revolution that replaced the Czarist government with the bourgeois democratic regime. The fact that Lenin and his followers subscribed to the Western doctrine did not bother slavophiles at the time: Social Revolutionists and their intellectual allies saw bolshevik Marxism as something superficial and accidental. Wittingly or unwittingly, "Scythes" helped create a certain peasant mythology that contrasted "bolshevism" as a native Russian phenomenon to "communism" as an unworthy doctrine imported from the West.

"Scythes" did not exist as a coherent ideological current for long. They disbanded after the left Social Revolutionists staged their unsuccessful revolt against bolsheviks. But their ideas continued to resonate for quite some time. Unmistakably "scythian" was the immensely popular novel "Naked Year" by Boris Pilniak published soon after the October Revolution. He depicted bolsheviks as a native force stirring the insurrection against the Western influence in Russia . The October Revolution was glorified here as the break with westernizing reforms initiated by Peter the Great, as a return to the pre-Petrin and even pre-Christian pagan Russia . Lev Trotsky, the number two Bolshevik at the time, took notice of Pilniak's book and chose to counter it with a memorable quip. Commenting on the Bolshevik Arkhipov, the hero depicted in the novel as a pre-Petrin, unshaven bear of a man, Trotsky said that he knew many comrades like Arkhipov but that, contrary to Pilniak, all of them shaved. Of course, forced shaving was a common -- and hated by anti-westernizers -- practice in Peter the Great's Russia . As subsequent developments showed, Trotsky was far too hasty in dismissing the link between bolshevism and anti-Western nativism in Russia . The "populist," "nativist," and "fundamentalist" reinterpretation of bolshevism would become a major theme in pre- and post-perestroika debates about the meaning and destination of Russian history.

One more influential perspective on Russian communism emerged soon after the October Revolution. "Eurasianism," as this intellectual current became known, could be seen as an attempt to reconcile the slavophile premise about Russia 's unique historical destiny with the bolsheviks' emphasis on a strong state. This influential school was founded in the 1920s by Russian emigres Nikolai Trubetskoy, Lev Karsavin, Georgy Florofskii, Pavel Suvchinsky, Peter Savitsky, and Georgy Vernadsky. Eurasianists interpreted the Bolshevik revolution as the triumph of the Eurasian principles over European reforms in Russian history. According to Nikolai Trubetskoi, [13] the most influential figure among eurasianists, Russians shared their mentality and political sensibilities not with other

Slavs but with the Turkic people inhabiting the Eurasian steps. Just as Turks, Russians could not work out a worldview of their own, but easily adopted coherent, schematically simple beliefs. Turks accepted Islam, Russians borrowed their Christianity from Byzantium. In its emphasis on "ritual piety," Trubetskoi implied, the Orthodox Christianity was not so different from Islam. Similarly, Russian culture lacked the characteristic Western emphasis on personality and legal rights -- another trait that hinted at its non-Western origins. As other eurasianists, Trubetskoi praised the Mongol-Tartar domination over Russia as a positive chapter in Russian history. For some two-and-a-half centuries under Mongol rule, Russians developed their political tradition, marked first and foremost by the powerful state institutions. The fabric of Russian statehood, said Trubetskoi, might have been "poorly designed but deftly sown together." If the Moscow Czarism was largely a creation of Mongol yoke, the Bolshevik state owed its being to the Germanic influence. Under the veneer of Western phraseology, however, communist Russia preserved and even strengthened its imperial Eurasian heritage. From this fact, eurasianists optimistically inferred that the nation's future was bright: in due course, Russia would reclaim its cultural archetype marked by strong state power and the subordination of the individual to the social whole.

The eurasianist writings bore more than a fleeting resemblance to Oswald Spengler's famous thesis about Europe's imminent demise. Just like Spengler, eurasianists tried to isolate "socio-cultural types" supposedly governed by historical fate and not by choices made by conscious historical agents. Members of this school also studiously avoided value judgments. The fact that personality in the Turkic socio-cultural type bowed to the state was neither good nor bad, according to eurasianists. It should not be taken as a mark of "Russian servility" but as the sign of a genuine respect for power indispensable to a strong state. While no judgement was passed here explicitly, it was quite clear that eurasianists saw the Russian mentality as a viable alternative to the Western political tradition, if not the way of the future for the entire world.

To sum up, the October Revolution evoked conflicting interpretations from those who lived through it. To Lenin's followers, the proletarian revolution appeared to be an episode in the universal drama of history, the first step toward the kingdom of freedom where all the nations were heading at a varying pace. The revolution that crushed capitalism turned Russia into the vanguard of the world-historical emancipation. This sanguine interpretation was countered by liberal intellectuals like Peter Struve, who were appalled by Lenin's disregard for civil rights and democratic procedures and saw Russia's failure to develop a Western-style legal state

as an indictment against the revolution. The slavophile-inspired writers, also known as "Scythes," felt a certain affinity with the revolution's egalitarian and communal ethos but concerned about the communists' modernizing propensities and their reliance on the powerful state. And eurasianists labored to reconcile the bolshevik etatism with the slavophile nativism.

All these perspectives on the place of communism in Russian history resurfaced in the Soviet era and were further elaborated by the critics and advocates of communism.

The Westernizing Dissidents and Their Critique of Soviet Communism

If in its formative years the communist regime glossed over certain ideological diversity, Joseph Stalin put an end to serious debates about the country's destiny and its relation to the West. Any view that did not accord with Stalin's latest pronouncements placed the nonconformist into mortal danger. After Stalin's death, however, the polemics would resume - - subdued and muted at first but increasingly open and vociferous with the passage of time. The dissident circles that sprang up in urban centers following Khrushchev's thaw contributed heavily to this resurgent interest in the nation's past and the willingness to reconsider its future. Among the first to take up the issue once more were liberal dissidents who sought to pry open the Bolshevik tradition with liberal Marxist schemes.

The first instinctive reaction of Russian crypto-liberals emerging from their decades-long hibernation was the campaign to cleanse Marxism-Leninism from "Stalinist perversion." This liberal line was all the more convenient in that it jibed well with the official line proclaimed by Khrushchev at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party. The critique of Stalin was carried out under the banners of "restoring Leninist principles," the latter being presented by official propaganda as the historically approbated guidelines for building a humane socialism. Outside the party officialdom, the historian Roy Medvedev was the movement's most vocal adherent. He tried to prove the unprovable, namely that the locomotive of Soviet history was derailed by the evil genius of one man -- Joseph Stalin. That something might have been wrong with the communist project itself did not seem to cross Medvedev's mind. In time, a modified version of this intellectual/political current branched out that condemned "true Leninism" as a peculiarly Russian perversion of Marxism. It was no longer Stalin vs. Lenin but Lenin vs. Marx. The old controversy between westernizers and slavophiles reappeared in a new form. This debate smoldered for a while

without attracting much attention in the West, but it was implicit in the early *samizdat* (clandestine self-publishing) publications and it influenced the writings by Soviet emigres who began to leave Russia in the early 70s.

Along side and somewhat apart from this thorny issue, a new kind of westernizing current found a foothold in Russia that transformed this theoretical question into an explicit political program. I am talking about the Human Rights Movement that made itself known in Russia and the West in the early 60s. Its adherents derived their inspiration from the liberal Western precept that a law-abiding state respecting inalienable human rights is indispensable for the civilized, democratic society. Dr. Andrey Sakharov, the widely recognized leader of Soviet liberal westernizers, spearheaded this movement with carefully worded, yet daring by the standards of the time, leaflets that first appeared in Soviet *samizdat* and were later reprinted in the West. Dissidence grew in prominence after 1963, when Khrushchev was deposed from his position as the party leader; it became a highly visible form of resistance to official communist dogma after the Soviet-led invasion that crashed the Prague Spring in 1968.

The dissident movement of the 70s was a heterogeneous phenomenon. It harbored intellectuals supporting the Western-liberal program of the Russian renewal as well as the critics of Soviet power with undisguised slavophile leanings. The latter included a highly influential group of village-prose writers, among which could be counted Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Too complex a figure to be subsumed under a neat political label, Solzhenitsyn was a writer and a political essayist highly respected in dissident circles for his personal courage and literary gift. His "stylistic integrity" prevented him from embracing extreme ideological claims, whether coming from the political left or right, but his politics had a pronounced anti-Western bias. In particular, Solzhenitsyn harbored a deep suspicion about Russian and Soviet liberals. In his famous literary memoir, *The Calf and the Oak*, he ridiculed the liberals' reliance on legal-rational concepts like "human rights" and "legal state" and scorned Valery Chalidze, a leader of the Human Rights Movement, who had been allowed to go to the West on a "lecture tour" -- a decision that could not have been done without a KGB approval, as Solzhenitsyn sarcastically pointed out. [14] Personal animosities aside, the reemerging ideological split between the new westernizers and slavophiles (if we are to stick with an old taxonomy) marked an important development in Soviet historical culture, which reignited an interest among Russian intellectuals in the centuries-old discourse about Russia's destiny. While new westernizers

continued to blame Russia's historical tradition for the nation's misfortunes and saw the best hope for the future in the country's rejoining the West, neo-Slavophiles decried the foreign influence in Russia and urged the return to the roots as the only solution to the country's problems. Intellectuals sympathetic to the slavophile tradition frame the question even more broadly. The entire modern culture is mortally ill, they insist; Russia is but the first victim of Western liberalism; unless forced to retreat, the Occidental model would continue to self-destruct, dragging down with it other, more viable cultural forms.

The Neo-Slavophile Ambivalence Toward Communism

Whereas liberal intellectuals in the post-Stalin era tended to gloss over the difficulties facing the capitalist West, the conservative opponents of bolshevism idealized the native cultural tradition. A prominent place among Soviet conservatives belonged to village-prose writers or so-called *derevenshchiki*, who focused their critique on the devastating impact that communist policies had on the nation's physical environment and its rural population. Valentin Rasputin, Vasily Belov, and Viktor Astafiev are perhaps the most prominent members of this group, but it was undoubtedly Alexander Solzhenitsyn who galvanized this powerful political-literary current. Particularly instructive in this respect is Solzhenitsyn's attacks on bolsheviks-westernizers, with their unabashedly technocratic ethos. Technocratic westernism was quite popular among the Russian artistic intelligentsia. It had its adherents among bolsheviks as well. Nikolai Bukharin comes to mind here; his pro-Western and anti-slavophile sentiments came to the fore in his article about Esenin's death in which he claimed that the poet's suicide marked the passing of the old, peasant, patriarchal Russia and the emergence of the new -- industrial and socialist -- Soviet Union . Another prominent technocratic westernizer who earned scorn from Solzhenitsyn and neo-slavophiles was Maxim Gorky. This prominent writer come Soviet bureaucrat edited a volume about an early Soviet era construction project -- *Belomorkanal* -- the channel between the White sea and the Baltic water basin built on Stalin's order. For Gorky , the project exemplified the grand battle between culture and nature, with bolshevism carrying out the rationalizing, Europeanizing mission that promised to bring industrialization and rational organization of labor to Russia . For Solzhenitsyn and his followers, the project symbolized the reckless disregard for nature, environment, and human lives typical of the communist rule: the project had little or no economic significance, adversely affected environment, and claimed numerous casualties among political prisoners who were forced to labor in

degrading conditions.

The anti-state and anti-communist agenda advanced by village-prose writers marked the resurgence of slavophilism in Soviet Russia. We find in this neo-slavophile current a powerful strand of Rousseauist rhetoric celebrating a back-to-nature life style and waxing nostalgic about patriarchal values once found in the peasant commune. According to *derevenshchiki*, these simple values were systematically destroyed by the communist policies of forced collectivization and mechanization of village life. The tractor -- the machine touted by bolsheviks as a chief tool of peasant emancipation -- was denounced by village-prose writers as an instrument of "Americanization" destroying traditional Russia . Village prose was the revolt of the swamp against land reclamation, a stirring cry for help on behalf of starving, exploited, demoralized, and gradually disappearing Russian peasantry that was sacrificed to the communists' ambitious industrialization plans. After Gorbachev unleashed his perestroika, village-prose writers quickly moved to political center stage, mounting a strong campaign against the government-sponsored plans to divert water from Siberian rivers to Central Asia . This widely publicized political initiative, which in the end persuaded the government to drop its ecologically disastrous plans, earned village-prose writers public sympathy. This was the first successful campaign in the Soviet Union 's history where public opinion prevailed on a vital policy matter.

Considerable public capital that village writers earned with their talented literary prose and civic courage tended to obscure another, far less benign, aspect of their political agenda. I am talking about *derevenshchiki*'s nativist, anti-Western proclivities. Ecological catastrophes, like the Chernobyl nuclear plant explosion, evolved in their writings into a broad anti-progressivist metaphor. The writers of this school pinned on the West the responsibility for all the suffering that the country had gone through under the Bolshevik rule. As long as Russia remained preoccupied with the world politics and allowed itself to be dragged into conflicts on the other end of the globe, it would continue to neglect its own people. Worse, it will serve as a dump for the Western waste -- industrial, political, and social. Communism appeared to *derevenshchiki* as just another discarded Western project that was carried out on Russian soil against the wishes of the Russian people. For Soviet intellectuals embracing the slavophile teaching, this was more than a literary trope: it was an indubitable, pernicious reality that required urgent action.

There is much that is sound in the village-prose writers' critique of Soviet

communism. You cannot read their works, especially their literary accounts, without sympathy for the plight of Russian peasantry. It is also widely acknowledged today that industrial civilization has left in its wake appalling ecological and spiritual byproducts. But in their attacks on science and technology, *derevenshchiki* went far beyond like-minded Western critics. In the postcommunist period, the village-prose writers' polemics have grown into a full-blown anti-Western program that equated European civilization with technocratic extremism. This program has a strong nativist flavor, most evident in Igor Shafarevich's book *Rusophobia*, [15] where the author offers a quasi-theoretical analysis that decries Jews as a conduit for Western ideas in Russia. The author discerns two contradictory currents operating in nature: an organic movement of life itself (something akin to Bergson's "creative evolution") and a theoretical force of "pure reason" exploited by those who, in the name of abstract reforms, distort nature's own inimitable, mystic ways. According to Shafarevich, Jews are notorious villains determined to force on reality their abstract ideological schemes and in the process destroy the organic foundations of nature and society. Jews, whom the biblical tradition treats as the "salt of the earth," are cast in this paranoid theory as an embodiment of evil, a people collectively responsible for their past and present crimes against humanity. The nativist tendencies already present in slavophilism are pushed to the extreme in this neo-slavophile reading, which renounces every political and social innovation as a retreat and perversion. One can no longer call this stance "cultural conservatism"; rather, it is "hysterical conservatism," for it anathemizes any literary or political criticism directed at Russia as blasphemy and treason. [16]

As we pass judgment on contemporary slavophilism, we should bear in mind the paradoxical metamorphosis that has marked this intellectual current. There is no reason to doubt *derevenshchiki*'s sincere concern for the plight of Russia under the communist rule. Neo-slavophiles opposed communism, sometimes openly, way before it became a safe, popular sport in Russia. [17] What neo-slavophiles refuse to see, however, is that Russia was not just a hapless victim raped by the historical forces imposed from without, as neo-Slavophiles like to picture it, but a determined aggressor carrying a considerable destructive and self-destructive potential. In bolshevism, Russia -- this "mystical broad" (to use an expression that Nikolai Berdiaev coined about Rozanov, an archetypical Russian slavophile) -- mutated from a "meek" into a "predatory" type, as an early 20th century literary critic, Apollon Grigoriev, would have put it. This transformation is echoed today in the paradoxical alliance that neo-slavophiles formed with communists in the post-Gorbachev era. When called upon to assess bolshevism on the 75th anniversary of its ascension

to power, anti-communist Shafarevich declined to indict it on the ground that settling old accounts now could only sow disunity among the true patriots, whose urgent task was to confront their common enemy: liberals preying on Mother Russia. Valentin Rasputin, the most talented writer in the village-prose group and a patented anti-communist, experienced a similar change of heart. During the first Congress of Peoples' Deputies, he voiced his opposition to the anti-army stance taken by the emboldened glasnost press. Later on, he joined the National Salvation Front that united communists and nationalists into a "red-brown" faction and defended the very communism that killed the Russian village and despoiled his beloved lake Baikal . Now Rasputin is saying that Western communism lost its international agenda after being transplanted onto slavic soil and, with the passage of time, evolved into a benign, genuinely national cultural form dovetailing with the Russian political tradition. The same shamelessly procommunist sentiments can be found in such slavophile publications as Nash Sovremennik and Den'. One could hardly think of greater irony: neo-slavophiles who started with denouncing communism as a planned destruction of Russia turned out to be the last communists' allies in post-Soviet Russia .

Reasons for such a miraculous transformation are many. The most important among these are the warped consciousness bred by Soviet Russia's isolation from the world civilization. This isolation is at the heart of the neo-slavophile belief that Russia and the West are antithetical historical entities, that the two oppose each other as the masculine and the feminine, form and matter, executioner and victim. The neo-slavophile philosophy of history reveals the deep-seated fear of historical change and critical reason that goes back to the prerevolutionary times (remember Leo Tolstoy's War and Peace). This philosophy also shows its proponents' failure to appreciate both the historical and metaphysical role of human rights and individuality. In place of the concrete historical personality, neo-slavophiles put "people" -- a collective national body endowed with natural wisdom and superhuman capacity to behold unvarnished truth. The personological aspect of being, by contrast, is dismissed as an aberration, as a product of critical reason wilfully encroaching on nature's imminent domain. With their stilted opposition between Russia (standing for the natural, organic form of historical being) and the West (representing the evolutionary hypertrophy of abstract reason), neo-slavophiles suppress all evidence that points to the historical cross-fertilization between Russia and the West. As a result, they fail to complete their critique of the communist utopia, which continues to appeal to neo-Slavophiles on a gut level as a teaching that elevates nature over culture, society over the individual, communal imperatives over human

rights. Communism favored by neo-slavophiles is not only a native but also a nativist phenomenon, it is a slavonic "Land communism" juxtaposed to the occidental "State communism." And if one is looking for a proof that communism is in some way endemic to Russian mentality, it could be gleaned from the persistent strand of slavophile nativism in Russian political thought. Isolationism, nativism, and obstinate anti-westernism demonstrate the limits of slavophilism as both an intellectual and political phenomenon.

The Resurgence of Eurasianism in Russia

Slavophiles and eurasianists alike have sought to drive a wedge between Russia and the West. But where slavophilism stresses the uniquely slavonic path toward nation-building that eschews etatism and relies on native commune, eurasianism affirms the common destiny of the Russian and Asian people and pin their hopes on the resurrection of imperial Russia .

Lev Gumilev and his prodigious writings form the vital link between original eurasianism which emerged as a coherent intellectual-political current in the Russian emigre community and the nascent Eurasianist movement in post-Soviet Russia . Gumilev's pedigree (he was the son of Anna Akhmatova and Nikolai Gumilev, two of Russia 's great poets victimized by communists), lent his ideas a special significance in the eyes of his contemporaries. Gumilev spent his youth in Stalin's prison camps where he first learned about eurasianism from Peter Savitsky, a member of the original Prague group arrested by the Soviets during World War Two. It is said that people subjected to prolonged isolation in prison sometimes become monomaniacs. Gumilev's case supports this view. Otherwise, it would be hard to understand why an offspring of an extraordinarily cultured Russian family embraced without apparent reservations this reactionary political doctrine.

Even before Gorbachev, Gumilev managed to publish in the official press his work on "the great steppe" and its role in the history of Turkic people, with whom, Gumilev implied, the Russians shared some psychological traits. He radicalized the old metaphor of "soil," which was for him not just a symbol but a bio-geological ground for the folk's habits, a physiological source of national uniqueness. According to Gumilev, the laws of history are similar to the laws that propel the swarms of locust to advance and recede. The border that separates Russia from the West coincides with the negative isotherm for the month of January. In other words, nature itself sets apart the two cultural entities. One of his followers, Dmitri Balashov, paraphrased Gumilev in this way: the iron plow that destroys the soil's

organic structure destroys Russia as well. And here is a statement from Gumilev's programmatic article "The Last Eurasianist" in which he openly declares himself an heir to the eurasianist legacy:

All Eurasian ethnoses managed to live and prosper as long as they stayed on their native territory. However, they perished . . . when intermingled with alien worlds. All contacts on the superethnic level yielded negative results. . . . The Eurasian concept of ethnocultural regions . . . applies to the world-historical process as well. Wherever emulation [mimesis] prevails, it runs contrary to originality and violates the principle "know thyself" and "be your own self." [18]

As an intellectual movement, original eurasianism encountered strong criticism in the emigre community. No lesser luminary than Nikolai Berdiaev voiced his opposition to this strand of Russian thought. He pointed out a striking resemblance between Marxism and Eurasianism: both intellectual strands hail necessity and scorn choice and freedom as factors in history. It is this deterministic and monistic metaphysics, rather than any shared political sympathies, that explains the eurasianists' willingness to cooperate with bolsheviks, their endorsement of the Soviet state as the continuation of the Russian ethnos's historical mission. Father Georgy Florofsky, once a member of the original Eurasianist group, dissociated himself from the movement and mounted an influential theological critique of Eurasianism. In his article titled "Metaphysical Underpinnings of Utopianism" he wrote:

A utopianist is bound to read history in teleological categories, as a development, unfolding of the innate traits, as the growth of a seed. . . . What is justified here is the world and history as a whole rather than man and personal life. This historical teleology rationalizes an anti-individualistic bias of utopian consciousness. Human being -- species being -- is tied in with nature here, while societal good is blown to the cosmic proportions. . . . Herein lies the commandment to obey -- it is madness to struggle with reality itself, just grasp the "natural evolutionary trends" and adopt yourself to them. Historical automatism alleviates the risk of failure, and along the lines kills the very possibility of creativity. [19]

This critique is targeted not only against eurasianism but also against Marxist historical metaphysics, Spengler's organic determinism, and certain strands in Russian theological thought which advocated various forms of Christian platonism (Sergei Bulgakov, Pavel Florensky, Lev Karsavin) with its emphasis on a preordained divine plan for historical

development that rules out novelty and emergence. This line of critique is very timely, for it exposes fatalism and anti-humanism deeply rooted in Russian consciousness and palpably present in several powerful currents in today's political thought. Calls to restore the Russian empire to its past glory are heard today from such diverse personages as neo-slavophile Rasputin, communist Ziuganov, etatist Prokhanov, and it is highly indicative that these diverse thinkers and groups invoke eurasianist arguments to justify their demands. Radical nationalists and etatists (*derzhavniki*) conceive future Russia as a great Eurasian empire that unites Orthodoxy and Islam on the basis of shared physical territory, kindred psychological traits, and common stress on ritual piety. Perhaps Trubetskoi and Gumilev were right and Islam is Russian Orthodox Christianity minus Christ. There certainly was a historical precedent for the Great Eastern Orthodox Christian state converting to Islam -- Byzantium . But as the 19th century philosopher Vladimir Soloviev pointed out, Byzantium fell not so much because of the irresistible force of the Muslim arms but because it exhausted its potential for inner growth, for a spiritual resistance to Islam -- Eastern Christianity surrendered the Christian spirit of freedom. It seems that today's imperial *derzhavniki* are ready for a similar surrender. This is just another paradox of Russian history: if neo-slavophile *derevenshchiki* feel nostalgic about the communism that defiled the country's environment, then neo-eurasianist *derzhavniki* are sizing up the political yoke that Russians shook back in the 15th century. They are willing to be slaves, as long as they are members of a great empire. The question is whether this is the last gasp of the imperial Russian idea or the beginning of the new cycle in the geopolitical struggle for Eurasian supremacy?

Russian Communism as a Spiritual Phenomenon

The breakdown of the Soviet regime in Russia brought in its wake a heightened interest in the long-suppressed Russian thought. Many readers saw in slavophilism, religious philosophy, and great Russian literature an antidote to communism. Some hoped to find therein a special path that could save Russia from the extremes of Western rationalism and capitalism. However, the "Russian idea" proved to be exceedingly muddled, and the blueprint for the future it offered to its adherents seemed to be tainted by the very communist spirit to which the Russian idea was supposed to be immune. Nothing illustrates this point better than the plight of the Orthodox Church in postcommunist Russia.

The renaissance of Russian Orthodoxy began long before perestroika. Many dissidents saw in religion a natural bulwark against godless

communism and actively sought to establish ties with the Russian Orthodox Church. The passing of communism spurred a religious revival. In the early perestroika years, the Church visibly strengthened its positions; for a while, it wielded a considerable moral authority, and its blessing was central to settling political disputes. Politicians of different stripes made a point to be observed attending church ceremonies and actively sought audiences with the Patriarch of all Russia. This revival proved surprisingly short-lived, however. Once a dissident and now a radical nationalist, Vladimir Osipov recently lamented that the Russian Church was once again treated as a nuisance, its priests singled out for a ridicule. This loss of authority has much to do with the fact that, freed from the state patronage, the Church showed little stomach for administrative independence and creative spirituality. The church leaders seem to desire little more than a new alliance with the state that would restore the Church to its pre-bolshevik role as an official state religion. For centuries, Russian Orthodoxy operated under the heavy state patronage, and its servile attitude to the powers apparently became an ingrained habit. Open support that some church leaders showed to the communist nationalists further discredited the Church as a political force (the most insidious case of this kind is Mitropolit Ioan of St. Petersburg, whose ultranationalist and crypto-anti-Semitic sentiments had been disavowed, albeit only tacitly, by the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church). The proud talk about Eastern Christianity as a core of Russian culture, supported by such giants of the Russian spirit as Fedor Dostoyevsky, turned out to be groundless. The Church's equivocal pronouncements and less than forthright actions dealt a devastating blow to many Christians who pinned their hopes for national renewal on Russian Orthodoxy as a guardian of national values.

Without dwelling on the metaphysics of Eastern Orthodoxy, we can point out that its diminishing stature in public opinion has much to do with its ritualism, with its conservative organizational forms, with the fact that the Church in Russia had never gone through a genuine Reformation. Official Russian Orthodoxy sanctified the quasi-spiritual forms of patriarchal life inimical to personality, human rights, individual initiative -- cultural forms central to modernity. The Church opposed not only political but also spiritual creativity, which made it suspicious of any new departure. The excommunication of Leo Tolstoy -- this Russian Luther of sorts, who protested the Church's corrupt ways and called for church reforms -- is highly emblematic in this context. An even stronger indictment against Russian Orthodoxy was the persecution of so-called "old believers" -- a powerful 17th movement that broke away from the established church. This latter episode in the history of eastern Christianity is particularly

pertinent today when the country is striving to build a market economy. It is well known that early capitalist entrepreneurs in Russia came in disproportionate numbers from the ranks of the old believers, who formed the proto-bourgeois stratum in Russia. Their marginal status as a persecuted minority and strong religious convictions emphasizing personal responsibility and the need for continuous self-improvement remind one of Weberian puritans engendering the "spirit of capitalism" in the Western world. Sergei Bulgakov noted this fact in his 1909 review of Weber's famous book *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*. [20] The official Orthodoxy, by contrast, frowned upon entrepreneurial activity, as it still does, remaining more or less aloof from efforts to develop a market economy in Russia. This indifference is evident not so much in the open opposition to capitalism as in the official stamp of approval that the Church bestowed on the collectivist psychology endemic to patriarchal economic and political forms. Until the Russian Orthodoxy finds the way to sanctify the spiritual foundations on which human rights and entrepreneurship could thrive, its contribution to political and economic reforms in post-communist Russia will remain very limited and inconsistent.

Religion is not the only institution that failed to manifest itself as a cultural form resistant to communism. The same could be said about another cultural resource that for a long time enjoyed a considerable authority in the country -- Russian literature. "What would Russians do after the collapse of communism?," a Russian luminary was asked in the heyday of perestroika -- "Read literary magazines," came the answer. The answer did not raise many eyebrows at the time. This conclusion seemed to have been born out by the astounding explosion of publishing activity in Gorbachev's Russia. The country revelled in its newly-found freedom to read, to write, to criticize. Between 1987 and 1990, long-suppressed books reached the reading public, everything from *Dr. Zhivago* to *Dr. Freud*. But this literary orgy did not last. By the end of perestroika, the demand for serious literature in Russia precipitously dropped. Thick literary magazines, once obligatory reading for every intellectual, saw their circulations cut from millions to a few thousands. The nation's attention turned elsewhere, leaving Russian writers, poets, and film makers to fend for themselves.

That the great Russian literature could not survive communism does not seem strange after all. In retrospect, Russian communism was in large measure a literary phenomenon, a popular book that enthralled its readers and kept them from other, more mundane, pursuits. Thrust into public eye by idealists and ideological visionaries, communism represented

a species of gnostic consciousness that longed for a cosmic revolution, for a resplendent society that meets all human needs and takes universal happiness as its highest goal. But the ideal of such a social world is, in the end, more important for those who believe in it than the world itself. The real is sacrificed to the ideal, illusion wins over fact, and the laws of beauty gloss over the messy currents of everyday life -- which is what literature has always been about, certainly great literature that flourished in Russia in the 19th century and that survived into the 20th century through the heroic efforts of writers like Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Communism was a literary project par excellence, an aesthetics embraced by the people who created a great literature.

Far from being merely formal, the continuity in question extends to substantive issues as well. Epic in its scope, Russian literature expressed the holistic consciousness endemic to primitive communism and codified by the nation's leading writers who sought to impart a collectivist mind-set to the elites and commoners alike. Great Russian literature flourished in traditional patriarchal society; its preoccupation with the people and their terrible plight was fed in part by the feeling of guilt and personal responsibility that the educated noblemen felt toward their subjects. With the notable exception of Dostoyevsky, Russian literature deliberately pushed the Russians toward primeval, collective ("swarming" as Tolstoy would have said) existence. Literature in Russia represented a discursive form that roughly corresponded to the cosmological period in ancient Greek thought associated with pre-Socratic philosophers. Dostoyevsky had moments of genuine "anthropological revelation," as Berdiaev used to say, but ultimately he called for a return to the pristine, wholesome "soil," just as his great contemporaries did. It is a said fact that Russian literature failed to inoculate its readers against communist temptations, and it failed to do so because it was anti-bourgeois and anti-personalistic to the very core. This important precept was first powerfully enunciated by writer Varlam Shalamov, a prisoner of the Gulag, and then popularized by several commentators, most recently by Alexander Ageev:

Russian literature of the 19th -- "golden" -- century was the last epic, titanic literature in European history. It flourished in a short and very peculiar time span [when] writers, already familiar with the European, personality-conscious literary culture . . . still felt behind their back the biblical presence of organic folk life in all its enormous biological might. This fact gave writers the right to speak on behalf of this elemental dormant force; it encouraged them to undertake monumental literary projects and assured the psychological veracity of their writings. Surveying Russia 's endless territory, [Russian artists] felt that "eternity

was on their side." But time refused to succumb to space. What seemed like Biblical eternity, exploded into a series of extraordinary dynamic events. Judged against the backdrop of real history, the "golden era" of literary flowering turned out to be a brief moment indeed. Alas, this brief outburst of creativity exerted an inordinate influence on the spell-bound Russian literature, which has ever since moved into the future crab-wise, with its eyes glued to its illustrious predecessors whose accomplishments Russian writers are still trying to emulate. [21]

The main target of this criticism is no doubt Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who likes to rail against the younger writers preoccupied with self-expression and indifferent to the great Russian literary tradition. What Solzhenitsyn fails to realize is that this shift is not just an aesthetic but a cultural historical phenomenon heralding the emergence of a new mentality in Russia -- individualistic, bourgeois consciousness. This shift marks a genuine historical change and presages the final demise of communism. The new Russian literature tends to be either purely commercially or aesthetically elitist, but this fact should be greeted as a sign that this historical transformation is becoming irreversible. As a novelist, Solzhenitsyn may have little to offer to the literature of the future, but as an author of *The Gulag Archipelago*, he should rejoice in this development, for along with the gruesome gulags expired great literature -- literature as "communism."

All these heady developments were duly noted by a well-known Russian critic Georgy Gachev. In his essay, programmatically titled "Honest Private Life as an Alternative to Russian Literature," Gachev drew attention to the literary memoirs written by the 18th century Russian, Andrey Bolotov. Bolotov exemplified a relatively rare in the Russian context type of a cultured land owner who spent considerable time improving the agricultural yield in his estate. For Gachev, this is an astounding example of a self-made man whose down-to-earth rational undertakings sharply contrast with the idealistic castle-building so common among Russian gentry and intelligentsia. Here is an excerpt from the paean to Bolotov that Gachev wrote to dramatize this man's accomplishments and to juxtapose them to the Russian literary cannon:

Enlightened owner! Autonomous human being -- what Englishmen call "self-made man" who comes to terms with his environment, his own self, and creates the conditions for decent existence. As *causa sui* (an attribute of the Absolute, of God), he is a cause of himself. Amidst the conditions of Russian autocracy, such a free private autocrat was little appreciated as a subject of history and the source of creativity. . . . But much scorned

common sense seems to work just fine when practiced by this man: instead of a broad Russian soul, he displays German "moderation and reliability" -- he is a veritable anti-hero of Russian literature! . . . What we witness is the ethos and eros of private honest life miraculously unfolding outside mainstream history. [22]

For all its exalted tone, Gachev's "anti-literature" article, ironically published in the journal "Literary Training," is highly symptomatic of the subterranean currents in contemporary Russian consciousness. This consciousness is busy reevaluating old values and experimenting with new attitudes. The latter goad Russians to leave behind their literary utopian projects and embrace real life with all its complexities. Russian critics have spotted unrecognized heroes in its literary past -- private owners, hard workers, businessmen -- and now seek to imprint their images upon mass consciousness as models worthy of emulation. Once again, the past has turned out to be as unpredictable as the future, and herein lies the best hope for Russia in decades to come.

Back to the Future: Concluding Remarks on Russian Historical Culture

As I have tried to show above, Russian communism has been nourished by communalism, nativism, and anti-westernism -- a set of beliefs and practices that elevate the species life over personality and sacrifice individual freedom to collective imperatives. There is more to the Russian tradition than its dominant historical culture would make you believe, however, and the search is now on for alternative values that could help the nation break out of its communist fetters.

The official memory embodied in the Russian cultural cannon is very selective: it brings to the fore some historical events and downgrades or completely ignores others. As the case of Andrei Bolotov suggests, this unclaimed historical heritage is finally beginning to attract serious attention in Russia . An enlightened owner, a self-made man, Bolotov is transformed from a cultural villain into a hero, and along with him, thousands of other Russian men and women once renounced for their personal initiative as hopelessly individualist are being restored to their proper place in the nation's cultural memory. This belated rehabilitation is not confined to archaic figures like Bolotov but extends to more recent personalities and their undertakings that are reappraised as valuable cultural resources. The names of Russian entrepreneurs -- Putilov, Obukhov, and Morozov -- are now frequently mentioned in Russia, their products are praised for their quality, their factory buildings, still in use,

are noted for their durability and workmanship. The Russian kulak, a much maligned family farmer hounded by Stalin's henchmen during the forced collectivization campaign, is celebrated today for his initiative, hard work, as well as spiritual strength in the face of endless political repressions. Equally portentous are recent attempts to reinterpret the old literary cannon, e.g., the novel by Mikhail Sholokhov -- "Virgin Soil." For decades Soviet pupils studied in school this novel as a literary paean to the battle against the kulaks. Now revisionist critics argue that the novel could be read as a satire on communists and their never-do-good helpers among local peasants who enforced the communist party's ruthless policies among the rural population. Hidden historical resources are discovered everywhere and brought back into wide cultural circulation. The old-believers come entrepreneurs, the Russian land-owners devoted to their land and people, even greedy profiteers -- antiheroes of Russian literature -- are recast as bourgeois entrepreneurs courageously defying ancient customs and asserting their will against the spineless traditionalism of their time. Practicality, efficiency, business-like attitudes are seen in today's Russia not only as economic virtues but also as values indispensable for the rejuvenation of the entire spiritual/cultural domain. What Soviet ideologists denounced as arch-heresy -- "bourgeois mentality" -- is redefined as essential to current reforms.

To be sure, these changes have been slow in coming; there are social strata and individuals who fervently resist attempts to reevaluate old values and continue to extol the values of nativism. The results of the December 1993 elections to the Russian Parliament which showed considerable popular support for communists and ultra-nationalists are more than a bit discouraging. But it would be wrong to view the efforts to redefine Russian historical culture as inconsequential or to relegate them exclusively to the cultural domain. Witness the emergence of "nomenklatura capitalism" -- a powerful trend that has been revamping the nation's economic and political scene in post-Soviet Russia . At the heart of this movement is the transformation of ex-party apparatchiks, administrators, and industrial managers into a new class of property-owners. Far from being ideological watchdogs determined to reverse the course of history (they are largely extinct today as a viable political species), these remnants of the past political and economic elites strongly support privatization and market reforms, if for no other reason, than because they stand to benefit from these changes personally. The confrontation between President Yeltsin and Khasbulatov's Parliament was precipitated primarily by the tension between the central and local elites after the latter endeavored to shed the suzerainty to their old bosses. The haste with which the old nomenklatura began to transform itself into a

new class of property owners was scandalous indeed, but the political-economic thrust of this process was undoubtedly positive. It marked the dispersion of power in Russia, its gradual metamorphosis from a political form of totalitarian control into an economically-based and hard-won authority. This process is the best guarantee that the difficult transition to a market economy would be a nonviolent, even if unseemly, process. No need to "liquidate the nomenclature as a class" (to use the Bolsheviks' favorite expression) -- the mutation would be gradual and voluntary. This transformation of yesterday's nomenclature workers into today's bourgeois property owners might be even more significant than sputtering democratic political reforms: while the latter could be reversed under the emergency powers granted to the Russian President, the latter are far less likely to be dismantled by any presidential decree or legislative action.

Today's situation brings to mind the earlier-mentioned historical precedent -- Andrei Bogoliubsky's refusal to move to the Kievan principality as mandated by the Rurik house nomenclature system. This pioneering attempt at privatization was restarted after the collapse of the communist party nomenclature, and there is reason to believe that this time the process will go far enough to become irreversible. Nomenclature functionaries are eager to trade off their coveted positions in the state/party hierarchy for a place in the emerging economic order, to exchange their political status for the promise of economic riches. The decentralization of political power, the regionalization of economic activity, the fusion of economic and political authority, the sanctification of private property -- these developments might seem like the return to "feudalism," but in Russian history they count as progress. The new trends were slowed down by the executive power's struggle against legislative independence and presidential decrees stifling regional autonomy, but they could hardly be reversed. It is highly unlikely that Russia would ever return to a unitary, nomenclature state. [23]

If post-Soviet Russia offers any historical lesson, it is that the past is a valuable national resource, that it is as problematic as the future, and that alternative scenarios for the future are inextricably linked to the discovery of an alternative past. It is time for Russian thinkers to reexamine those periods in their history when the nation enjoyed close relations with the West, most notably the St. Petersburg era and the empire built by Peter the Great. Moving further back into Russian history, one could ponder what the historian G. P. Fedotov hailed as a "Moscow servicemen" and what Dostoyevsky described as a "state servant" -- a shrewd man who repeatedly demonstrated his flexibility, resourcefulness, capacity to adapt to extreme circumstances, find ingenious solutions to knotty practical

problems. [24] Today's industrial managers keeping their enterprises afloat under the most trying conditions are the latest incarnation of this historical type. The ex-nomenklatura functionaries, or at least its most productive part, show the will to become capitalist entrepreneurs and turn Russia into a viable market economy. This servant of the state who used to do the powers' bidding has shown that he has a mind of his own. Like the "slave" transcending his bondage and mastering his "master" in the Hegelian dialectical scheme, the Russian serviceman survived autocracy and numerous ideological overlords and even stood up to the state that oppressed him. This uncanny ability to transform the environment, transcend the organic tradition, keep moving ahead during the transitional periods of "radical historical transformation" (Berdiaev) is Russia's greatest historical resource. After all, efforts to break with the past are as much a constant in Russian history as attempts to stem reform and preserve the status quo. Or as the slavophile Khomiakov pointed out, there was hardly a more typical persona in Russian history than the arch-reformer Peter the Great.

The reform confronting today's Russia is not dissimilar to many others that preceded it. It can be best described as the "new westernization." This reform has a decent chance to succeed because it trades on familiar territory, because it represents the return to the well-trodden path from which Russia had been pushed by a series of unique historical circumstances. Knowledge the Russians need to see this transition through will be based on their historical experience -- it will be remembrance of the things past, remembrance of the things future.

References

This paper was translated from Russian by Dmitri Shalin.

1. See S. M. Soloviev, *The History of Russian Since the Ancient Times*. Vols. 1 & 7 (Moscow, 1962).
2. On Chicherin, see B. Paramonov, "Chicherin: Liberal Conservator." *Continent* Vol. 50 (pp. 279-312).
3. On the 17th century religious schism in Russia see James H. Billington, *The Icon and the Ax. An Interpretive History of Russian Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966, pp. 116-162).
4. The very title of Tolstoy's great novel hints at his slavophile sympathies. The opposition of state and land is tacitly present in the

antithesis of "War and Peace," where "peace" embodies the celebrated slavophile "Land" that is juxtaposed to "war" or which is the same thing -- "State." B. M. Eikhenbaum states that Tolstoy's work is not so much a "historical novel" as an "anti-historical novel." "In a sense, Tolstoy waged war against . . . the very historical process" (Eikhenbaum, *Lev Tolstoy* (Leningrad, 1928, p. 288).

5. K. Aksakov, *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii. Vol. 1 Historical Works* (Moscow, 1889, pp. 279, 597 -598).

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 283-284.

7. We should remember that the Russian commune was not so much an organic expression of the Russian folkways as a state decreed institution created for the sake of implementing state fiscal policies. The Westernizer Chicherin showed this clearly in his work. Yet, the slavophile mystifications succeeded in convincing the authorities that the commune was somehow native to the Russian soil. All this is not to gainsay, of course, that the century-old institution of communal village life left its mark on the collectivist psychology of the Russian peasant.

8. See Richard Pipes, *Struve: Liberal in the Right, 1905-1944* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1980, pp. 317-319).

9. Nikolai Berdiaev, *Sobranie Sochinenii, Vol. 1. Samopoznanie. Opyt Filosofskoi Avtobiografii* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1983, p. 138).

10. A. Block, *Collected Works, Vol. 6* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1962, p. 162).

11. Peter B. Struve, *Sotsialnaia i Ekonomicheskaia Istoriia Rossii* (Paris, 1952, p. 19).

12. S. L. Frank, "Iz Razmyshlenii o Russkoi Revolutsii" (*Novyi Mir*, no. 4, 1990, p. 215).

13. N. S. Trubetskoi, *K Probleme Russkogo Samosoznania* (Paris, 1927, pp. 42-43, 51-52, 49).

14. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Bodalsia Telenok s Dubom. Ocherki Literaturnoi Zhizni* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1975), p. 400.

15. The book was written in the late 70s and published in 1988-89 simultaneously by three nationalistic magazines. See e.g., *Nash*

Sovremennik, no. 6, 11, (1989).

16. Shafarevich instigated a noisy campaign against Andrey Siniavsky's book "Strolling with Pushkin," which shows an uncanny resemblance to the reception that the Muslim world accorded to Salman Rushdy's book.

17. In the 70s, Shefarevich distinguished himself with a courageous book exposing socialist fallacies. This book was compared by critics with F. Hayek's "The Road to Slavery" -- a comparison designed to dismiss the book and its author as overly partisan. see Igor Shefarevich, *The Socialist Phenomenon*(New York: Harper & Row, 1980).

18. Lev Gumilev, *Nashe nasledie*, no. 3, (1991, p. 25).

19. Georgy Florofsky, "Metafizicheskie predposylki utopizma," *Voprosy Filosofii*, no. 10 (1990), p. 87-88.

20. S. Bulgakov, *Dva Grada. Issledovanie o prirode obshchestvennykh idealov*. Vol. 1, Moskva (1911, p. 198).

21. A. Ageev, "Konspekt o krizise." *Literaturnoe obozrenie* no. 3 (1991, p. 17).

22. G. Gachev, "Chastnaia chestnaia zhizn. Alternativa russkoi literature." *Literaturnaia ucheba*, no. 3 (1989, pp. 119, 120, 128).

23. Some years ago, I singled out the evolution of the communist party nomenclatura system into a nomenclatura capitalism as a welcome scenario for the future (See B. Paramonov, "Kanal Griboedova," *Grani*, no. 138, 1985). My analysis was based on the structural continuity between the old Russian aristocracy and communist nomenklatura. Today this continuity and based on it transforation of the party nomenklatura into a new economic class of property owners is commonly acknowledged in the Russian press.

24. G. P. Fedotov, *Novyi Grad. Sbornik Statei* (New York: Chekhov Publishing House, 1952, pp. 75-76, 78, 86) and Fedor Dostoyevsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. 5 (Leningrad: Nauka, 1973, p. 57).
