The great age of Russian philosophy spans the century between 1830 and 1930 – from the famous Slavophile–Westernizer controversy of the 1830s and 1840s, through the “Silver Age” of Russian culture at the beginning of the twentieth century, to the formation of a Russian “philosophical emigration” in the wake of the Russian Revolution. This volume is a major new history and interpretation of Russian philosophy in this period. Eighteen chapters (plus a substantial introduction and afterword) discuss Russian philosophy's main figures, schools, and controversies, while simultaneously pursuing a common central theme: the development of a distinctive Russian tradition of philosophical humanism focused on the defense of human dignity. As this volume shows, the century-long debate over the meaning and grounds of human dignity, freedom, and the just society involved thinkers of all backgrounds and positions, transcending easy classification as “religious” or “secular.” The debate still resonates strongly today.


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A History of Russian Philosophy
1830–1930

Faith, Reason, and the Defense of
Human Dignity

EDITED BY
G.M. HAMBURG AND RANDALL A. POOLE
To George L. Kline
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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,¹ or appearance of historical materialism;² the symbiotic relationship between philosophy and literature,³ or between philosophy and social thought;⁴ the

¹ Probably the best-known essay on Russian religious philosophy is Nikolai Berdyaev, The Russian Idea (R.M. French, trans.), London: Geoffrey Bles, 1927. 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 simone i nosom (St. Petersburg: Aleteia, 2000), which connects Russian religious thought in the “long nineteenth century” to its Byzantine and Orthodox roots, and B.P. Gaideko, Vladimir Solou’ev i filosofia Seredinyego veka (Moscow: Progress-Traditsiya, 2001).


⁴ Here the classic works are Andrey Walički, A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism (Hilda Andrews-Rusecka, trans.), Stanford University Press, 1979), which has recently appeared in a revised and expanded Polish edition, Zory myśli rosyjskiej od oświecenia do rewolucji religijno-filozoficznego (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2005); and Andzej Walicki, Legal Philosophy of Russian Liberalism (Oxford University Press, 1987).
dialectical relationship between Russian "national" philosophy and western cosmopolitan influences; or the self-transformation of philosophy into an academic discipline situated mainly in universities. 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


Introdution

about Russian philosophy in this period: its humanist tradition. A few philosophical thinkers, such as the panславist theorist Nikolai Danilevskii and the Byzantine enthusiast Konstantin Leont'ev, clearly do not belong to that tradition and are not considered here. 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. 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, the Christian naturalist Nikolai Fédorov, the "concrete" idealist Sergei Trubetskoi, the religious existentialist Lev Shestov, and the religious, moral, and social philosopher Boris

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9 On these thinkers see Studies in East European Thought 45, no. 3-4 (1995), special issue devoted to "Neo-Kantianism in Russian Thought" (Bernice Glater Rosenthal, ed.); Thomas Nemeth, "Debol'skii and Lesevich on Kant: Two Russian Philosophies in the 1870s," Studies in East European Thought 45, no. 4 (1993), 383-395; 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. Ballew, Science and Russian Culture in an Age of Revolutions: VI. Vernadsky and His Scientific School, 1897-1945 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995); and Randall A. Poole, "Vernadskii, Vladimir Ivanovich (1863-1945)" in Edward Craig (ed.), Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy (London: Routledge, 1998-), online version (2002).


Vysheslavtsev. 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. 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.

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Introduction

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. 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, Semen Frank called this second current in Russian thought “religious humanism.” 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. Following a wide range of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin sources, Italian humanist thinkers gave the Genesis text a

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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.'" 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.

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.

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

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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.”

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. For Pico, Cassirer suggests, our likeness to God consists in freedom and the perfectibility that it makes possible. 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.”

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.”

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, 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

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23 Cassirer “Giovanni Pico della Mirandola,” 323.

24 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,” 339). Tzvetan Todorov, *Imperfect Garden: The Legacy of Humanism* (Princeton University Press, 2003), 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.”


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."38

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 their choicest part."39 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 Lilly 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."40 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 Platonian Academy in Florence. Maksim was a learned exponent of the Greek patristic anthropology of "image and likeness" (in its hesychastic, ascetic interpretation).41 He propagated these ideas in Muscovy until 1525, when he was accused of heresy by a Russian church

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38 Cassirer, "Giovanni Pico della Mirandola," 328.
40 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, 1589–1905 (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2007), pp. 20–92. His account is informed by the works of Trinkaus, Cassirer, and Jaeger, among many others.
41 On hesychasm, see chapter 1.
Introduction

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.\textsuperscript{32}

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.\textsuperscript{33}) 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.\textsuperscript{34} The youngest and most philosophical of the Cappadocians, and the one who probably exercised the most influence on Italian humanism,\textsuperscript{15} 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."\textsuperscript{36}

Three years later the Moscow Theological Academy began to publish \textit{Works of the Holy Fathers in Russian Translation}, a massive project that eventually comprised forty-eight volumes.\textsuperscript{37} By the 1860s, Russian theological studies, including several on Gregory himself, were advancing a moral-philosophical (rather than strictly mystical) understanding of \textit{theosis}: a "theological anthropology of moral perfectibility, human dignity, and theocentric freedom," in Michelson's formulation.\textsuperscript{38} 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.\textsuperscript{39}

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

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\textsuperscript{32} Michelson, "The First and Most Sacred Right," pp. 48–52.
\textsuperscript{34} Michelson, "The First and Most Sacred Right," p. 61.
\textsuperscript{35} Trinkaus, "Renaissance Idea of the Dignity of Man," p. 137.
\textsuperscript{36} Michelson, "The First and Most Sacred Right," p. 62.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid. pp. 62–63.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid. pp. 64, 73–92 passim.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid. p. 63.
book with his chapter on the Slavophile–Westernizer controversy. This seminal
debate formulated some of the basic positions in Russian philosophy of his-
tory, national identity, social and political thought, and religious philosophy. As
Horujy shows, the problem of personhood (lichkeit) 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 Telekosp, 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.” 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 cap-
tured by a contemporary (and Westernizer), Pavel Annenkov, who called the
period between 1838 and 1848 a “marvelous decade” in Russian intellectual
life. The main Slavophile thinkers were Ivan Kireevskii, Aleksei Khomiakov,
Konstantin Aksakov, and Iurii Samarin. As a group, they retained Chaadaev’s

60 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: 
41 The Extraordinary Decade: Literary Memoirs by P. V. Annenkov (Irwin B. Titunik (trans.), Arthur P. 
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religious conception of history, but inverted his categories: for them, Russia’s Byzantine heritage was not a curse but a blessing, the source of true Russian spirituality. They celebrated Russia’s distinct historical development, for it had spared the country the rationalistic, atomistic aspects of Roman law and civilization. Instead of the implicitly antagonistic principles of Western legalism, Russian social principles, according to the Slavophiles, were rooted in Christian love and harmony, embodied in the peasant commune and Orthodox church.43

The Slavophiles’ social philosophy and philosophy of history rested on their concern for the integrity or inner wholeness of the human person. The Slavophiles developed their conception of “integral personhood” (tser’naia lichnost’) within what Horujy calls the “theocentric personological paradigm” of Eastern Christianity, but they were far from completing their philosophical project. “That task was inherited from them,” Horujy writes, “by Russian philosophy of the Silver Age.” Nonetheless, Ivan Kireevskii, for Horujy the “most powerful philosophical mind of his generation,” clearly pointed the way in his essay “On the Necessity and Possibility of New Principles in Philosophy” (1856).44 Here the Slavophile philosopher laid out his concept of the “integral consciousness of believing reason,” which reconciles faith and reason. Unlike European rationalism, Orthodox “believing reason,” according to Kireevskii, is capable of bringing the subject and object of knowledge together in an immediate, concrete intuition. It is a kind of revelation or immediate apprehension that penetrates to the ontological essence of reality, ultimately to God, thus grounding the self in the divine source of all being.45 The Slavophile theory of personhood was not new; Kireevskii proudly pointed to his continuity with the Greek church fathers, whose works he studied and translated at the Optina Monastery.46

The Westernizers (Mikhail Bakunin, Vissarion Belinski, Timofei Granovskii, Alexander Herzen, and others) articulated their ideas within the philosophical framework of Hegelianism, in direct opposition to Slavophile romanticism.

43 An excellent concise exposition of Slavophilism can be found in Andrzej Walicki, A History of Russian Thought, pp. 92–114.
They were united by a general belief that Russia should develop along western, European lines; in this respect they shared the universalism of Chaadaev's philosophy of history, though not his religious formulation of it. The Westernizers were also united in their defense of "autonomous personhood"—of the free, self-contained individual who realizes him or herself through conscious action in history and work toward progress. Their conception, sharply different from the Slavophile philosophy of "integral personhood," belongs to what Horujy terms the "anthropocentric personological paradigm" of western philosophy. However, according to Horujy, Westernism never fully elaborated a concept of personhood; in his apt formulation, personhood was not studied as a philosophical problem, but was rather treated as a solution to other problems (typically social ones). He modifies this judgment in the case of Herzen, whose approach was more philosophical. Herzen thought that self-realization is the necessary task of personality, a task accomplished through action. In Herzen's words, only in "rational, morally free and passionately energetic action" do human beings attain "the reality of personhood." As Horujy observes, Herzen based his ethics on the principles of freedom and dignity. His credo, "action is personality itself," may echo Pico's and Kant's idea that human dignity consists in self-determination.

Alexander Herzen receives detailed consideration in chapter 2, by Derek Offord. Until the late 1840s, Herzen retained a generalized Hegelian belief in historical progress. This belief did not survive his emigration to the West, where he witnessed the defeat of western European socialists in the 1848 revolutions. Over the next several years he expounded his concept of "Russian socialism" as an alternative vision of Russia's future, based on values he imputed (following the Slavophiles) to the peasantry. He laid his hopes for Russian socialism on a voluntaristic philosophy of history directed against teleological systems of historical necessity. Herzen set out his new philosophy in *From the Other Shore* (1850), a work often seen, in Offord's words, as "the classic exposition of Herzen's philosophy of history and his thinking on liberty." Offord deals candidly with what he calls the "limitations of Herzen's defense of personhood," especially the Russian thinker's disregard of legal, institutional, and political safeguards of individual liberty and rights.

The Slavophiles had manifested similar limitations, as Horujy indicates. True, Konstantin Aksakov's distinction between "Land" and "State" was based on the idea of "freedom from politics" and on the inviolability of the inner life of the spirit. Hence the Slavophiles' defense of freedom of conscience and expression. These and other liberal elements of Slavophile thought enable Horujy to remark that, "the pathos for freedom, dignity, and the rights of personhood was in no way a monopoly of the Westernizers." But, like Herzen, the Slavophiles did
not recognize that these rights must be firmly guaranteed by law. Aksakov declared: "Guarantees are unnecessary. They are an evil!" With his approach, albeit an extreme one, "juridical standards are completely repudiated," Horuy writes. "The opposition between ethics and rights, between 'inner truth' and 'external truth,' is sharpened to the point of legal nihilism." The examples of the Slavophiles and Herzen (and they are far from the only ones) make clear that Russian humanism was not necessarily liberal in its applications. Liberalism requires not only a humanist focus on the person and human dignity, but also recognition of the value of law. By this measure and others, neither the Slavophiles nor Herzen were liberals.

Alexander II's succession to the throne in 1855 marked the beginning of a new period in Russian intellectual history. This period, usually called the "sixties," is sometimes named the second Russian "enlightenment" (prosveshchenie), a description that suggests a certain similarity between its ideas and eighteenth-century rationalist and naturalist notions of human perfectibility. New currents of Russian radicalism arose as the hopes of the Great Reforms turned to frustration and disappointment. Thinkers such as Nikolai Chernyshevskii, Nikolai Dobroliubov, and Dmitrii Pisarev adopted a perspective comprising various elements of materialism, utilitarianism, realism, and "rational egoism." Their outlook, frequently referred to as "nihilism," was notoriously embodied by Bazarov, the hero of Ivan Turgenev's novel *Fathers and Children*.

Whatever its philosophical flaws, the worldview of the radical intelligentsia, the subject of chapter 3, by Victoria Frede, was surely charged with humanist pathos. These philosophical flaws were significant, however. Frede shows that the materialists' denial of free will prevented them from dealing successfully with the problem of human dignity. Their most formidable critic was the philosopher Pamiil Iurkevich, a professor at the Kiev Theological Academy. Frede notes that his refutation of materialism combined philosophical idealism (Kantianism) with Orthodox Christian theology, a combination that was to be characteristic of Russian religious philosophy of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. 45 (Vladimir Solov'ev studied with Iurkevich, who moved to Moscow University in 1861.) Part of Iurkevich's critique focused specifically on human dignity. He believed, according to Frede, that human beings are created in the image of God and are born with innate ideas, "which are manifestations of their 'godlike' (bogopodobny) souls." Dignity is one of these ideas, and it can only be realized by willing the good: "a philosophical system that denies free will thus excludes dignity," in Frede's summation.

45 Thomas Nemeth, "Karpo and Iurkevich on Kant: Philosophy in Service to Orthodoxy?," *Studies in East European Thought* 45, no. 3 (1993), 169–211.
Positivism formed the general climate of progressive opinion in Russia down to the twentieth century. In its most reductive forms, it took a naturalistic view of the world, asserting that the only reality, or at least the only one that we can know, is the empirical world of positively given sense data. Yet the dominance of positivism was never complete, as Thomas Nemeth shows in chapter 4. Already by the 1870s there was a reaction against “objectivist,” deterministic theories of progress and a renewed “subjectivist” defense of the role of the individual in history. This shift took place with the elaboration of Russian populism (narodnichestvo). The populists’ “subjective method” (or “subjective sociology”) helped to rehabilitate human will, purposiveness, and moral values as real factors in the historical process. To some extent it thus anticipated the turn to ethical idealism and the “revel against positivism” at the end of the century.47

By then, as Nemeth indicates, another current of Russian social thought had gone further in this direction: the revisionist movement within Russian Marxism. The Russian revisionists or “legal Marxists,” led by Pëtr Struve, attempted to use neo-Kantianism to bolster the philosophical foundations of Marxism. In the process they partially recovered the Kantian distinction between “what is” (das Sein) and “what ought to be” (das Sollen) – a distinction that positivism by definition collapses – and so contributed to the critique of positivism even before their full conversion to idealism and liberalism. Their conversion was completed by 1903, when they contributed to the large volume Problems of Idealism, a milestone in the development of Russian philosophy of the Silver Age, as the early twentieth-century Russian cultural renaissance has come to be known.48

Russian literature also played an essential role in preserving and deepening the Russian humanist tradition in the second half of the nineteenth century. From the perspective of the future development of Russian philosophy, Dostoevskii was the most important figure. Already at the age of seventeen, he had committed himself to solving what he called “the mystery of man,” and he devoted his life’s work to the task.49 For him the mystery was not only that human

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beings combine in themselves both human and divine elements, but that the realization of the divine depends on human freedom. The human realization of the divine involves tortuous inner struggle, since the human element is inclined toward the physical world while called toward the spiritual. For Dostoevskii’s Grand Inquisitor, the burden of this struggle is so great that to impose it on human beings is inhumane. For Dostoevskii, not to impose it is inhumane, since without freedom (especially freedom of conscience) humanity cannot realize its highest, divine potential.

Dostoevskii thought freedom the ground of genuine faith. He believed that faith must come from within each person, on “the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1), not externally through the Grand Inquisitor’s instruments of “miracle, mystery, and authority.” But freedom entails the possibility (and abundant historical reality) of moral evil, the ultimate justification of which is beyond human understanding. Dostoevskii’s anguish over the problem of evil led to his messianic vision of a universal Christian brotherhood united by Russia, the one “God-bearing” nation. Utopianism aside (and sometimes not), the genius with which Dostoevskii explored the inscrutable “mystery of man” had a deep impact on Russian philosophy of the Silver Age, especially through his close friend Vladimir Solov’ev, but also through (among the figures considered in this book) Sergei Bulgakov, Nikolai Berdiaev, and Dmitrii Merezhkovskii.

Lev Tolstoi also contributed powerfully to Russian anti-positivism. His major novels, War and Peace, Anna Karenina, and Resurrection, all valued the goal of individual inner self-perfection over the objective of political reform. In his philosophical tract, On Life (1888), Tolstoi made the case that every human being should cultivate “rational consciousness,” a principle of personal economy ordering the passions or “appetites.” In the same tract, he attacked positivists under the label of modern–day “Scribes,” for ruling out any questions about life beyond those pertaining to the “animal existence” of human beings. In his defense of religious anarchism, The Kingdom of God is Within You (1893), Tolstoi elaborated a three-stage theory of history asserting that human beings have moved from an initial period of individualism, through an intermediate stage of social collectivism, to a final period of “divine consciousness” characterized by faith in “the source of eternal, undying life – God.” This theory of history was a deliberate repudiation of August Comte’s positivist scheme, which imagined

52 Tolstoi, O zhizni, pp. 326–338.
historical progress as a move away from “primitive” religious and metaphysical consciousness. Tolstoy’s anti-positivism made him, along with Dostoevskii, a hero to Berdiaev, Bulgakov, Frank, and Struve, who in the 1909 Landmarks (Vékh) anthology celebrated his independence from the irreligious intelligentsia.

METAPHYSICAL IDEALISM: CHICHERIN, SOLOV’EV, AND THE RUSSIAN PANPSYCHISTS

By the end of the nineteenth century, the revolt against positivism that could be detected in certain currents of Russian social thought and literature was well under way in Russian philosophy proper, as Part II of our book shows. The reaction began as early as the 1870s in the metaphysical idealism of Boris Chicherin and Vladimir Solov’ev, the most prominent philosophers of nineteenth-century Russia. Both were vitally concerned to defend human dignity, and both did so on the Kantian foundations of moral autonomy and self-determination.

Chicherin, Russia’s greatest Hegelian philosopher and liberal theorist, was the living link between the “philosophical epoch” of the 1840s and the neoidalist revival of the Silver Age. Among his works, Science and Religion (1879) and Philosophy of Law (1900) were the most influential in this revival. Both volumes are wide-ranging and profound. In them Chicherin presents his mature philosophical conceptions of human nature, religion, society, politics, and history, exploring, along the way, the relationship between God and man, faith and reason, individual and society, and law and liberty. In chapter 5, Gary Hamburg reconstructs Chicherin’s philosophy of history, showing how it achieved a powerful synthesis of Kant’s conception of human dignity and Hegel’s conception of history as the progressive realization of the Absolute. This synthesis largely reinterpreted Hegel in the spirit of classical liberalism, based on the inviolability of persons. Hamburg pays close attention to Chicherin’s Philosophy of Law, the definitive statement of his liberal theory and, arguably, one of the great works of European social thought. It demonstrates that Chicherin, unlike many Russian humanists who also exalted the principle of personhood, had a deep appreciation of the need for its protection under the rule of law.

In 1874, Vladimir Solov’ev defended his master’s thesis, The Crisis in Western Philosophy: Against the Positivists. Within twenty-five years he would be Russia’s greatest religious philosopher. Randall Poole, in chapter 6, focuses on the central concept of Solov’ev’s philosophy, Godmanship (bozhelovechestvo), also translated as “divine humanity” or the “humanity of God.” Godmanship refers to humanity’s divine potential and vocation, the ideal of our divine self-realization in and union with God. Human beings, created in the image of God, are called to realize the divine likeness through positively working for the Kingdom of
God, for universal transformation in the “unity of all” (востинство), in which all will be one in God. Since God-mankind depends on autonomous human activity and self-development, it is, as Nikolai Berdiaev remarked, humanistic in its very conception. At many points Solov'ev's thought recalls the religious humanism of the Renaissance. In 1891, Solov'ev delivered a lecture, “On the Reasons for the Collapse of the Medieval Worldview,” before the Moscow Psychological Society. On this occasion he condemned as “monstrous” the medieval doctrine that the only path to salvation is faith in church dogma, and as “cheap” the idea of “salvation through dead faith and works of piety — works and not work.” True salvation requires, rather, the hard work of self- and social transformation, of assimilating to God’s likeness and achieving deification.

During this period other Russian metaphysical idealists also advanced challenging theories of personhood, but on somewhat different foundations than Chicherin and Solov'ev. The neo-Leibnizian tradition of Russian panpsychism, examined masterfully in chapter 7 by James Scanlan, was founded by Aleksei Kozlov (himself not a personalist) and developed by Lev Lopatin and Nikolai Losskii. All three philosophers advanced a spiritualistic metaphysics that conceived reality as a multiplicity of individual spiritual (or psychic) substances at different stages of development, all grounded in and striving toward the supreme substance, God.

Lopatin designated his system “concrete spiritualism” to emphasize its personalism. Like Kozlov, he criticized Solov'ev for conflating philosophy and religion; he thought faith has no role in philosophy and that reason alone discloses the truth about ultimate reality. In his metaphysics, Lopatin returned to the rationalism of Descartes and Leibniz. Kant had feared that this type of rationalist metaphysics (like Newtonian science) risks infringing upon free will. His system of transcendental idealism reconceptualized nature as empirical experience (transcendentally conditioned by the a priori forms of space

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54 Berdiaev, The Russian Idea, p. 91.
55 Despite its name, the Psychological Society was the first and most important center of the growth of Russian philosophy over the some thirty-seven years of its existence (1885–1923), which roughly coincided with the broader Silver Age. A key factor in its success was its journal, Questions of Philosophy and Psychology (1889–1918), Russia’s first regular, specialized journal in philosophy. The society was led (and its journal was edited) by the idealist philosophers Nikolai Greb, Lev Lopatin, Sergei Trubetskoi, and Solov'ev. Greb was chair from 1888 until his death in 1890; then Lopatin took over until 1921, a year before his own death. Ivan I'm chaired the society in its remaining few years. On it, see the editor’s introduction to Poole, Problems of Idealism, pp. 1–78, and Randall A. Poole, “Moscow Psychological Society” in Edward Craig (ed.), Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy (London: Routledge, 1998–), online version (2003).
and time) in order to permit a transcendent or noumenal sphere beyond those limits, although it also thereby ruled out theoretical knowledge of that sphere. "I . . . found it necessary to deny knowledge," Kant wrote, "in order to make room for faith" — in freedom, immortality, and God. Lopatin's solution to the problem of free will and determinism was his doctrine of "creative causality," which imputed, on the basis of human psychic experience, freedom and creativity to all reality. In other words, he rejected mechanistic determinism in order to save both human free will and his own pre-Kantian metaphysics. It is striking, however, that his system seems to have been built on the premise of Kantian ethics — that dignity consists in self-determination. Thus Lopatin could write of the "infinite dignity of everything spiritual" because he stipulated the "free creativity" of spirit.

RUSSIAN RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY AFTER SOLOV'EV:
BULGAKOV, FLORENSKII, AND FRANK

Part III of our book turns to three major religious philosophers of twentieth-century Russia. In recent years Paul Vailiere has done a great deal to advance our understanding of Russian religious philosophy. His subject here, in chapter 8, is Sergei Bulgakov. Bulgakov's conversion from Marxism to idealism was brought about by his recognition that faith is a basic human need, and that it cannot be satisfied by positivist ideologies. (In chapter 11, Bernice Glattz Rosenthal shows that Dmitrii Merezhkovskii's Christian humanism was based on a similar recognition.) Bulgakov found that Solov'ev's metaphysics of the "unity of all," inspired by Schelling, could do justice to the human need for faith by vindicating its object as transcendent and yet as related to the world. This doctrine was not a form of pantheism, but of panentheism. Bulgakov was most attracted to Solov'ev's idea of Sophia: the Divine Wisdom by which God created the world, the creative principle in God, the unity and divinity of creation. Bulgakov's sophiology took the form of a "cosmodicy," or a demonstration of "the pervasiveness of testimony to God in the world," as Vailiere expresses it. "Cosmodicy," he writes, "is a distinctively modern project in its affirmation of the freedom and dignity of the world."

The idea of Sophia is also essential to Pavel Florenskii's thought, as Steven Cassedy shows in his fascinating and wide-ranging discussion in chapter 9. "So powerfully did Florenskii believe in the venerability of God's creation and

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specifically of humanity that,” Cassedy writes, “he gave us a fourth Person of the Trinity to represent them” – Sophia. Very much like Solov’ev and Bulgakov, Florenskii thought that “God reveals his divinity through his very creation.” Thus, for Florenskii, “to be a humanist is not to abandon faith but to embrace it.” He shared with Pico the conviction that God’s creatures constitute “an eternal divine miracle.”

In chapter 10, Philip J. Swoboda presents a compelling interpretation of Semën Frank’s philosophy as “expressivist humanism.” The expressivist vision of man, according to Swoboda, “affirms the infinite value of each human person as a potential vehicle for the manifestation of unique spiritual content.” In certain respects, however, Frank’s expressivism was, especially in his émigré period, “incompatible with the assumptions of liberal humanism,” most obviously in his ambivalence toward the idea of law. Frank, Bulgakov, and Florenskii all championed the idea of human dignity, but they arrived at no consensus about what type of social philosophy might best promote human freedom, dignity, and the realization of human potential.

RELIGIOUS HUMANISM IN THE RUSSIAN SILVER AGE

In general, as Part IV of our book suggests, the Silver Age was divided between defenders of individual freedom under the rule of law and proponents of one or another vision of human transformation through “positive freedom,” that is, between liberal and radical religious humanists, as Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal calls them in her rich survey of the period (chapter 11). Most of the Silver Age humanists dealt with in this book were indeed “religious” in one sense or another, even Marxist “God-builders” such as Maksim Gor’kii and Anatolii Lunacharskii (see chapters 13 and 15).  

The liberal religious humanists are the subject of chapter 12, by Frances Nethercott. They believed that the ideal of human perfectibility rests on self-realization, which requires a sphere of personal autonomy (freedom from external interference) guaranteed by legally enforced human rights. Three outstanding liberal theorists of the period, Pavel Novgorodsev, Evgenii Trubetskoi, and Sergei Kotliarevskii, were neo-idealist philosophers whose recognition of the value of law stemmed from a theistic conception of human dignity and destiny. Their work, as Nethercott demonstrates, was shaped by the powerful double legacy of Chicherin and Solov’ev. For the liberal humanists, law was an essential spiritualizing force: by removing people from the state of nature and limiting the

59 For a pioneering and highly influential account of Gor’kii and Lunacharskii as “God-builders,” see Kline, Religious and Anti-Religious Thought in Russia, ch. 4.
power of one person over another, it normalized human relations and placed them on the basis of equality. It enabled people to develop as persons and ultimately to realize their divine potential. At the same time (and this is one of Nethercot's main themes) the liberal philosophers maintained that the rule of law itself rests on the spiritual force of a highly developed civic consciousness built through "cultural endeavor."

The "radical" religious humanists formed a larger group, more representative of the Silver Age as a whole. Here were the poets, artists, philosophers, and visionaries whose insight into human creative powers often led to a certain Prometheanism that neglected or denigrated the value of law and incremental progress. These cultural figures, many iconic, are emphasized in Rosenthal's account, and are the subject of chapter 13 by Robert Bird. Bird takes us on an exciting tour of the main venues and attractions of the period's "new religious consciousness." Along the way we encounter, for example, the Marxist Aleksandr Bogdanov's powerful images of a future society as a single super-human being, and we hear him proclaiming, "Man has not yet arrived, but he is... on the horizon." Bird remarks that this faith in the "untapped potential of human imagination" traversed the ideological spectrum; it was a faith in the power of image alone to transform reality. Marxists and modernists alike longed for the total realization of collective human potential, typically through some external agent or event (an eschaton). Perfectibility was not so much an individual autonomous process, as a collective totalizing eschatology. Art, the proletariat, the Russian nation, technology, even sex were all given salvific roles.

The confrontation between these two competing notions of freedom and of human perfectibility, between what might be called liberal and illiberal humanism, was a critical part of Silver Age philosophical and cultural history. It reflected the complex legacy of Vladimir Solov'ev, whose influence on the Silver Age was vast and multifaceted, largely because his syncretic thought could appeal to very different types of thinkers. As Judith Deutsch Kornblatt shows in chapter 14, in a carefully constructed and considered argument, Solov'ev's legacy involves two opposing conceptions of faith and salvation. One, which Kornblatt argues was Solov'ev's own through the end of his life, is faith in humanity and its own salvific power; salvation is our individual responsibility and cannot be achieved without active human participation. The other conception is faith in salvation through external intervention, faith in apocalypse and eschatology, which displaces human agency and responsibility to an external salvific force and awaits redemption. Solov'ev's Silver Age heirs (Kornblatt focuses on the Symbolist poets Valerii Briusov and Aleksandr Blok) imputed the second conception to him on the basis of their pessimistic and apocalyptic readings of the philosopher's "Short Tale of the Antichrist," written in the last year of his life.
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It is easy to see how the tale could be read as Solov’ëv’s repudiation of his earlier faith in humanity, but Kornblatt herself, in a revisionist interpretation, argues that it does not represent a dramatic departure from his lifelong commitment to optimistic humanism. Its overriding message is hope in the “truth and goodness of human interaction.”

CODA

Not the least fateful development of the “positive,” collectivist direction of freedom and perfectibility in Russian humanism was Russian Marxism, the subject of chapter 15 by the eminent Polish historian of ideas Andrzej Walicki. His chapter opens Part V of our book, “Russian Philosophy in Revolution and Exile.” In an incisive analysis that covers complex developments over a sixty-year period, Walicki explains how the “Marxian dream of the total realization of collective human potential, envisioning a totally regenerated human species,” was transformed into the reality of an ideology that “proved deeply inimical to its own humanist ideals.”

Philip T. Grier, in chapter 16, deals with the efforts of three Russian philosophers to combine Hegelian dialectic and Husserlian phenomenology – purely philosophical pursuits in an environment that was rapidly turning deadly for philosophical inquiry. These three philosophical projects succeeded, but at great personal cost to their creators: Ivan Il’in was exiled in 1922, Aleksei Losev was imprisoned and sent to the camps (1930–1933), Gustav Shpet was executed in 1937. Losev had been secretly tonsured as a monk in 1929. In his fealty to the Orthodox mystical tradition of hesychasm, he was a modern Slavophile. Shpet, by contrast, was a modern Westernizer. In Grier’s telling, Shpet swam against the ideological current of his day by advocating the pursuit of philosophy as objective knowledge, “not as morality, not as preaching, not as ‘worldviews.’” He hoped this disinterested philosophical enterprise would help bring about a Russian Renaissance. Yet there was something similar to the Promethean outlook of Bolshevism in Shpet’s attributing to philosophers and artists the historical power to reconstitute or revivify actuality (in the form of social being). In his hermeneutics of discourse, he upheld the dignity of the intellectual as seer, a notion fully compatible with that of the Italian humanists.

Il’in was among the nearly one hundred prominent intellectuals, including most of Russia’s major philosophers, who were forcibly deported from the country in 1922. In chapter 17, Stuart Finkel follows the trajectory of exiled philosophers from Soviet Russia to émigré life in Europe. As Finkel observes, the philosophers tended to view the 1917 Revolution as a spiritual catastrophe, an apocalyptic moment of destruction foretold by Dostoevski and limned by
Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West*. They disagreed bitterly over whether to persist in political opposition to the Soviet regime (Struve and Il' in) or to concentrate on the “spiritual tasks” of self-perfection (Berdiaev and Frank). This debate, Finkel argues, continued the one begun by the *Vekhi* collection in 1909.

Some of the Russian émigrés formed Eurasianism, an intellectual movement usually associated with the assertion of Russian cultural uniqueness and geopolitical might. Martin Beisswenger, in chapter 18, reconceptualizes Eurasianism by demonstrating that religious-philosophical ideas of personhood were central to it. By the mid-1920s, leading Eurasianists actively speculated on the humanist task of affirming the image and likeness of God in both individuals and collective “persons” (e.g., nation, state, church). Lev Karsavin’s concept of Eurasia held out hope for the “ecclesiastization” of the state and the world in general. This hope had Byzantine and Muscovite roots, in the concept of the “symphonic relationship” of church and state. It also resembled the idealized view of society articulated by the Elder Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov*. But it raised serious issues about the protection of individual rights against collective or symphonic “persons,” issues that were at the forefront of Eurasianism’s further development. The tensions within Eurasianism, so ably identified by Beisswenger, testify both to the tensions inherent in Russian philosophical humanism and to the protean vitality of that tradition.

In his landmark 1994 book *Posle pereryva* (*After the Break*), Sergei Horujy put on the post-Soviet philosophical agenda the task of recovering from the Russian emigration the philosophical legacy suppressed by the Bolshevik Revolution, and of reintroducing into the secularized philosophical discourse of the 1990s the rich resources of Orthodox theology. To a remarkable degree and in a relatively short time, Horujy and other Russian philosophers have succeeded in rekindling within Russia academic interest in Russian idealism and religious philosophy. We hope the present volume will augment that interest and spread it in the West, where the history of Russian philosophy has been studied and fully appreciated mainly by specialists. In addition, we hope our book makes clear the degree of fruitful interaction between reason and faith, western-rooted and eastern-oriented humanism, characteristic of Russian philosophy during its “long nineteenth century.” Finally, we hope our book conveys the excellence of the philosophical questions asked by Russian thinkers about the nature of human beings, our intrinsic value, our rights before one another and the state, and our historical lot. No one should expect from Russian philosophy final answers to such questions, even though the answers provided by Russian philosophers are as intelligent as any in identifying the dangers consequent on ignoring or
diminishing human dignity. If nothing else, Russian philosophy teaches us, in Horujy's words, that "history and the cosmos are open," and "this radical openness is truth itself."^{60}

^{60} Khoruzhii [Horujy], Posle pereryva. Puti russkoj filosofii (St. Petersburg: ladone'ervo "Altezia," 1994). p. 13. Horujy adds that "the ultimate meaning of history is being decided at every instant between God and us."
VLADIMIR SOLOV’EV’S PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY: AUTONOMY, DIGNITY, PERFECTIBILITY

RANDALL A. POOLE

Vladimir Solov’ev is widely regarded as Russia’s greatest philosopher, certainly its greatest religious philosopher.1 The focus of this chapter is the essential humanism of his core philosophical concept, Godmanhood (bogochelovechestvo), which incorporates human dignity as a constituent and inviolable principle.2 Solov’ev believed that personhood entails both consciousness of the absolute and the capacity to determine oneself according to that consciousness, i.e., according to absolute ideals. This conception of human nature, or philosophical anthropology, is deeply indebted to Kant. Solov’ev develops it in his three most important philosophical works: Lectures on Godmanhood, Critique of Abstract Principles, and Justification of the Good.3

LIFE, WORKS, CONCEPTS

Vladimir Sergeevich Solov’ev was born in Moscow in 1853, the son of Sergei Solov’ev, the leading Russian historian of his generation. In November 1874 he defended his master’s thesis, The Crisis of Western Philosophy: Against the Positivists.

his first book.4 He began lecturing at Moscow University, but in June 1875 went abroad for research on gnosticism and mysticism at the British Museum. There he had a mystical vision of Sophia, the Divine Wisdom, who directed him to travel to Egypt; in the desert he saw her again. Returning to Moscow in the summer of 1876, Solov’ev resumed teaching and wrote his second book, Philosophical Principles of Integral Knowledge (1877).5 Within a year he moved to St. Petersburg to take a position in the Ministry of Public Education. In early 1878 he delivered his famous Lectures on Godmanhood to audiences of nearly a thousand that included Dostoevskii.6 In April 1880 the young philosopher defended a brilliant doctoral dissertation, Critique of Abstract Principles, and began teaching at St. Petersburg University.7 He was 27 years old.

These early works, all highly theoretical, advance the main outlines of Solov’ev’s philosophical system—a metaphysics of the “unity of all” (vseedinstvo), which conceives the cosmos as the manifestation of the divine absolute in the process of its own becoming or self-realization.8 The unity of all, the return of (perfected) creation to the creator, is to be achieved through Godmanhood, the ideal of humanity’s divine self-realization in and union with God (deification or theosis). Achievement of this ideal requires that human beings work toward “free unity” among the three spheres of life: “free theurgy” in creativity, “free theosophy” in knowledge, and “free theocracy” in social practice.9 Another key element of Solov’ev’s metaphysics of cosmic redemption is Sophia, the subject of his mystical experiences.10 Sophia is the Divine Wisdom by which God created the world, the unity and divinity of creation. Since humanity is the point where creation most reflects its creator, Sophia can be described as ideal humanity, humanity as it ought to be, as conceived by God. Our task, according to Solov’ev, is to perfect ourselves and thus to transfigure the world by embodying the divine, Sophic essence. Indeed, the great theme of his philosophy is human perfectibility.11

Compared to the theoretical focus of his first four books, Solov’ev’s work in the 1880s took a somewhat different direction. On March 1, 1881, Emperor

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8 Solov’ev distinguishes between two poles of the absolute. The first is self-subsistent (God), the second is in the process of becoming (man), “and the full truth can be expressed by the word ‘Godmanhood’.” Kritika otvlechenykh nachal, pp. 315–324 (quotation at p. 323).
9 Filosofskie nachala tsel’nogo znanija, pp. 286–287.
11 It is the first of Solov’ev’s “central teachings” identified by Jonathan Sutton in his The Religious Philosophy of Vladimir Solov’ev: ‘Founda or Reassessment (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988).
Alexander II was assassinated by terrorists. Later that month, Solov'ev gave a public speech in which he appealed to the new tsar, Alexander III, to spare the regicides who had killed his father the death penalty, which Solov'ev regarded as an unconscionable violation of human dignity. Solov'ev's plea was poorly received by both his audience and Alexander III, who, when he heard of the speech, ordered the philosopher to "refrain for a certain time" from lecturing in public. This was a mild measure, but Solov'ev felt it necessary to resign his positions at the Ministry of Public Education and St. Petersburg University. Thenceforth he lived as an independent scholar and public intellectual, devoting himself to his writings.

In the 1880s his works focused on various aspects of his project for establishing a worldwide "free theocracy" in preparation for the Kingdom of God on earth. Disappointment with Russia, which he had imagined to be the messianic agent of universal theocracy, and more generally with the external forms of his theocratic ideal, led Solov'ev to return to philosophy proper in the 1890s. This period culminated with Justification of the Good (1897), his magnum opus. His final work was Three Dialogues on War, Progress and the End of World History, with a Brief Tale of the Anti-Christ (1899–1900). He died on July 31, 1900 at the age of 47.

GODMANHOOD AND THE MEANING OF ABSOLUTE HUMAN VALUE

The central idea of Solov'ev's philosophy is bogochelebchestvo – a term variously translated as Godmanhood, divine humanity, or the humanity of God. The concept's meaning, as conveyed by the teaching of St. Athanasius and...

12 Solov'ev was a lifelong opponent of capital punishment. He wrote devastating critiques of it in his long essay Law and Monstrosity: Essays in Applied Ethics (1897) and in a shorter one, "Retribution (On the Spanish-American War") (1898), a remarkable piece that also deals with another of his abiding concerns: freedom of conscience. Both are included in Vladimir Woronik (ed. and tran.), Politics, Law, and Morality: Essays by V.S. Solov'ev (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. II–133, 171–184.
14 His works of the period include Dukhovnye osnovy zhizni (The Spiritual Foundations of Life) (1882–1884); "Velikiy spor i khristianskaya politika" ("The Great Schism and Christian Politics") (1883); "Izbrannye i khristianskie voprosy" ("The Jews and the Christian Problem") (1884); Istoria i budushchestvo teokratii (The History and Future of Theocracy) (1887); L'Ile russe (1888); La Russie et l'Église universelle (1889); and National'nye voprosy v Rossii (The National Question in Russia), 2 vols. (1888, 1891).
16 Tri vozvazhavaa o voine, progress i konets vremennoi istorii, so vklucheniem kratkoi povesti ob anti-khristse i s prilozhenitmi in Sochinenie sochinenii, vol. 10, pp. 81–225.
17 See the "note on translation" in Valiav, Modern Russian Theology, pp. 11–15.
other church fathers, is that “God became man so that man might become God.” The formula consists of two key elements: kenosis (the humanization of God in the incarnation) and theosis (the deification of man). For Solov’ev, bogochelovechestvo meant both the humanity of God and the (potential) divinity of humanity. The term “Godmanhood,” perhaps better than either the “humanity of God” or “divine humanity,” suggests Solov’ev’s conception of God and man as ultimately one absolute, divine-human being: divinity that is also human (in intrinsically and not only in the incarnation) and humanity that is also divine (by origin and vocation). Crucially, it also conveys the idea of a condition that is to be achieved.

Godmanhood was not an initial dogmatic premise for Solov’ev, but rather the logical conclusion of sound philosophical method. His point of departure was not God but man, specifically human consciousness and morality. He believed that morality — our consciousness of absolute ideals and the capacity to act on them — is not only the most distinctive property of human beings but also our primary testimony to the ultimate nature of reality. He therefore made it the basis of his philosophy. In this respect he followed Kant, whose epistemology (transcendental idealism) was designed to validate moral experience and to demonstrate the possibility of the metaphysical “postulates” he drew from it: God, freedom, and immortality.

18 One of the places Solov’ev quotes St. Athanasius’s formula is his 1883 “Note in Defense of Dostoievski against the Charge of a ‘New’ Christianity,” where he argues (against Konstantin Leon’tev) that Dostoevski’s humanism was truly Christian, that his belief in humanity meant “believing in its capacity for defileation, believing according to the words of Saint Athanasius the Great, that in Christ God became man in order to make man god.” This “Note” is included in Vladimir Westin’s (ed. and trans.), The Heart of Reality: Essays on Beauty, Love, and Ethik ed. by E.S. Solov’ev (University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), pp. 199–204 (quotation at p. 202). Solov’ev knew well the work of the Eastern church fathers, especially Maximus the Confessor. See Richard Gustafson’s seminal essay, “Solov’ev’s Doctrine of Salvation,” in Judith Deutsh Kornblatt and Richard E. Gustafson (eds.), Russian Religious Thought (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), pp. 31–48.


20 E.N. Trubetzkoy’s classic two-volume study of his friend and philosophical mentor emphasizes the primacy of ethics in his philosophy. Mitnozvezdyanie VI. S. Solov’ev, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1913), vol. 1, pp. 107, 121.

21 Kant held that duty and the capacity to act on it (free will or self-determination) indicated that natural necessity was not the sufficient determining cause of every event. He believed that morality was thus grounds for thinking that nature was not “coextensive with the real,” as he puts it in the preface to the second edition of the Critique of Pure Reason. The problem was to show how nature might not extend “everywhere,” as in the Newtonian conception. Kant’s solution was transcendental idealism, which, by reconceptualizing space and time as a priori forms of sensibility or representation (empirical experience) rather than properties of “objective reality” (Kant’s term), left room for a supra-sensible (and thus also theoretically unknowable or “noumenal”) metaphysical reality beyond those limits (nature). Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason (Norman Kuppers Smith (trans.), unabridged edn., New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1965), pp. 465–466, 26, 89. I develop
Vladimir Solov'ev's philosophical anthropology

Solov'ev's method, proceeding up to the divine from analysis of the human, is brilliantly deployed from the beginning of Lectures on Godliness. The first three lectures introduce important aspects of his philosophical anthropology by examining the rise of secular humanism in modern European history. Insofar as modern humanist ideologies such as socialism and positivism proclaim the principle of human dignity, they are right, according to Solov'ev; but they are wrong, he says, in supposing that human beings can be absolute in value while also being only facts among a multitude of other facts. Thus Solov'ev's main criticism of secular humanists is that, in Paul Valliere's formulation, they do not appreciate the implications of their basic assumption. Solov'ev draws out these implications and concludes that the very capacity to conceive ourselves as absolute in value entails the reality of the absolute, i.e., a theistic metaphysics.

The Russian philosopher distinguishes between two aspects of our self-conception. The first is "negative absoluteness," which "consists in the ability to transcend every finite, limited content," never to be satisfied with such content and constantly to strive for more (p. 17). Negative absoluteness describes the nature of consciousness, which is to transcend facts, evaluate everything according to ideals, and strive in our thought and action toward those ideals - morality in the broad sense. It is the basis for human perfectibility or infinite development. Negative absoluteness presupposes a positive end toward which the whole process of infinite development tends; this is "positive absoluteness," the fullness of being or "unity of all." Secular humanists stop at negative absoluteness, since they fail to recognize that the capacity for infinite striving and development - their (and Solov'ev's) precious ideal of human perfectibility - implies the reality of the positive absolute. From this logic Solov'ev draws a striking conclusion: "Belief in oneself, belief in the human person, is at the same time belief in God" (p. 23).

The reasoning behind this conclusion (that negative entails positive absoluteness) is that there is something "unnatural" about our self-conception and human consciousness in general. The idea of "absolute," present in our thought...

Kant's argument in my essay "The Neo-Idealist Reception of Kant in the Moscow Psychological Society," Journal of the History of Ideas 60, no. 2 (April 1999), 310-343. I did not discuss Solov'ev in detail there, but he embraced Kant's approach, as I will try to show here.

22 Vladimir Solovyov, Lectures on Divine Humanity (Peter P Zolotov (trans.), Boris Jakim (rev. and ed.), Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1995), pp. 18-19. Subsequent references to this work will be cited parenthetically in the text. I have at some points modified the translation in accordance with the Russian text (see note 6).

23 Modern Russian Theology, p. 147.

24 Solov'ev retained the basic idea behind positive and negative absoluteness, but reformulated it in his later works. In Justification of the God he refers to it simply as consciousness of absolute perfection (God) and our capacity for perfectibility according to that consciousness (see below).
at all levels whether we consciously recognize it or not, is a striking anomaly in an empirical world of relative facts. Even such evaluations (the world as "empirical" and facts as "relative") demonstrate the inevitability of the absolute perspective of consciousness. It is the nature of the mind to evaluate, and in doing so we rely on absolute, ideal norms. As Solov'ëv writes, "the simple, universally clear, and, one might say, trivial distinction of good from evil, truth from falsehood, beauty from ugliness, already in itself presupposes recognition of the objective and absolute principle in these three spheres of spiritual life" (p. 30). The upshot is that our capacity to evaluate – and to value and perfect ourselves as absolute – when experience confronts us with only facts starkly contradicts the naturalistic (i.e., atheistic) worldview.

The "objective and absolute principle" presupposed by our intellectual, moral, and aesthetic evaluations, toward which we strive in our "negative absoluteness," is, in its highest unity, God. Although Solov'ëv does not refer to Kant, he clearly has in mind the "ideal of pure reason," which the German philosopher, too, called God. According to Solov'ëv, neither the existence of God nor of the external world in general can be proved – it must be taken on faith. Solov'ëv says this for the same reason Kant did: we know only phenomena, not things in themselves, and the forms and concepts of our knowledge are inadequate to establish the actual existence of things apart from our representations of them (pp. 30–31). Solov'ëv does not indicate, as did Kant, that transcendental idealism justifies such faith.

There is another aspect to Solov'ëv's understanding of absolute human value, one that goes to the heart of his concept of Godmanhood. Solov'ëv insists that Godmanhood cannot be achieved without human autonomy: "The divine content," he said in his 1880 inaugural lecture in philosophy at St. Petersburg University, "must be appropriated by a human being from within himself, consciously and freely." Godmanhood can only be a free union between man and God, as he emphasizes in a key passage of Lectures on Godmanhood (p. 17):

Such a union would be impossible if the divine principle were purely external to humanity. It it were not rooted in human personhood itself. If it were not so rooted, our relationship to the divine principle could be only one of involuntary, fateful subordination. The free inner union between the absolute, divine principle and the human person

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25 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, pp. 485–495.
26 Kant's argument is that space and time naturalize or phenomenalize whatever they encompass and so, were they "transcendentally real," would preclude a sure ground of being by turning everything into "mere illusion" (Critique of Pure Reason, p. 89). Transcendental idealism, by contrast, makes possible "faith" in being apart from phenomena (nature), although it also rules out theoretical knowledge (which, according to Kant, depends on the forms of space and time) of such being.
is possible only because the latter also has absolute significance. The human person can
unite with the divine principle freely, from within, only because the person is in a certain
sense divine, or more precisely, participates in Divinity.

The human person "is in a certain sense divine" because our divinity is an
intrinsic potential that must be freely, humanly realized, and this would be
impossible without divine-human equality — the meaning of absolute human
value.28

THE THREE PRINCIPLES OF HUMAN NATURE

Solov'ëv calls human consciousness of the (positive) absolute the divine, reli-
gious, or mystical principle in man. It is one of three principles in his overall
conception of human nature. The other two are the material principle, by which
human beings are part of the natural world, and rational freedom or autonomy
(reason and morality), which is the distinctively human principle, the middle
principle between the divine and material (p. 158). The human principle is
the capacity for self-determination in the direction of either the material or
the divine, the capacity to "become" more (or less) than we presently are, to
perfect (or degrade) ourselves (p. 142). Solov'ëv sees the capability to "become"
as distinctively human. Non-rational beings do not "become," they can only
"be" what they are by nature; their natural capacities are realized over the
course of their life by instinct, not self-determination. God, too, according to
Solov'ëv, can only "be," in that he is already perfect. Only human beings (and
in principle other free rational beings) are capable of "becoming" and therefore
of self-perfection.29 The autonomous human element, as noted above, is an
indispensable component of Godmanhood.

CRITIQUE OF ABSTRACT PRINCIPLES: RATIONAL AUTONOMY
AND FREE THEOCRACY

The conception of human nature (divine-human-natural) that Solov'ëv intro-
duced in Lectures on Godmanhood forms the basic philosophical framework of his

28 Compare to Ernst Cassirer's characterization of Pico della Mirandola's idea of freedom, quoted in
the Introduction to this volume: "Thus when Pico ascribes to man an independent and innate
creative power, he has in this one fundamental respect made man equal to Divinity."

29 He stresses this human capacity to "become" in many of his works. In Justification of the Good he
calls it the "essentially human attribute." See Vladimir Solov'yov, The Justification of the Good: An
Essay on Moral Philosophy (Natalie A. Duddington, trans.), Boris Jakin (ed. and annot.), Grand
(1892-1894), included in Worniuk (ed.), The Heart of Reality, pp. 83-133, especially p. 92; and
subsequent works. Critique of Abstract Principles, written concurrently with Lectures on Godmanhood, is an indispensable exposition of the philosopher’s whole system. An “abstract principle” is one that is abstracted from and mistaken for the whole, whether the whole is person, society, or, ultimately, the “unity of all.” Solov’ëv shows how the material, human, and divine principles can each be abstracted or put in place of the whole. Even so, he was much less concerned with the dangers of rational autonomy (the human principle) being an abstract principle than of it not being firmly included in the whole, between the material and divine principles. Indeed, in many respects the Critique is a defense of human autonomy. Solov’ëv demonstrates that autonomy is the essence of true morality and law, which must themselves be relatively autonomous parts of any social order or whole. The vision of the ideal society that he laid out in the Critique is “free theocracy,” “free” because it purports to respect human autonomy.

The first half of the Critique is devoted to morality and to the social conditions for its realization and development (to pure or “subjective” ethics and to applied or “objective” ethics). Solov’ëv dealt with ethics (practical philosophy) before epistemology and metaphysics (theoretical philosophy) because he thought theory should explicate what moral experience immediately discloses about reality. Later, in Justification of the Good, he defended this approach as the “autonomy of morality” (see below). In the Critique, he indicated that the task of theoretical philosophy, which occupies him in the book’s second part (beyond the scope of this essay), is to demonstrate the objective ontological reality of what Kant called the postulates of practical reason. He says that ethics is thus directly dependent on metaphysics (in the sense of the metaphysical reality of the postulates) and that this was Kant’s own point of view, but, like many other Russian idealists, Solov’ëv was ambivalent about whether Kant held that the postulates are metaphysical truths or merely subjective claims,10 In any case, he had far more confidence in their theoretical certainty than Kant did.

Solov’ëv’s overall emphasis on the primacy of ethics is Kantian, as is his specific conception of the nature of morality. He begins his account with a critique of empiricist theories of ethics (hedonism, eudaemonism, altruism), which seek to derive the end or aim of moral activity from the data of sense experience, i.e., from observable human behavior.11 These ethical theories (altruism in particular) may explain the psychological origins or motives of a moral act, but, according to Solov’ëv, they cannot account for what is specifically moral about it, for its quality of being normative or obligatory, since this can only be determined a priori by pure reason. Hence the psychological or “material”

principle in morality must be brought under the rational principle, and empirical morality must be supplemented by rational ethics.  

The rational principle in morality, the distinctively human one, is what gives a moral act its specifically moral quality. Solov’ev’s conception of rational ethics relies wholly on Kant, whose *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* he closely paraphrased at length. Kant’s central idea is the autonomy of the will, the will’s self-determination by duty or the moral law (“ought,” *das Sollen*), which it recognizes as its own. Heteronomy, by contrast, is the will’s determination by sources (or objects) external to the moral law, such as ordinary natural impulses and inclinations. “In that case,” Kant writes, “the will does not give itself the law, but the object does so in virtue of its relation to the will.” Solov’ev embraced Kant’s conception, declaring the autonomy of the will to be the “essence of morality.” He continues that “only through the concept of duty does morality cease to be an instinct,” as with empiricist theories, “and become a rational conviction.” Here he paraphrased Kant’s proposition that “duty is the necessity to act out of reverence for the law.”

The moral law holds, Kant says, not only for human beings but for all rational beings as such. There may be rational beings whose will is determined solely by reason and its apprehension of the good; human beings are not among them, since our will is also subject to empirical determination (it may be either autonomous or heteronomous). For us, therefore, the moral law takes the form of a command or imperative, specifically the categorical imperative: “Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.”

Kant formulates the categorical imperative not only in terms of the form but also in terms of the ends or objects of morality. These ends are the same rational beings whose will ought to and can be self-determined by the moral law. He defines these rational beings as *persons* or ends-in-themselves. They are absolute values in themselves, “for unless this is so, nothing at all of absolute value would

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33 *Ibid.* pp. 44–51. In fact, much of what he presents as a paraphrase of Kant is a direct translation of key passages from the *Groundwork*.  
35 *Kritik*, p. 44.  
37 *Groundwork*, p. 68; *Kritik*, p. 49. Although Solov’ev, like Kant, regards duty as necessary for morality, he does not think that only acts done solely from duty have moral worth (a view he attributes to Kant). Duty and natural inclination may coincide in the same act, he says, and this not only does not diminish but increases its moral value (*Kritik*, p. 65). In this way he tries to reconcile the natural feeling of compassion (altruism) with the categorical imperative.  
38 *Groundwork*, p. 76.  
be found anywhere." They words Solov'ëv clearly took to heart in writing about the meaning of absolute human value in *Lectures on Godmanhood*. He also quotes, in the *Critique*, Kant's famous second formulmation of the categorical imperative: "Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end." Kant's third formulation is "the Idea of the will of every rational being as a will which makes universal law."

The categorical imperative leads to Kant's "very fruitful concept" of the kingdom of ends, which Solov'ëv calls the ultimate aim of all moral action. Citizens of the kingdom of ends are self-legislating in that their will mandates only universal laws, to which they themselves are, of course, subject. Autonomy, Kant stresses, is the ground of their intrinsic value or dignity. The kingdom of ends made a deep impression on Solov'ëv. "If every subject is a moral agent," he writes, "and everyone else as an end-in-itself is the object of its action, then the general result of the moral activity of all subjects will be their organic unity in the kingdom of ends." Kant's kingdom of ends closely resembles Solov'ëv's own vision of the ideal society (free theocracy), which in the preface to the *Critique* he describes as the practical "unity of all" (vnapredstvo), "by virtue of which all are the end... for each and each for all."

It is clear that Solov'ëv's concept of rational autonomy – the middle, distinctively human principle in his overall conception of human nature – is deeply indebted to Kant's ethics, in two ways. First, Kant's idea of the autonomy of the will is the core notion of human freedom that Solov'ëv adopts in his own work. Secondly, Kant's idea that human dignity consists in rational autonomy, that is, in self-determination by consciousness of "ought" (the moral law) – as Kant directly puts it, morality "is the only thing which has dignity" – is Solov'ëv's basic understanding as well. For Solov'ëv, the divine or religious

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41 *Groundwork*, p. 96; *Kritika*, p. 58.
42 *Groundwork*, p. 96, italics omitted; *Kritika*, p. 58. Solov'ëv argues that Kant's distinction between rational and non-rational beings is artificial and may not be valid from the noumenal point of view, and that therefore all beings, whether we recognize them as rational or not, ought to be treated as ends-in-themselves. Accordingly he reformulates Kant's second principle as follows: "Act in such a way that all beings are the end and not only the means of your activity" (*Kritika*, pp. 69-70).
43 *Groundwork*, p. 98, italics omitted; *Kritika*, p. 59.
44 The quoted phrase is Kant's (*Groundwork*, p. 100), but Solov'ëv presents it as his own.
45 *Kritika*, pp. 70, 114, 116.
46 *Groundwork*, pp. 100-103.
47 *Kritika*, p. 70.
49 Kant treated autonomy and free will synonymously, writing that "a free will and a will under moral laws are one and the same." *Groundwork*, p. 114. Solov'ëv devotes two chapters to the problem of free will and Kant's solution, again presenting his direct translations of Kant (in this case *Critique of Pure Reason and Critique of Practical Reason*) as a paraphrase (*Kritika*, pp. 89-110).
principle in human nature is not, by itself, the source of human dignity. The real source is the human principle of autonomy, or self-determination according to our consciousness of the absolute or divine. In *Lectures on Godmanhood*, Solov'ëv affirms absolute human value, human divinity, and divine-human equality, but the core of human dignity is autonomy, the capacity for the self-realization of our intrinsic divine potential – the capacity to realize God within ourselves, to become divine (theosis).\(^5\) Were this realization externally rather than internally determined (heteronomously rather than autonomously), human dignity would be deprived of its basis. “Salvation” apart from free will, by external divine agency (grace), as in mainstream Christian understandings of salvation since Augustine, would violate human dignity or at any rate be accomplished past it.\(^5\) For this reason, the source of human dignity, according to Solov'ëv, is not God but Godmanhood. This is the humanist thread that runs through his philosophy.

We know that both Kant and Solov'ëv held consciousness of moral duty, of the absolute principle(s) by which the will is self-determining, to be grounds for theistic belief: the German philosopher referred to the metaphysical postulates and the Russian to the “positive absolute.” It is important to appreciate the direction of their argument. Both philosophers thought that our moral ideals suppose a higher metaphysical reality, and that the very presence of these ideals and their hold over us are sure testimony to that reality. While neither philosopher could conceive of human dignity without God, both maintained that the idea of God is entailed by (or follows from) human dignity, and both insisted on that logical sequence. Solov'ëv was a mystic whose life and thought were full of divine presence, yet he was no less concerned than Kant to prevent autonomy (and hence human dignity) from being overwhelmed by God. This is an intricate point.

Kant makes it in a striking passage, which Solov'ëv quotes, in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*. Kant is writing that morality cannot, of course, be derived from examples:

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\(^5\) This connection between human dignity and theosis is most explicit in *Justification of the Good* (see below).

\(^5\) Orthodox theology in general has not drawn the sharp opposition between (human) nature and grace that has characterized much of western Christian thought. See Vollmer, *Introduction to the Modern Orthodox Tradition* and *Vladimir Soloviev* in *The Teachings of Modern Christianity on Law, Politics, and Human Nature*, vol. 1, pp. 508, 514. For Solov'ëv, “grace” comes as human beings freely perfect themselves and is a result of that process. See, for example, *Istoriia i budushchest' sovetskii* in *Sbornik sochinenii*, vol. 4, pp. 337–342.
Even the Holy One of the gospel must first be compared with our ideal of moral perfection before we can recognize him to be such. He [Jesus] also says of himself: "Why callest thou me (whom thou seest) good? There is none good (the archetype of the good) but one, that is, God (whom thou seest not)." But where do we get the concept of God as the highest good? Solely from the idea of moral perfection, which reason traces a priori and conjoins inseparably with the concept of a free will. Imitation has no place in morality.  

These lines powerfully capture the distinction between autonomy and heteronomy. The moral law or the good must be recognized from within if human autonomy and dignity are to be preserved. For this reason, God must not be "seen," as in the claims of miracle or revelation, but rather experienced from within, through faith.

Solov'ev leaves Kant's passage without comment, but the reasoning underlying it was integral to his thought. The principle of autonomy led him to downplay or reconceptualize the role of miracle, revelation, and dogma in religion, all of which, he feared, risked undermining true faith by purporting to manifest the divine as if it were something external and knowable as a positive fact. Like Dostoevskii, Solov'ev understood that miracles can enslave, impairing the free, human realization of the divine. This understanding decisively shaped Solov'ev's Christology. In Lectures on Godliness he writes that "strictly speaking, the incarnation of Divinity is not miraculous, that is, it is not alien to the general order of being" (p. 157). In his 1891 speech "The Collapse of the Medieval Worldview," he comments on Luke 9: 49–56 as follows: "James and John did not know the spirit of Christ, and they did not know it just because they believed above all in His external miraculous power. Such power there was, but it was not the essential thing." The Russian philosopher closest to Solov'ev, Evgenii Trubetskoi, expressed the spirit of Solov'ev's Christology by writing: "Christ's complete sacrifice saves man not as sorcery from outside, but as spiritual influence liberating him from inside and transforming his nature only on the condition of the autonomous self-determination of his will."

Autonomy is the essence of morality, but morality cannot be realized in a vacuum, by the autonomous subject on his or her own. The moral will must have an object or end, which for Kant is other persons and for Solov'ev all living

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53 Groundwork, p. 75; Kritik, p. 51. Solov'ev does not quote the last sentence. The biblical verses Kant quotes are in the Synoptic Gospels: Mark 10:18; Matthew 19:17; and Luke 18:19.
54 One of the many places Solov'ev specifies his view that true faith cannot be coerced but rests on "the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1) is his essay "The Jews and the Christian Problem" (1884), which is translated in part in Frank (ed.), A Solovyov Anthology (here, p. 112).
55 The speech is translated in A Solovyov Anthology (quotation at p. 62).
56 E.N. Trubetskoi, Svyati zhizni (Berlin: Steele, 1922), p. 204 (1st edn., Moscow, 1918).
beings, treated as ends-in-themselves. Morality thus presupposes society, ideally
the kingdom of ends; thus Solov’ev passes from “subjective” to “objective”
ethics. He always insisted that human dignity and potential are realized in
society and develop in history. The task is to clarify the social ideal, a vision of
the normative society adequate to the ever fuller realization of human dignity.57

In trying to meet this task, social philosophy is as prone to abstractions as
pure ethics is. In both cases Solov’ev concentrates, first, on what happens when
the material principle is abstracted and taken for the whole. In “subjective
ethics” the result, as we have seen, is empiricist theories that miss the essence
of morality. In “objective ethics” the result is “abstract economism,” either
economic individualism (capitalism or “plutocracy”) or economic collectivism
(socialism).58 “Both standpoints,” in Walicki’s summary, “are equally immoral
because both reduce man to homo economicus, instead of giving him the status of
a person.”59 In social philosophy no less than in pure ethics Solov’ev empha-
sized the importance of subordinating the material principle to the human
principle.

In Solov’ev’s social philosophy, the principle of rational autonomy takes the
form of law, based on recognition that human beings are persons, ends-in-
themselves, and bearers of rights.60 In Valliere’s felicitous expression, “law is
grounded in metaphysical personhood (freedom and reason), the inalienable
glory of the human being.”61 The virtue of law, according to Solov’ev, is that
it makes possible the realization of all higher potentials of human nature, for it
is the very condition of civilized life and peaceful society. By removing people
from the state of nature, where the strong brutalize the weak and themselves
in the process, law equalizes human relations and enables people to develop as
persons.62 This was Solov’ev’s ultimate justification of law and, more generally,
of “objective ethics.”

Law is an essential but not the highest principle of Solov’ev’s social philosophy.
Its domain is the means by which people pursue their ends, but not the ends
themselves. In the Critique, he writes that the equality of all before the law
actually means that “all are equally limited by law, or all equally limit each
other; this means there is no inner or positive unity among them, only their

59  Andzej Walicki, Legal Philosophies of Russian Liberalism (Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 182–
183.
60  Kritika, pp. 130–140.
61  “Vladimir Solov’ev,” p. 346. A comprehensive account of Solov’ev’s legal philosophy can be found
in Andzej Walicki, Legal Philosophies of Russian Liberalism, pp. 165–212. Solov’ev’s essay Law and
Morality: Essays in Applied Ethics serves as a good overall statement of his philosophy of law (Wozniak
correct division and demarcation." Only the divine or mystical principle in human nature — "by virtue of which all members of society are not limits for each other, but rather internally fulfill each other in the free unity of spiritual love" — can provide inner, positive unity among people. This principle is realized in the church. "Thus the normative society," according to Solov'ev, "has as its foundation a spiritual union or the church, which defines its absolute ends." But the realization of the divine principle in society must be approached freely and consciously; it cannot be based on clerical authority or blind faith; and it must fully respect the human principle of rational autonomy, both in morality (where it takes the form of freedom of conscience, which Solov'ev consistently championed) and law. "Thus the true, normative society must be defined as free theocracy." This was Solov'ev's social ideal, the way to the realization of humanity's divine potential (Godmanhood).

The meaning of Solov'ev's theocratic ideal has long vexed scholars. A society freely united in love of God, all of whose members seek to fulfill each other in that love, is one that has attained a vastly higher level of moral development than any in Solov'ev's day or ours. The Russian philosopher may have wanted to suggest that the Kingdom of God would not be possible until, at least, "free theocracy" was. In any case, Solov'ev believed that the establishment of free theocracy — the Christianization of life culminating in the final triumph of the Kingdom of God — rested on the reunification of the church. Solov'ev devoted himself to this cause (ecumenism, as it would come to be called) in the 1880s. He even had an operational plan to make his vision a reality: Christendom was to be reunited by an alliance between the Russian emperor, Alexander III, and Pope Leo XIII. Nowhere, perhaps, is it more clear that

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68 The most sophisticated and sensitive treatment of Solov'ev's ideal of free theocracy can be found in Paul Vilière's works, Modern Russian Theology, especially pp. 127–137, and "Vladimir Solov'ev," pp. 547–551.
69 The first of whom was Boris Chicherin, whose Mystizm v nauke (1880) is a book-length critique of Solov'ev's dissertation.
70 Kovalyev, Dostoevsky and Soloviev, p. 115. Vilière proposes that "theocracy" may be a better name than "theocracy" for Solov'ev's ideal ("Vladimir Soloviev," pp. 550–551).
71 His first and most important work laying out his conception of the church and ideal of church unity is "The Great Schism and Christian Politics" (1883), translated in part in Frank (ed.) A Soloviev Anthology, pp. 75–101. In it he applies his tripartite model of human nature to the church. Eastern Christianity represents the divine element and western Christianity the human, but the historical development of each has been one-sided or "abstract." The ideal of the church, in contrast to these historical distortions, is the free inner union of both the divine and human elements.
Solov'ev, the mystic, had difficulty distinguishing between this world and the next one.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE GOOD: MORAL EXPERIENCE
AND ITS AUTONOMY

In the 1890s Solov'ev grew disillusioned with his practical (or so he had imagined) plans for theocracy, though never with the ideal itself. He returned to the type of philosophical work that had engaged him a decade earlier. By common consensus, his Justification of the Good, which appeared in 1897, is the most important Russian work of moral philosophy. Arguably it is one of the great modern works of ethics and religious philosophy. In it we find Solov'ev's most powerful defense of human dignity.

Justification of the Good is divided into three parts, “The Good in Human Nature,” “The Good from God,” and “The Good through Human History.” In the first part Solov'ev applies the three principles of human nature to an analysis of moral experience. He identifies three “primary data of morality”: shame, compassion, and reverence. Shame corresponds to the material principle in human nature, compassion to the purely human, and reverence to the divine. Shame indicates that human beings are not merely material beings, but something other and higher, since we could not be ashamed of our material nature were we identical with it. As Solov'ev puts it, “I am ashamed, therefore I exist” (p. 27). He believed shame to be the root of morality and the source of conscience. Compassion is the feeling of solidarity with other animate beings. It is the basis of the moral relation of equality and the rational principle of justice. Reverence is the moral basis of religion.

Solov'ev calls shame, compassion, and reverence the “primary data of morality” because they are immediately given in moral experience and are irreducible. In moral experience we are directly conscious of ourselves as supra-material beings, of fellow persons, and of God. These are not representations or phenomena but actual realities (pp. 140–143). Solov'ev insists that we cannot doubt the reality of what is given in moral experience, despite theoretical arguments against the existence of God, other selves, and the external world. He took such arguments seriously on their own terms; critical philosophy had demonstrated the difficulty of proving the reality behind sense phenomena. Solov'ev held

70 Conceived as a new edition of Critique of Abstract Principles, the project grew into a new book. Page references will be cited parenthetically in the text to Jakim (ed.), The Justification of the Good.
71 Solov'ev's views on this point changed somewhat between Lectures on God's Nature and Justification of the Good. In the first work he held that the existence of both God and the external world could
that moral experience discloses reality in a more reliable way than empirical experience or theoretical philosophy; hence the importance of the autonomy of morality.

Solov'ëv thought that moral experience is our primary guide to the nature of reality, but he assigned reason an indispensable role in working moral data into general, indeed universal and necessary, principles. This role is perhaps most obvious in ethics itself (pp. 35–36). In Walicki's apt formulation of Solov'ëv's position, "It is only possible to speak of ethics when reason deduces the inner ethical content from the natural data and confirms it as a categorical imperative independent of its psychological foundations."72 Since the primary material of reason in the development of ethics is moral experience, not revealed religion or theoretical metaphysics, Solov'ëv defended the autonomy of ethics relative to them.73 But in a real sense he held that moral experience, as he broadly defined it, is the foundation not only of ethics but also of religion and metaphysics; here as well reason works with the primary data of morality, which includes religious experience (reverence) or, as he also called it, consciousness of the absolute. Reason in these spheres, theology and metaphysics, may be more or less adequate to moral-religious experience, or it may lose the experience altogether, but "the most false and absurd theological doctrine cannot prevent anyone from experiencing the Divine, nor cause anyone to doubt the reality of what is given in experience" (p. 142).

The autonomy of morality is a concept most often associated with Kant. By it the German philosopher meant, as we have seen, the autonomy of the will, its self-determination by the moral law. Solov'ëv embraced Kant's conception in Justification of the Good no less than in Critique of Abstract Principles, writing in the latter work that it "is one of the greatest achievements of the human mind" (p. 135). At the same time, the Russian philosopher stressed that the moral law rests on metaphysical premises, Kant's postulates of practical reason. Solov'ëv claimed that the postulates are undermined by transcendental idealism and so are arbitrary elements of Kant's system. He offered his own concept of moral autonomy as a remedy: "God and the soul are not the postulates of the moral

be taken only on faith (p. 32). By faith in the external would be meant the assumption that it is real beyond the phenomena of our sense experience. This use of the term "faith" could not strictly apply to God since God is not a phenomenon. In Justification of the Good Solov'ëv adopts the approach that the data of moral experience are immediately given (that is, not mediated by space and time) and therefore do not need to be taken on faith — we can be more sure of their reality than of empirical data, which are so mediated.

72 Walicki, Legal Philosophies of Russian Liberalism, p. 194.
73 His introduction to Justification of the Good is entitled "Moral Philosophy as an Independent Science." Here he refers to the authority of St. Paul, who wrote that people can do good regardless of their religion because the moral or natural law is "written in their hearts" (Romans 2:14–15).
law, but the direct creative forces of moral reality,” ones that are immediately given in moral experience and therefore need not be merely “postulated” (p. 138).  

**JUSTIFICATION OF THE GOOD: HUMAN PERFECTIBILITY IN THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD**

Solov’ëv regarded religious experience (reverence) as a very important component of moral experience, so much so that his overall conception is really moral-religious experience. Part II of *Justification of the Good*, “The Good from God,” develops this aspect of his moral philosophy. Throughout he emphasizes the immediacy and authenticity of religious experience. “The reality of the divine is not a deduction from religious experience but the content of it...God is in us, therefore He is” (p. 144). This conviction in the veracity of moral-religious experience as testimony to the ultimate nature of reality is, as I have stressed, the foundation of his whole philosophy.

Solov’ëv divides the content of religious experience into three constituent elements: consciousness of God as absolute perfection, consciousness of our own imperfection, and conscious striving toward divine perfection. Our consciousness of divine perfection is the “image of God” in us; our striving to perfect ourselves according to that image is our “likeness” to God (p. 145). This type of dynamic, synergetic interpretation of the “image and likeness” verses had been advanced by Christian humanists since the Eastern church fathers (see the Introduction to this volume). In *Justification of the Good*, Solov’ëv also refers to Matthew 5:48 (“Be perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect”) but explains that the command can only be accomplished by the process of becoming perfect (perfectibility), so that “be perfect” actually means “become perfect” (p. 147).

In a remarkable statement that ties together several strands of his argument, Russia’s greatest religious philosopher declares (p. 151):

The concept of God that reason deduces from what is given in true religious experience is so clear and definite that we always can know, if we wish to, what God wants from us. In the first place, God wants us to be conformable to and like Him. We must manifest our inner kinship with the divine, our power and determination to attain free perfection. This idea can be expressed in the form of the following rule: *Have God in you.*

Solov’ëv now explicitly defines human dignity as consisting in our consciousness of absolute perfection (the image of God) and in our striving to perfect  

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74 I believe Solov’ëv drew too sharp an opposition here between his position and Kant’s.
ourselves (the likeness of God) (p. 152). He calls the image of God the power of representation (of absolute perfection) and the likeness of God the power of striving (to achieve it). This “double infinity” belongs to every person. “It is in this that the absolute significance, dignity, and worth of human personhood consist, and this is the basis of its inalienable rights” (p. 176). Further, the human person contains an element of intrinsic value, “which can never be merely a means — namely, the possibility, inherent in it, of infinite perfection through apprehending and assimilating [vospriiatie i usvoenie] the absolute fullness of being” (p. 196). And in perhaps the most capacious lines from Justification of the Good, Solov’ëv writes, “The absolute value of man is based . . . upon the possibility inherent in his reason and his will of infinitely approaching perfection or, according to the patristic expression, the possibility of becoming divine (theosis)” (p. 290).

Human autonomy, dignity, and perfectibility are the conditions of Godmanhood or the Kingdom of God. Solov’ëv insists that the Kingdom of God is a human project: it cannot be expected by the immediate action of God, for “God has never acted immediately” — a striking comment meant to reinforce the necessity of free human participation in God’s work. “In man’s consciousness and his freedom is the inner possibility for each human being to stand in an independent relation to God,” Solov’ëv writes, “and therefore to be His direct end [isel’], to be a citizen possessed of full rights in the kingdom of ends” (p. 150). The “kingdom of ends” is a very significant reference in this context. It is Kant’s “very fruitful concept,” which Solov’ëv explicated and embraced as his own in Critique of Abstract Principles. In Justification of the Good, Solov’ëv’s point is that the Kingdom of God can be achieved only through the kingdom of ends. “Universal history is the realization of this possibility for everyone,” he declares. “Man who takes part in it attains to actual perfection through his own experience, through his interaction with other human beings. This perfection attained by himself, this full, conscious, and free union with the Divine, is precisely that which God ultimately wants — the unconditional good” (p. 150). Solov’ëv’s premise throughout is that an achieved perfection is greater than one that is bestowed.75

The gradual realization of human potential in history, the process of human perfectibility and striving toward Godmanhood, is called progress. It is the subject of Part III of Justification of the Good, “The Good through Human History.” The fundamental principle of Solov’ëv’s social philosophy is human dignity, the “moral norm of social life,” as he calls one of his chapters. The just

75 Sutton, The Religious Philosophy of Vladimir Solov’ëv, pp. 74–75, demonstrates that Solov’ëv was indebted to Schelling on this central point.
society ought to recognize that each of its members has the right to a dignified or worthy existence, and it ought to materially provide, where necessary, for this right (pp. 296–298, 306). In this belief that the state ought to guarantee a certain minimum welfare for its members, in his protest against dehumanizing social conditions and his concern for the poor and urban working classes, Solov'ev was a modern “new” liberal. His views on criminal justice, including his devastating critique of the death penalty, are also quite modern and entirely consistent with the “moral norm” of human dignity.

Progress appears to be the very concept of the “justification of the good” and to explain why humanity was not created perfect, why the Kingdom of God is our task rather than God’s gift. “Perfection,” according to Solov’ev, “is not a thing which one person can make a gift of to another; it is an inner condition attainable through one’s own experience alone” (pp. 150–151). That Godmanhood is an ideal to be achieved can only mean that perfectibility is itself the highest good and that it is God’s justification for permitting (or enabling) the whole process. If so, then Solov’ev’s “justification of the good” is a type of theodicy. In his own formulation: on the one hand, God permits evil since to do otherwise would violate freedom and be a greater evil, “for it would render perfect (i.e., free) good impossible in the world; on the other hand, God permits evil inasmuch as it is possible for His Wisdom to extract from evil a greater good or the greatest possible perfection” (p. 152). Possible for His Wisdom, not ours. What remains for us is faith and work. As Solov’ev expressed it in his last words, “Hard is the work of the Lord” — our work, and it continues.


Solov’ev writes that in God there can be no process of becoming perfect, only “eternal and unchangeable” perfection (p. 150). This statement is difficult to square with Solov’ev’s overall philosophical approach. If infinite perfection, one that transcends itself and increases in perfection, is greater than one that is “eternal and unchangeable,” then that must be God (as the greatest possible perfection). Many of Solov’ev’s uses of the term “absolute” imply “infinite absolute,” and the very concept of Godmanhood surely suggests that God is enriched in the process of our perfection. This problem may explain Solov’ev’s introduction of two poles into the absolute (see note 8). The logic of Godmanhood anticipates process theology.


Quoted by Frank, A Solov’ev Anthology, p. 27.