Review Essay

Nineteenth-Century Russian Liberalism
Ideals and Realities

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Liberalism in Russia has long been a topic of special interest among historians, perhaps most of all because of its direct bearing on the accursed questions of the fate of the tsarist regime and of the historical alternatives to autocracy, tsarist or communist. The liberal alternative was thought to be clearly the better one even if it was historically unlikely, the one that ought to have been realized, even though it was not (and even if it could not have been). Underlying this contention is the claim that liberalism is normative and not merely another ideology. What is behind this claim to normativity?

Liberalism is a political philosophy based on human rights. It maintains that the highest value of social and political life is the human person. The intrinsic value of the human person is the principle of human dignity, the idea that every person is an end-in-itself who ought never to be treated merely as a means to other ends. Human dignity is the source or ground of natural

or human rights. Liberalism stipulates that such rights are to be guaranteed and protected by the rule of law, which limits the power of one person over another and the power of the state over its subjects. In the final instance, it is civil society (the body of citizens who recognize their own and one another’s rights and who are able and willing to enforce such rights through civic action) which ensures that the state fulfills its purpose of enforcing, and not itself violating, the rule of law. The premise that the individual human person is an intrinsic, insuperable value is what makes liberalism normative. On that premise, it has no contenders for our reasonable allegiance. Who would disagree with liberal purposes—the highest possible self-realization and fulfillment of every person? Yet the social, economic, and political structures and institutions that are compatible with or best promote those purposes remain matters of debate.

Liberalism took shape in the European Enlightenment. The French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen contains one famous formulation of the basic liberal principle: “The aim of every political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man.” When did liberalism begin in Russia, and who were the first Russian liberals? There are two basic sides to this debate. The first finds the origins of Russian liberalism in the development of a set of ideas and values, while the second looks for intentional political programs or plans for reform that sought to transform liberal ideas into reality and that had some realistic prospect of accomplishing their aims. The first—more philosophical—approach locates the beginning of Russian liberalism earlier, perhaps as early as the adoption of Enlightenment ideas by figures such as Nikolai Novikov and Aleksandr Radischchev, and certainly not later than the 1840s with the liberal Westernizers. The second—more political—approach typically delays it, most

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plausibly to the accession of Alexander II and the era of the Great Reforms, or even later. Marc Raeff, for example, argued for a late start:

We are able … to discover the existence, analyze the nature, and trace the development of individual specific theoretical elements of liberalism (individualism, natural law, economic theories); but their existence did not make for liberalism as a political or social program. After all, what matters is not the individual concept or idea but the dynamic relationship in which it finds itself to other ideas and its historical environment. It is my belief that in Russia, at least until the 1880’s, the relationship between liberal concepts and historical circumstances was an inert one.\(^4\)

Raeff was reacting not only to abstract philosophical approaches but also to historians such as Victor Leontovitsch, who maintained that Catherine II’s reforms marked the beginning of Russian political liberalism.\(^5\) But to return to the distinction between the two main approaches: the first approach suggests that the history of Russian liberalism can be divided into at least two stages—a purely intellectual one followed by a political one once structural reform became possible—while the second approach starts with political or programmatic criteria. Both Julia Berest and Konstantin Shneider explicitly position their books within this historical debate. Berest takes the first approach and Shneider takes the second. Anton Fedyashin is not directly concerned with the problem of origins, as his book deals with a somewhat later period and with liberalism conceived less as philosophical theory or as high politics than as local social and economic development.

Berest’s position within this historical debate is clear even from the title of her book, *The Emergence of Russian Liberalism*. The liberalism that, according to her, emerged in the first decades of the 19th century was an intellectual and cultural one that cultivated a set of values and philosophical ideas. Its abeyance of politics is no reason to slight its significance, she writes, for as a philosophy of life, “liberalism was espoused by many educated Russians, who succeeded in creating the elements of a civil society despite the pressures


of a paternalistic monarchy. Their moral independence and critical attitude toward the government could not but undermine the autocracy’s power. For Russia, it was not a small achievement” (7). Long deprived of political outlets, Russian liberalism “found expression in artistic, literary, and scholarly forms that exalted the idea of human dignity and individuality” (8). It helped produce a humane culture, as Derek Offord also has shown. Its rich philosophical development, as if to compensate for its weak social and political position, remained a distinctive, deep feature of the Russian liberal tradition.

Aleksandr Petrovich Kunitsyn (1783–1840) was one of the founders of that tradition, as Berest clearly demonstrates in her excellent intellectual biography. She identifies him as one of the earliest, if not the earliest, Russian theorist of “liberal individualism,” a term she uses to emphasize his defense of human dignity. He was a principled champion of negative liberty, “the right of the individual to act freely within his private domain, the right to choose his occupation, and, ultimately the right to shape his life within the limits set by law and the moral principles embodied in the Kantian categorical imperative. Kunitsyn rightly understood Kant’s concept of dignity as applying to all human beings without regard to their social status or economic situation” (4). Kant was one major source of his liberal philosophy. Another was Adam Smith, whose *Wealth of Nations* appeared in a government-sponsored Russian translation between 1802 and 1806 and was widely read. Kunitsyn’s commitment to individual autonomy, civil rights, and the rule of law; his unqualified acceptance of private property, the free market, and the principle of laissez-faire; and his recognition that Russian liberalism depended ultimately on the growth of civil society—all make him a direct predecessor of Russia’s later, more influential liberal thinkers, in particular of Boris Chicherin (as Berest might have indicated).

Berest’s attention to Kunitsyn’s Kantianism is one of the strengths of her study. A central part of his liberal theory was his Kantian conception of natural law, which he developed in his teaching and in his major work, *Pravo estestvennoe* (Natural Law, 1818–20). His liberal approach was an innovation compared to the more absolutist, cameralist tradition of natural law associated with Christian Wolff, which tradition had been taught in Russia since the opening of the Academy of Sciences in 1726 (Peter the Great had been advised by Wolff and Leibniz). Berest devotes the last three of the seven chapters of her book to the teaching of natural law in Russia and to Kunitsyn’s book and its fate (it was banned in 1821). Her account clearly shows that Kunitsyn’s

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teaching was part of what Richard Wortman called “the development of a Russian legal consciousness” and that his book was a forerunner of the later legal philosophies of Russian liberalism analyzed by Andrzej Walicki.\footnote{Richard S. Wortman, \textit{The Development of a Russian Legal Consciousness} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976); Andrzej Walicki, \textit{Legal Philosophies of Russian Liberalism} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). Wortman himself indicated that “Kunitsyn inspired many of his students with a genuine devotion to the law, and several entered judicial posts directly upon completing the [Tsarskoe Selo] lycée.” This included Dmitrii Zamiatnin, who became minister of justice in 1862 (41, 251).}

In her first chapter, Berest recounts Kunitsyn’s education at the Tver’ Seminary, from which he graduated in 1803, at the St. Petersburg Pedagogical Institute, and at the University of Göttingen (1808–11). Throughout, Berest provides an informative account of Russia’s educational system, together with details of Kunitsyn’s courses, texts, and professors. In 1811, he began teaching at the new and elite Tsarskoe Selo Lyceum, where young noblemen were to be educated “for highest office in the service of the state.” His teaching there, which continued until 1820, is Berest’s subject in chapter 2. His career began auspiciously with a speech he delivered on the occasion of the lyceum’s opening on 19 October 1811, a ceremony attended by the emperor. The themes of the speech were the importance of the rule of law and meritocratic order. “Law violated by its guardian,” he said, “does not have sacredness in the eyes of the people.” Alexander I was so impressed by the speech that he awarded Kunitsyn the St. Vladimir Cross of the Fourth Degree (34).

Another admirer was Pushkin, who graduated with the lyceum’s first class in 1817. His liberalism (as expressed, for example, in his famous 1817 poem “Ode: Liberty”) owed much to his teacher.\footnote{Leonard Schapiro, in his classic study \textit{Rationalism and Nationalism in Russian Nineteenth-Century Political Thought} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), wrote that Kunitsyn’s influence on Pushkin’s political views was “important above all.” Schapiro devoted a few pages to Kunitsyn and to his teaching on natural law, which (in Schapiro’s estimation) conveyed “the most enlightened principles of past thought on the relations of the individual and the state,” namely, that the ruler’s power is “limited by the natural rights of his subjects, and these subjects can never be treated as a means to an end but only as an end in themselves” (48–50).} Pushkin commemorated Kunitsyn in his poem “19 October”: “To Kunitsyn—the tribute of the heart and wine! / He created us, he sparked our fire, / He laid the foundations, / He lit the light” (55). Pushkin was one of many students who gave the lyceum a reputation for being a hotbed of liberalism and freethinking. (Two alumni, Wilhelm Küchelbecker and Ivan Pushchin, joined the Decembrists and were exiled to Siberia; six others were arrested in connection with the revolt but released.) Their liberalism, according to Berest, was a natural consequence of the liberal arts education they received.
Kunitsyn taught moral philosophy, natural law, political economy, and political science. Relying on the meticulous notes of one of his students (the future diplomat Prince Aleksandr Gorchakov), Berest analytically presents the content of his lectures on such topics as his critique of serfdom, Kant's legal and moral philosophy, and contract theory.9 “The idea that the state is instituted for the purpose of securing people’s innate rights defined for Kunitsyn the essence of the common good,” she concludes, though in his lectures he still at times tried to combine liberalism with the older cameralist tradition of the well-ordered police state (Polizeistaat) (52). With the graduation of Pushkin’s class in 1817, Kunitsyn began to teach as a law professor at his alma mater, the Main Pedagogical Institute (renamed in 1814 to reflect its new university-like status), though he also continued to teach senior courses at the lyceum until 1820, when he moved full-time to St. Petersburg University (which succeeded the institute in 1819).

During these years Kunitsyn wrote for Syn otechestva, Russia’s most influential journal between its founding in 1812 and the Decembrist Revolt. His first articles, in 1812, were about the Napoleonic Wars. In 1818, he wrote articles on serfdom, constitutionalism and freedom, and the philosophical principles of international relations. Berest devotes chapter 3 to analysis of the later articles and to the general historical context (in more detail than earlier in the book). She affirms that, despite the establishment of the State Council and ministries and various plans for liberal reform, in the end the tsar’s personal power remained unlimited and autocracy firmly intact. Though she does not specifically refer to it, Mikhail Speranskii’s “Introduction to the Codification of the Laws” (1809) was a liberal (indeed constitutional) proposal “to establish and found the government, hitherto autocratic, on inviolable law,” but Speranskii was exiled in 1812, and then his own views became more conservative.10 In these circumstances, educated Russians were confined to expressing their liberal sentiments mainly in salons and private letters. Political journalism was in its infancy. Kunitsyn’s 1818 articles in Syn otechestva were remarkable given the climate. At the end of her book Berest concludes that they “sought to create public support for the idea of

9 Schapiro also highlights Kunitsyn’s liberal interpretation of contract theory (50), as does I. D. Osipov in the short section on Kunitsyn in his valuable study, Filosofsia russkogo liberalizma (XIX–nachalo XX v.) (St. Petersburg: Izdatel’stvo Sankt-Peterburgskogo universiteta, 1996), 57–58.

constitutional reforms, the rule of law, and the abolition of serfdom against the rising voice of conservative opinion in Russia” (193). 

Kunitsyn’s liberalism was shared by certain members of the nobility and high-ranking officials, who are also part of Berest’s story. She draws attention throughout to Prince Petr Viazemskii (a Russian official serving in Poland) and to the brothers Aleksandr and Nikolai Turgenev. Indeed, a separate chapter is dedicated to Nikolai Turgenev (1789–1871), one of Kunitsyn’s friends from their student years in Göttingen. Unlike Kunitsyn, who earned his noble status, Turgenev was a hereditary nobleman, large serf-owner, and official in the State Council. His Opyt teorii nalogov (Essay on the Theory of Taxation, 1818) received a long review by Kunitsyn, who praised it for its principles of social justice and liberalism. Berest describes in detail Turgenev’s plans for a liberal “Society of the Year 1819” and for a scholarly political journal. All but three of the society’s potential members (which included Pushkin) were already members of the Union of Welfare, an early organization of the future Decembrists. Kunitsyn was not among the Decembrists (nor was Pushkin) but apparently he was one of Turgenev’s closest collaborators on the project. However, neither the society nor its journal went beyond the planning stage.

Berest judiciously reviews the debate over the possible connection of the Society of the Year 1819 with the Union of Welfare, founded in 1818 and replaced in 1821 by the more radical Northern Society that staged the Decembrist rebellion of 1825. Turgenev was a member of the Union of Welfare but later denied joining the Northern Society. On the basis of this implausible denial and of his reformist rather than revolutionary stance, Berest distances him from the Decembrist movement, contrary to the prevalent view. 

In 1824, he left Russia for what was to be essentially lifelong political exile. “He had come to realize that in Russia there was yet no place for the kind of liberal movement he envisaged—the one carried

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11 The second article, on constitutionalism, was probably the most important. It was written in response to Alexander I’s speech before the Polish Sejm in March 1818, in which the emperor reaffirmed his commitment to constitutional government for the Kingdom of Poland and hinted at such a possibility, in the right circumstances, for Russia. At this time, he charged Count N. N. Novosil’tsev with preparing a draft constitutional charter for Russia, on which see John P. LeDonne, “Regionalism and Constitutional Reform, 1819–1926,” Cahiers du monde russe 43, 4 (2003): 5–34. Kunitsyn’s defense of constitutionalism distinguished between modern liberty, defined as negative liberty or private autonomy guaranteed by civil rights, on the one hand, and ancient liberty or direct participatory democracy, on the other. This distinction, Berest explains, had recently been made by Benjamin Constant (69).


13 Turgenev’s La Russie and les russes (1847) is still in print.
out by progressive-minded patriots who would act as a public voice without undermining the government” (100). Viazemskii and Aleksandr Turgenev were similarly disillusioned by the autocracy’s refusal to entertain serious reform, as was Pushkin (to whom Berest devotes some revealing pages in this chapter as well). Their response was largely resignation. The Decembrists chose a different path, one that Berest thinks largely excludes them from the history of Russian liberalism.14 “The failure of the liberal officials to reach out to the wider public and push Alexander I for reforms put an end to the early development of political liberalism in Russia,” she concludes. “However, liberal ideas and aspirations survived among the Russian intelligentsia to ensure the revival of liberal activism, with the beginning of the Great Reform era under Alexander II” (103). Their survival, she contends, owed something to Kunitsyn’s intellectual legacy.

To better understand the roots of his legacy, Berest explores “the natural law tradition in Russia” (chapter 5, the longest in the book). That tradition began in the early 18th century, when the tsarist state established instruction in natural law for the purpose of training enlightened government officials. Most of the professors came from Germany and taught their subject according to the philosophy of Christian Wolff, whose influence remained dominant until

14 The Decembrist movement included both liberal and radical-Jacobin currents, represented by Nikita Murav’ev of the Northern Society and Pavel Pestel’ of the Southern Society, respectively. Yet Berest argues that since even the liberals were prepared to resort to revolution in the name of constitutional monarchy, the movement does not belong to the history of Russian liberalism (223 n. 66). She is not alone: Daniel Field, too, treated rejection of revolution as a definitive criterion for Russian liberalism (“Kavelin and Russian Liberalism,” Slavic Review 32, 1 [1973]: 59–78). The antirevolutionary criterion has led to some odd historiographical results, such as Leontovitsch’s confusion of liberalism and conservatism (he includes N. M. Karamzin but not the Decembrists in the history of Russian liberalism). It is not at all clear, however, that disavowing revolution should be made a criterion of liberalism. Locke recognized that civil society might need to change the government if the latter failed in its essential purpose of protecting natural rights. The Glorious Revolution in England, the American Revolution, and the French Revolution (in its first phase) were all revolutions made to establish a liberal political order. Furthermore, it is hard to deny that the greatest result of Russian liberalism was a revolution, that of 1905. Andrzej Walicki sees Decembrist ideology (in the Northern Society) as “essentially an example of modern liberalism,” while also being revolutionary, a combination that came to an end in 1825, at least until the 20th century. After the Decembrists, Russian “liberalism became an openly antirevolutionary force, and the revolutionary movement was dominated by various versions of socialist ideas” (Walicki, A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism, trans. Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1979], 59, 70). Applying an antirevolutionary criterion to Russian liberalism seems to be based largely on historical circumstances particular to the country, namely that civil society was so weak that revolution—as liberals such as Chicherin feared—could lead to the disintegration of the state, violent anarchy, and civil war. Thus liberal progress had to be made within the existing absolutist order until civil society grew strong enough to support constitutional government.
the end of the century. Berest observes that natural law was not a uniform theory in early modern Europe; it could justify either absolutism or liberalism (107). Wolff’s approach was absolutist in that it maintained that natural law specified the ends of human society, the realization of which justified the state’s absolute power. Natural law dictated human perfectibility, an end that was to be achieved not through individual autonomy and self-determination but through collective effort directed by the paternalistic state. The Wolffian conception was well-suited to autocracy, whether in Wolff’s native Prussia or 18th-century Russia, and Berest details how it shaped the teaching of natural law at the Russian Academy of Sciences and Moscow University.

By the end of the 18th century, first in Germany and then in Russia, cameralism gradually began to give way to more liberal ideas of autonomy and self-determination (Adam Smith, the French physiocrats, Kant). Kant’s idea of individual moral autonomy—the capacity for self-determination according to the moral law as known by conscience—was a profound shift that undermined state paternalism and hereditary privileges at their core. The initial Russian reception of Kant was encouraging. The Russian Academy of Sciences elected him a foreign associate in 1794 and The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals (the epochal text in its defense of human autonomy and dignity) appeared in Russian translation in 1803. A year later, a new statute on university autonomy was issued, which helped make the first two decades of the 19th century a period of relative academic freedom in Russia. German and Russian professors taught Kant’s philosophy in combination with diverse other sources, ideas, and approaches—some liberal, some absolutist. There were new German textbooks and Russian translations, together with traditionalist texts for professors who preferred the old Wolffian absolutism. Berest provides a meticulous analytic survey of all these courses and texts, effectively conveying the eclecticism of Russian legal and political philosophy from the beginning of the 19th century until the appearance in 1820 of Kunitsyn’s Natural Law, which “was bolder than anything that had been published earlier on the subject of legal philosophy in Russia” (106). The book’s clear and forceful defense of Kantian liberal individualism made it a milestone in the intellectual development of Russian liberalism.16

15 Terry Pinkard has written of the Kantian revolution in philosophy: “Overthrowing the old metaphysics, it inserted a new idea into the vocabulary in terms of which modern Germans and Europeans spoke about their lives: self-determination. After Kant, nothing would be the same again” (German Philosophy, 1760–1860: The Legacy of Idealism [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002], 15).

16 She identifies Franz Zeiller’s Das Natürliche Privatrecht (1802), translated into Russian in 1809 by Petr Lodii for use in the Main Pedagogical Institute, as presenting the most consistently liberal (Kantian) conception of natural law before Kunitsyn’s work.
Berest offers (in chapter 6) a detailed exposition of Kunitsyn’s magnum opus, published in two volumes (1818, 1820). The subject of the first part is natural rights and that of the second is the state; as a whole the book lays out a “liberal theory of human rights” (155). For Kunitsyn, the purpose of the state was not to order, regulate, and police society in pursuit of a higher, common good (such as in Wolff), but to defend people’s natural and civil rights through the rule of law and to provide the safety and security necessary for individuals to pursue their own ends. According to Berest, he largely followed Kant in grounding natural rights in human nature, specifically in freedom and reason, which together constitute human personhood. He saw no need for a divine or metaphysical sanction (147). Taking the Kantian conception of autonomy as his basic principle, he emphasized the so-called intellectual rights of freedom of conscience, freedom of thought, and freedom of expression. They are preconditions for the recognition of truth, which can be reached only through one’s own reasoning and assent, as well as for the pursuit of happiness, which, as a matter of individual free choice, cannot be externally imposed. They are also preconditions for faith. Well before it was common for Russian thinkers, he seems to have defended full religious freedom for individuals, maintaining that faith is a matter of personal conviction (150). Less surprising was his robust defense of individual property rights.

In Berest’s judgment, Kunitsyn’s discussion of the state and of the political arrangements that would sustain individual autonomy is somewhat “less satisfactory,” a consequence in part of his need to evade the censors and perhaps also of his own “creative eclecticism” (152, 153). Whatever its shortcomings, his political theory was a strong affirmation of liberalism’s core principle: “Kunitsyn embraced the idea that the rights and interests of autonomous individuals set boundaries on the power of the state and society as a whole,” as she expresses it in the conclusion to her book. She argues that he was even ahead of his time in recognizing societal, and not just state, threats to individual development, fulfillment, and self-realization. “To our knowledge, he was the first thinker in Russia to raise a concern about the constraints on individual freedom posed by social traditions and expectations” (194). The individual must have the opportunity to pursue his own happiness, even if it

17 This may have had a lasting effect on his student Aleksandr Gorchakov. Decades later, in the early 1870s, Gorchakov, by then the Russian foreign minister, invoked “the glorious traditions of our own history, our characteristic toleration, and respect for freedom of conscience,” in protest against their continued violation. Such invocations by imperial officials of freedom of conscience were made from the 1860s into the 1870s but then declined and largely disappeared. They were part of the emergence of the discourse of freedom of conscience in Russia in the 1860s. See Paul Werth, *The Tsar’s Foreign Faiths: Toleration and the Fate of Religious Freedom in Imperial Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 188–96 (quotation on 192).
means going against social conventions or norms; he must be permitted his own views and opinions, even if they are mistaken, irrational, or odious; and he must have “the right to inner thoughts and feelings, no matter how moral or immoral” (in Kunitsyn’s own words), provided only that he does not do harm to others (157). To attempt to impose happiness, truth, or morality on an individual is to deprive her of freedom, “without which any good would mean nothing,” he wrote (148). On the basis of these progressive views Berest suggests that Kunitsyn, for all he owed to Kant, moved beyond him “in the direction of the modern individualistic conception of happiness” (148). We need not go that far to agree that “liberal individualism” is an accurate term for his social and political theory, even if he himself did not use it. It conveys the priority he gave to civil over political rights: his belief that they specified and guaranteed modern, liberal (negative) freedom, including equality before the law and equality of opportunity (which his own life experience made him prize), and that they were the more essential ones for the development of civil society in Russia.

After the publication of Kunitsyn’s *Natural Law*, it became virtually impossible to publish anything else on natural law in the Kantian tradition. In her final chapter Berest recounts the effects of the conservative backlash on tsarist educational institutions and policy. In February 1821, the Main School Administration banned Kunitsyn’s book (and ordered that copies of it be confiscated) because it was allegedly “based on ideas contrary to the truths of Christianity and tending toward overthrowing all family and state ties” (168). The next month, Kunitsyn was dismissed from St. Petersburg University; the dismissal of other suspect professors followed. Mikhail Magnitskii, a conservative member of the Main School Administration, orchestrated a campaign to exclude philosophy and natural law from Russian gymnasia and universities, and though he did not succeed entirely, over the years the quality of teaching in both subjects suffered a marked decline. By 1835, remaining courses in natural law were replaced by narrower, utilitarian courses in legal training. At the same time, Sergei Uvarov, who became Nicholas I’s minister of education in 1833, tried to restrict the teaching of philosophy to the limits set by his paradigm of “Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality.” In 1850, after the 1848 European revolutions, philosophy chairs were closed.

Kunitsyn fared fairly well in the years after his dismissal from university teaching. In 1821, he obtained a position in the Ministry of Finance, and he was not affected when several Decembrists referred to him as one of their teachers in 1826. Indeed, he was appointed to the legal Codification Committee of

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His Majesty’s Own Second Chancellery that year. In the early 1820s, he completed another work, *Istoricheskoe izobrazhenie drevnego sudoproizvodstva v Rossii* (A Historical Study of Ancient Russian Jurisprudence), published posthumously in 1843. Four years later, Konstantin Kavelin published a more famous essay on a similar topic, “A Survey of Juridical Life in Old Russia,” one of the defining statements of Russian Westernism. Possibly Kunitsyn’s work helped inspire Kavelin’s essay, which emphasized the idea of human dignity and personhood, though Berest herself does not speculate about this possibility. In 1840, Kunitsyn was appointed director of the Department of Foreign Confessions, but he died in July of that year.

Berest’s book is a most impressive achievement, based on broad and deep reading in the primary and secondary sources. Her thesis, though she might have stated it a bit more explicitly, is important and persuasively argued: that Kunitsyn deserves to be recognized as the first Russian liberal philosopher. She places him within the intellectual, cultural, and political contexts of his time, paying particular attention to Russian education and academic life, journals and journalism, and to other contemporaneous Russian liberals, including Pushkin and the group that formed around the Turgenev brothers. Her book makes a compelling case that the history of Russian liberalism, at least its intellectual history, begins earlier rather than later in the 19th century.

Kunitsyn was a prescient thinker, and Berest might have said more about the fate of his ideas in Russia (though in fairness his direct influence is hard to discern). By the time of his death, the next stage in the intellectual development of Russian liberalism had already begun with the formation of

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20. This designation depends in part on the meaning of “philosopher” and on how firmly it is distinguished from “thinker.” A case can be made that the distinction should go to Radishchev or perhaps to Speranskii. Osipov devotes the first chapter of his book on the philosophy of Russian liberalism to Speranskii.

21. In this she returns to the view of earlier historiography. For example, Mazour in his book on the Decembrists wrote: “The liberal tradition seems to have been well established at the beginning of the nineteenth century. There was yet no organized movement, as in Western Europe, but the idea was present” (53). According to George Fischer, “The history of Russian liberalism stretches from the eighteenth century to the 1917 Revolution” (*Russian Liberalism: From Gentry to Intelligentsia* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958], iii). Richard Pipes goes even farther: “Russia’s tradition of liberalism—defined as a theory holding that political authority must be restrained by law and representative institutions—is as ancient as the autocratic tradition” (*Struve: Liberal on the Left, 1870–1905* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970], 283).
Westernism, which unfolded within the philosophical framework of Hegel rather than Kant. From it Boris Chicherin emerged as the outstanding liberal philosopher of the 19th century. His ideas had very much in common with Kunitsyn’s “liberal individualism,” especially as he evolved toward a more Kantian position in the last decades of his life.\textsuperscript{22} By the end of the 19th century Russian liberalism, in thinkers such as Pavel Novgorodtsev, returned to Kant and underwent a remarkable revival of natural law.\textsuperscript{23}

Russian Westernism of the 1840s and 1850s produced three of the country’s great liberals: Timofei Granovskii, Konstantin Kavelin, and Boris Chicherin.\textsuperscript{24} Granovskii was appointed professor of history at Moscow University in 1839 and became the most revered teacher of his generation.\textsuperscript{25} Leontovitsch considered him the foremost proponent of liberal ideas in the reign of Nicholas I.\textsuperscript{26} He died in 1855, but his protégés Kavelin and Chicherin were able to take advantage of the new possibilities opened up by Russia’s defeat in the Crimean War and by the accession of Alexander II to effectuate the long-awaited transition from intellectual to political liberalism. Over the past 50 years, both Russian and Anglo-American historiography has carefully reconstructed the history of this transition.\textsuperscript{27} Konstantin Shneider’s study builds on this historiography to present his own picture of Russian liberalism from the 1850s to the 1870s. By “early Russian liberalism,” he means liberalism after it made the transition from ideas and theory to programmatic

\textsuperscript{22} In his masterpiece \textit{Philosophy of Right}, B. N. Chicherin uses the term “individualism” to refer to the Kantian defense of the intrinsic value of personhood (\textit{Filosofiia prava} [Moscow: I. N. Kushnerev, 1900], 225–28).


\textsuperscript{24} It also produced thinkers of a different type, including Vissarion Belinskii, Mikhail Bakunin, and Alexander Herzen.


\textsuperscript{26} Leontovitsch, \textit{The History of Liberalism in Russia}, 191.

content and practical plans for reform. One might also call it the “classical stage of Russian liberalism.”

One of Shneider’s main themes is the distinctiveness of Russian liberalism. As a philosophy of human dignity and human rights, liberalism by its very nature makes universal claims, yet it takes on a distinctive form in any particular historical context. Shneider indicates that in the case of Russia, this national or cultural distinctiveness could be framed as either philosophical or historical (8–15). Recent works in Russian historiography have taken the view that the distinctiveness of Russian liberalism consists in its deep philosophical or theoretical development. Shneider, by contrast, thinks that the distinctiveness is historical, by which he means, essentially, Russian liberalism’s statist orientation, the idea that liberal values and institutions had to be promoted by the autocratic state until civil society became strong enough to support a constitutional regime. For him, the adaption of liberal ideas to national conditions (chiefly the absolutist state) marks the appearance of early Russian liberalism (10). He dates this stage to the mid-19th century, not earlier, but his approach is similar to Leontovitsch’s notion of a Russian “liberal absolutism” (for Leontovitsch this tradition began under Catherine II).

Shneider’s book begins with an updated version of his 2006 Kritika review essay on Russian liberalism. He credits Soviet historiography for establishing, beginning in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the concept of early Russian liberalism (understood to date from 1855). Anglo-American historiography then pursued and further developed the idea. True, George Fischer, in an early study, concentrated on the postreform period (he begins with zemstvo liberalism), but subsequent works, starting with Darrell P. Hammer’s doctoral dissertation on Chicherin and Kavelin, agreed with the contemporary Soviet view that Russian liberalism as a political program emerged in 1855–56. Shneider singles out Andrzej Walicki, Derek Offord, Lidiia Novikova and Irina Sizemskaia, “Liberal Traditions in the Cultural–Historical Experience of Russia,” Russian Social Science Review 36, 1 (1995): 38–57, here 42.

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30 Shneider, “Was There an ‘Early Russian Liberalism?’”
31 Among the earliest works were V. N. Rozental’, “Pervoe otkrytoe vystuplenie russkih liberalov v 1855–1856 gg.,” Istorii SSSR, no. 2 (1958): 113–30; and N. G. Sladkevich, Ocherki istorii oshchetvennoi mysli v Rossii v kontse 50-kh–nachale 60-kh godov XIX veka (Leningrad: Leningradskii gosudarstvennyi universitet imeni A. A. Zhdanova, 1962).
32 Fischer, Russian Liberalism; Darrell P. Hammer, “Two Russian Liberals: The Political Thought of B. N. Chicherin and K. D. Kavelin” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1962);
and G. M. Hamburg, whose work helped give Anglo-American scholarship the “dominant position” in the study of early Russian liberalism (40).\textsuperscript{33} His own book closely follows the trajectory laid out by that scholarship.

The political program of early Russian liberalism (again, that it had a political program defines the very concept) was elaborated mainly (but not only) by Kavelin and Chicherin in several articles originally circulated in manuscript (1855–56) and then published abroad by Alexander Herzen in a series entitled \textit{Golosa iz Rossi} (Voices from Russia). Echoing the characterization of Rozental’, the first Soviet historian of the subject, Shneider says that these articles have every right to be considered “the Russian liberals’ first public statement” (45).\textsuperscript{34} The first issue of \textit{Golosa iz Rossi} (1856) began with an open letter to Herzen. Written by Kavelin and Chicherin, the letter was signed, anonymously but portentously, “a Russian liberal.” It read in part: “We are thinking of how to emancipate the peasants without shaking the whole social organism; we dream of the introduction of freedom of conscience into the state, and of the revocation or at least weakening of censorship…. We are ready to rally around any even slightly liberal government and to support it with all our strength, for we are firmly convinced that we can act, and achieve results, only through the government.”\textsuperscript{35} This emphasis on the role of the government reflected the statist convictions of Kavelin and Chicherin. As representatives of the so-called state school of Russian historiography, they maintained that the state, ever since the rise of Muscovy, had had the main role in Russia’s historical development. They hoped it could now act as the

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\textsuperscript{33} V. N. Rozental’, “Pervoe otkrytoe vystuplenie russkikh liberalov v 1855–1856 gg.”
\textsuperscript{34} Quoted by Shneider (44) from K. D. Kavelin and B. N. Chicherin, “Pis’mo k izdateliu,” in \textit{Opyt russkogo liberalizma: Antologiia} (Moscow: Kanon, 1997), 27.
agent of liberal progress by initiating reforms designed to guarantee civil rights and to promote the development of civil society, eventually culminating in constitutional government (103–9).

In addition to the open letter to Herzen that he co-authored with Kavelin, Chicherin contributed four long articles to Golosa iz Rossii. As Gary Hamburg has noted, they amounted to the most intellectually substantive part of the collection and constituted “the clearest presentation of educated society’s political aspirations in more than thirty years.”36 In one of them, “Sovremennye zadachi russkoj zhizni” (Contemporary Tasks of Russian Life), Chicherin identified seven core principles of the liberal program that he envisioned for Russia: (1) freedom of conscience; (2) emancipation from servile status (not only from serfdom but also from government oppression and abuse of authority); (3) freedom of speech; (4) freedom of the press; (5) academic freedom; (6) publication of all governmental activities whose disclosure would not be harmful to the state; and (7) public legal proceedings. He recommended that these measures guide government policy, for he was convinced that liberalism was Russia’s future.37

Shneider concurs with Hamburg’s overall assessment of Chicherin, to whom he gives the most attention and whose “conservative liberalism” (okhranitel’nyi liberalizm) he identifies as the most authentic form of Russian liberalism. In 1862, in the wake of the emancipation, Chicherin formulated his position as follows:

The essence of conservative liberalism consists in the reconciliation of the principle of liberty with the principle of government [vlast’] and law. In political life its slogan is “liberal measures and strong government”: liberal measures that grant society independent activity, that secure citizens their rights and personhood, that protect freedom of thought and freedom of conscience, and that make it possible to express all legitimate aspirations; strong government that is the guardian of state unity, that binds and restrains society, that protects order, that strictly oversees the fulfillment of law and suppresses every violation of it, and that inspires citizens’ confidence that at the head of the state is a firm hand that can be relied upon and a rational force capable of defending public interests against the pressure of anarchic elements and against the howls of reactionary parties.38

36 Hamburg, Boris Chicherin and Early Russian Liberalism, 141.
38 Quoted by Shneider (48–49) from Chicherin, Razlichnye vidy liberalizma,” in Chicherin, Neskol’ko sovremennykh voprosov (Moscow: K. Soldatenkov, 1862), 199–200.
The zemstvo and judicial reforms of 1864 further convinced Chicherin of the state’s progressive role and of the efficacy of “conservative liberalism.” Indeed, he was, in Shneider’s view, the most consistent defender of the achievements of the Great Reforms. His liberalism was conservative precisely because it aimed to conserve and consolidate those achievements on which the prospects for a liberal Russia ultimately depended (49, 112–13). Shneider’s overall thesis is that the conservatism of Chicherin’s liberalism is what made it most “Russian”: it marked the adaption of liberalism to specific Russian circumstances, the autocracy first of all, which had long thwarted civil society but now was to be relied upon to spur its development (93).

If we follow Shneider’s argument, Chicherin’s conservative liberalism was the most national (or adapted) form of early Russian liberalism, but it was not the only form. There was also a constitutionalist current (notably among the provincial nobility in 1861–62). Chicherin opposed this trend as premature given the level of Russia’s social development: the immediate task of Russian liberalism was to focus on the primacy of civil rights over political ones and on the transformation of what might be called the people’s “pre-civic” mentalities into civic sensibilities and a legal consciousness. Kavelin agreed with Chicherin’s position on constitutionalism, but on other issues they differed. Chicherin favored a centralized system of state administration, while Kavelin and others defended administrative decentralization and regional self-government (116–18). Chicherin saw no long-term economic, legal, or civic value in retaining the peasant commune; Kavelin and others did (151–66). In view of these and other differences, Shneider acknowledges that there were at least two currents competing for the right to express “national liberal authenticity”: Kavelin’s “populist” current and Chicherin’s conservative current (15, 138). But he clearly sides with Chicherin’s conservative liberalism (131–40).

Though Chicherin is his main figure and Kavelin a close second, Shneider also considers the “second echelon” of early Russian liberals: Pavel Annenkov, Vasilii Botkin, Aleksandr Druzhinin, Ivan Babst, and Evgenii Korsh. He compares the views of all these thinkers on a range of issues, beginning with the most valued ideals of Russian liberalism (chapter 2): individualism (by which Shneider means the intrinsic value of the individual person), private property, equality (mainly of opportunity), freedom, right (pravo), law, and progress (the historical realization of liberal values). Another main theme


(chapters 2 and 3) is the Russian liberals’ historical (and historiosophical) conceptions, including their images of Russia and the West, their use of (and dispute over) England and France as historical models, and their prominence in the state school of Russian historiography. Under the heading, “Political Program” (a section of chapter 3), Shneider considers the views of Russian liberals on state administration, monarchism, democracy, representative government, judicial reform, and public opinion. Subsequently, he analyzes the political economy of Russian liberalism (concentrating on Babst) and the peasant question (concentrating on Chicherin, Kavelin, and Mikhail Katkov in his liberal period). The last chapter in the book is devoted to the “sociocultural features of early Russian liberalism”: its aristocracy and defense of the nobility as a liberalizing social force; its aesthetics (Annenkov, Botkin, Druzhinin, Katkov); and its critics from right and left on the spectrum of Russian social thought. In his conclusion, Shneider reviews his argument that, in Russian circumstances, conservative liberalism was really the only viable form “between freedom and autocracy,” where the former was to be gradually realized with the help of the latter. A more rapid approach risked “social apocalypse,” as he puts it earlier in the book (139).

Chicherin’s hope that conservative liberalism in Russia would eventually culminate in constitutional monarchy depended on the autocracy’s continuing support for the Great Reforms. That support weakened as early as 1866, with Dmitrii Karakozov’s assassination attempt, and it evaporated under Alexander III and Nicholas II, whose notion of personal monarchy was inimical to civil society and liberalism.41 The counterreforms convinced Chicherin that tsarism was not the enlightened monarchy on which his conservative liberalism was premised. By the early 1880s, he moved from conservative to “classical” liberalism, with its emphasis on human rights and civil law; by 1900, he was calling for a constitutional regime in Russia.42

In the last third of the 19th century, Russian liberalism, facing the intransigent autocracy, took an apolitical approach emphasizing “small deeds”: practical social, educational, and cultural work (kul’turnichestvo) among the Russian people. The underlying goal was the self-transformation of subjects into citizens who would be ready for constitutional government when the day finally came. Until the end of the century, the only exception to the general climate of political quiescence occurred in 1878–81, when constitutionalist hopes were raised in several provincial zemstvos. The leading “zemstvo constitutionalists” were Ivan Petrunkevich and Fedor Rodichev, whose prominent roles in the history of Russian liberalism would extend into the early 20th century. Overall, Russian liberalism in the era of “small deeds” developed mainly within the zemstvo institutions and within the professions, as well as their learned societies and journals.  

Anton Fedyashin’s book, which focuses on the “thick journal” Vestnik Evropy (The Herald of Europe, as he translates it), covers this period in the history of Russian liberalism. Founded in 1866, Vestnik Evropy soon became the country’s leading popular historical journal. At least into the 1890s, it was the “flagship of Russian liberalism,” as Fedyashin calls it. Anton Chekhov called it the “best of the thick journals” (163). Fedyashin uses it to explore the “journal” culture of educated Russian society and the journalistic heritage of Russian liberalism. In particular, he reconstructs and assesses the worldview of four significant liberal intellectuals who guided Vestnik Evropy between 1866 and 1905: Mikhail Stasiulevich, Aleksandr Pypin, Konstantin Arsen’ev, and Leonid Slonimskii. His book helps us better understand the zemstvo movement in Russia, which Vestnik Evropy liberals championed, as well as the diverse intellectual sources of Russian liberalism, especially populism. Fedyashin’s book fills an important gap in the historiography, which has tended to concentrate on either early Russian liberalism.
liberalism, as we have seen, or on the period of the 1905 revolution and the last two decades of the tsarist regime. With this new study, we thus have a more continuous picture of the development of Russian liberalism. Perhaps most important, Fedyashin's book deepens our appreciation of the characteristic humanism of Russian liberalism by showing how *Vestnik Evropy* liberals pursued a humane form of modernization and how they evaluated socioeconomic progress according to its benefits for local communities and individuals.

The name *Vestnik Evropy* was ironic, because the journal's vision of liberal progress was not one of iron convergence with West European development but rather one that took account of unique Russian circumstances and institutions. In particular, *Vestnik Evropy* liberals thought that the zemstvo institutions of local self-government offered a Russian path to capitalism, just as the populists believed that the peasant commune offered a Russian path to socialism. The journal rejected socialism yet embraced the populist concern for peasant welfare. Its regular contributors believed that a liberal Russia should come from below, not through centralized state direction (which may have been necessary for the Great Reforms but should now give way to local initiative and organic development); they wanted to balance the statist approach of Russian liberals such as Kavelin and Chicherin. Meanwhile, Kavelin collaborated with the journal and mediated between the two traditions, a role facilitated by his concern to meliorate the effects of capitalism in the countryside. Generally, *Vestnik Evropy* supported decentralization and local autonomy as optimal ways to balance economic development, social stability, and individual welfare. Its liberalism focused on local economics rather than national politics; the zemstvo was not so much the germ of a future constitution or parliament but the mechanism for reinvesting wealth into the communities who created it. The journal emphasized socioeconomic practices, not philosophical theories of liberalism.

Part 1 of the book presents rich and detailed biographies of the four liberal intellectuals around *Vestnik Evropy*. Devoting one-third of the book to intellectual biography might seem excessive, but the author's aim is to reconstruct the origins and development of the liberal worldview of the journal's main figures—a task he accomplishes very well. The biographies are revealing of 19th-century Russian educated society as a whole, from the Golden Age of Russian literature, through the mid-century differentiation of the Russian intelligentsia into liberal "fathers" and more radical "sons," and finally to the age of realism in literature and populism in social thought. Fedyashin pays particular attention to Russia's literary humanistic tradition, which decisively shaped the outlook of the *Vestnik Evropy* liberals. Iconic cultural figures such
as Karamzin, Pushkin, Belinskii, Herzen, Turgenev, and Chernyshhevskii figure prominently. As in Berest’s book, there are good accounts of Russia’s educational system and universities. In short, this part of the book successfully integrates biography with intellectual and cultural history and is broader than its title might suggest—“The Men of the Herald of Europe.”

Stasiulevich was a historian of medieval Europe, Pypin a historian of Slavic literatures and of Russian intellectual history. Arsen’ev and Slonimskii were trained as lawyers. The role of historical scholarship in promoting Russia’s liberal progress is one of the book’s main themes; another is legal education and the development of legal consciousness. Stasiulevich, Pypin, and Arsen’ev graduated from St. Petersburg University and began their professional careers as Russia entered the era of Great Reforms. Slonimskii was younger and studied law at St. Vladimir’s University in Kiev. He was Jewish, the son of Haim Slonimskii, who belonged to the Russian Jewish Enlightenment, or Haskalah. Fedyashin uses this fact to provide cultural context about Jewish life in the Russian Empire.

All four Vestnik Evropy liberals devoted themselves to defending the Great Reforms, the legacy of which naturally occupies much space in a book on Russian liberalism during this period. They regarded themselves as part of the “loyal opposition”—loyal in their aversion to the revolutionary movement, oppositional in their aversion to autocratic retrenchment. The editors condemned Alexander II’s assassination in March 1881 as a catastrophic setback for Russia’s liberal development.

Part 2 treats Vestnik Evropy as the “flagship of Russian liberalism.” Its mission was “gradual change and betterment of the social order by way of perfecting and developing the individual personality, by way of enriching the people and educating its thoughts” (75). The journal emphasized history and historiography, reflecting the scholarly interests of Stasiulevich and Pypin, but it also published literary works, such as those of Aleksei Tolstoi.


45 Studies of Russian Jewry that address the broader implications for Russian liberalism include Benjamin Nathans, Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); and Brian Horowitz, Jewish Philanthropy and Enlightenment in Late-Tsarist Russia (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009).
and Ivan Goncharov. Ivan Turgenev was an early and major benefactor. The distinguished jurist Anatolii Koni was a regular contributor. Pypin exemplified the group’s belief that scholarship—“labor, effort, knowledge”—was itself a contribution to liberal progress, because it involves the type of self-discipline, creativity, and sense of achievement that promotes respect for the individual. He understood liberalism as (in his own words) “the direction of social thought that tends toward maximum social self-realization, toward the maximum freedom for personal individuality and personal thought.” His historical scholarship sought to recover the liberal currents in Russian social thought that might constitute a “usable past.” For Pypin the intellectual genealogy of Russian liberalism included the Freemasons, Decembrists, Slavophiles, Westernizers, and Populists. In all these movements, Fedyashin writes, “Pypin saw individuals as agents of change who brought ‘society into consciousness of its role in national development and led it through self-activity toward self-government’” (121). Another way in which scholarship contributed to liberal progress was through self-governing learned societies, which were spurring the nascence of Russia’s civil society.46 Pypin was a member of many.

One of Fedyashin’s themes is the distinctiveness of Russian liberalism, but his approach is very different from Shneider’s. “Borrowing from both Populists and Marxists,” he writes, “the journal articulated a vision of socio-economic development that made Herald liberalism unique” (12).47 The Vestnik Evropy liberals maintained that Russia’s economic development would be capitalist, but they shared the populists’ concern over the effects of capitalist modernization on the rural population. Pypin, in particular, conceived liberalism as a mature form of populism: it rejected as utopian the idea of Russian socialism built on the peasant commune, but he thought it should cultivate the possibility of a distinctive path of (capitalist) development that would defend peasant and agricultural interests. Vestnik Evropy liberals sided with populist “particularity” rather than with the Marxist universalistic scheme of one path of historical development. Most important, they shared the ethical ideals of populism and of the Russian humanistic tradition more generally, defending the rights and interests of the individual, whether in the village or factory, against the impersonal forces of capitalist modernization and industrialization. They envisioned the zemstvo as an institution that could

46 See n. 43.
lessen the human costs of capitalist modernization in Russia, by mediating the interests of the rural population, the intelligentsia, and the state.

The third and last part of the book examines *Vestnik Evropy*’s liberal program and its response to the state-sponsored modernization program of the 1890s—“the Witte System.” As part of the background, Fedyashin examines the postreform “vertical” policies of the Finance Ministry as Russia entered the world economy, the Russian reception of Marx (*Capital* was translated in 1872) and other European economic thinkers, and the agrarian crisis. He shows how the great famine of 1891–92 further convinced *Vestnik Evropy* liberals—Slonomskii and Arsen’ev take center stage in this part of the book—that the modernization process should be a decentralized one, respecting local autonomy and proceeding through the zemstvo institutions. In the years prior to the famine, the tsarist government had increasingly infringed on zemstvo autonomy. The journal consistently opposed this encroachment. In 1882, it published Arsen’ev’s “liberal program,” which included freedom of the press, freedom of conscience, personal inviolability, educational reform, rural land and tax reform, and the establishment of an all-estate volost’ (rural township or canton, a self-government unit below the district zemstvo). Ten years later, the famine—Arsen’ev participated in famine relief with other public figures such as Lev Tolstoi and Vladimir Vernadskii—crystallized his program’s ideals and reinforced his support for an all-estate volost’ to decentralize the administrative system and to make local self-government more cohesive. He and the other *Vestnik Evropy* liberals believed that liberalism’s urgent task, before national constitutional reform, was to humanize modernization through direct local empowerment, including economic empowerment. Their vision was of a “moral economy” instead of Witte’s system of modernization from above, a system that Russian Marxism in the 1890s condoned. That confrontation is the subject of the book’s last chapter, “From Marxist Apologetics to a Moral Economy.”

The philosophical outlook of *Vestnik Evropy* was a type of broad, nonmetaphysical positivism, but its pages were open to a wide range of philosophical viewpoints. Vladimir Solov’ev, Russia’s greatest religious philosopher, became a regular contributor in the second half of the 1880s, after his break with Slavophilism. Despite their very different philosophical worldviews, Solov’ev became friends with all four *Vestnik Evropy* editors. He wrote of the journal’s founder and chief editor Stasiulevich: “I do not know of another man in Russia who deserves more respect than this ‘liberal’” (167). In the same years, another major figure in the history of Russian idealism came under the influence of the journal: Petr Struve, then in his youth. His
biographer, Richard Pipes, notes that *Vestnik Evropy* was one of the main sources of Struve’s liberal inspiration. “Struve greatly admired the column ‘Domestic Survey’ (Vnutrennee obozrenie), in which Arseniev month after month flayed the bureaucracy and championed the cause of law and freedom.” He befriended Arseniev around 1885 and frequented his literary salon, where he met Solov’ev, Pypin, Koni, and others.\footnote{Pipes, *Struve, Liberal on the Left*, 23–24. Kitaev suggests that *Vestnik Evropy*’s platform in the 1880s of “social liberalism” was later encapsulated by Struve’s article “Sozialliberalismus,” in *Internationales Handwörterbuch des Gewerkschaftswesens*, ed. Ludwig Heyde, 2 vols. (Berlin: Verlag Werk und Wirtschaft, 1931–32), 2: 1531–36. Kitaev cites the Russian translation in P. B. Struve, *Izbrannye sochineniia* (Moscow: RossPEN, 1999), 412–23. See Kitaev, “The Unique Liberalism of *Vestnik Evropy* (1870–1880),” 59–60.} Fifteen years later, Struve had moved from Marxism to idealism and was leading Russian liberalism into its next major phase—the Liberation Movement that would culminate in the revolution of 1905.

Fedyashin has written a valuable and engaging study that is more focused than its title suggests. The “liberals under autocracy” are the four editors of *Vestnik Evropy*, and the book is more about their ideas than the realities and practices of Russian civil society. Their ideas were part of what Laura Engelstein has called “the dream of civil society,” a dream that was not realized.\footnote{Laura Engelstein, “The Dream of Civil Society: The Law, the State, and Religious Toleration,” in Engelstein, *Slavophile Empire: Imperial Russia’s Illiberal Path* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), chap. 3.} For the *Vestnik Evropy* liberals, the heart of the dream was the human person. In a section of his last chapter, “Modernization and the Individual,” Fedyashin writes of Slonimskii:

> He worked out a development program at the center of which stood neither *Homo economicus*, nor the peasant commune, but the individual—a crucial modern concept that the Witte system neglected. Exploring how the individual negotiated with a modernizing state in the absence of political institutions became the unique contribution that the *Herald* group made to the Russian liberal tradition. The *Herald* approached the individual externally, through local self-government rights that protected the individual’s socio-economic interests from the encroachments of Russia’s modernization project, of which the Witte system marked the apex. In the process, the *Herald* defined a personal sphere of local socio-economic activity that gave the individual room for self-definition. (190–91)

In referring to the journal’s “external approach” to the individual, Fedyashin means that its editors were not much interested in the “inner” philosophical defense of human dignity. Slonimskii dismissed the philosophical treatise
Problems of Idealism (1902), for example. Yet his own program of humane modernization remained in Russian circumstances an ideal, or a dream.

In his 1905 book in English, *Russia and Its Crisis*, another famous Russian liberal, Pavel Miliukov, wrote that “Russian liberalism was not bourgeois, but intellectual.” He meant that Russian liberalism had to compensate for its weak social foundations (ultimately a consequence of the autocracy) by becoming a powerful movement of ideas. In various ways, the three books reviewed here confirm Miliukov’s judgment. At one level, the intellectual character of Russian liberalism is not so distinctive: by its nature liberalism is philosophical in that its essential values are ideals (human autonomy, dignity, community, and perfectibility). But 19th- and early 20th-century Russian liberalism achieved a very high level of philosophical development, one rivaling anything in contemporary European social thought and one that has enriched and deepened our understanding of liberal ideals. That is its distinctiveness and greatness. Liberalism, however, is not only the philosophical understanding of human ideals. It is also the practice of their ever fuller realization, beginning with human rights, and the creation of the social, economic, cultural, legal, and political conditions for human self-realization and flourishing. If the philosophical achievements of Russian liberalism are its triumph, then its tragedy is the hard resistance of Russian realities to its ideals. The three books reviewed here shed new light on these two sides of Russian liberalism.

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