UTOPIANISM, IDEALISM, LIBERALISM: RUSSIAN CONFRONTATIONS WITH VLADIMIR SOLOV’EV

by

Randall A. Poole
Boston University

Introduction

Russian culture of the late imperial period is well known for its Silver Age and religious-philosophical renaissance. The Moscow Psychological Society, a learned society of philosophers founded at Moscow University in 1885, occupied an integral but distinctive place within this broad cultural revival. The particular contribution of the Psychological Society was to promote the free, autonomous development of philosophy in Russia. In pursuit of this goal, the society advanced a powerful neo-idealistic critique of positivism. As a general outlook, positivism had been remarkably pervasive in Russia from the middle of the nineteenth century. The main characteristics of this positivist background were reductionism, the rejection of the possibility of being beyond the positively-given data of sense experience; scientism, the claim, consistent with the positivist reduction of being to natural phenomena, that the natural sciences cover everything; and utopianism, or faith in human perfectibility through (in this case) application of natural scientific methods to man and society. In its popular naturalistic and scientific forms, positivism asserted that philosophy had no special methodology and thus no legitimate right to exist as its own type of scientific (nauchnyi or wissenschaftlich) discipline. Empirical sciences were the only sciences; philosophy could serve, at best, as a field that systematized empirical research. The measure of reality was experience: positively-given, external sense data. Against these reductionist claims, the Psychological Society sought to defend the autonomy of philosophy by arguing that the positivist criterion of reality was far from exhaustive, and that what it did not exhaust comprised the special domain of philosophy. This domain was human consciousness itself, to the extent that it could be shown to be irreducible to sense experience (the positivist sphere). Russian neo-idealism thus took shape as a type of philosophy of consciousness.
The effort to base the autonomy of philosophy on the irreducibility of consciousness had direct implications for the value and dignity of the human person, and thus for liberalism. In its multifaceted ideal of autonomy, the Psychological Society made, arguably, the most important contribution to both the development of Russian philosophy and the theoretical defense of Russian liberalism. Society philosophers advanced neo-idealism as a compelling defense of the self against positivist reductionism and naturalism. In this, they were deeply indebted to the Kantian idea of autonomy; from Kant they went on to conclude, moreover, that the self was not free-floating, anchored neither in this world nor another, but metaphysically grounded. For them, Kant's transcendental idealism entailed a transcendent ontological reality. Russian neo-idealism thus took the form of a modernized, theoretically explicit theism, in which the value of the person was rooted in transcendental being (personalism). Here, Psychological Society philosophers drew on the “concrete” or personalistic traditions of Orthodox theology, where it is the “image and likeness” of God in man that constitutes personhood. The philosophers raised the special claims liberalism made for the dignity of the person to an ontological level.

The neo-idealistic defense of the autonomy of philosophy presents a more or less sharp contrast to other currents in the late tsarist revival of broadly idealist thought, religious speculation, and artistic creativity. For while the Silver Age can be seen as a general revolt against positivism, as a whole it tended to replace scientific utopianism, itself a secular transposition of eschatology, with new, explicitly religious forms of utopian thought, such as millenarianism and apocalypticism. Historiosophical speculation about the intramundane realization of the absolute permeated the eschatological mentality of Russia's “new religious consciousness.” Here it is clear that the Silver Age continued the utopia-rich history of the Russian intelligentsia. In contrast to the metaphysical maximalism of Silver Age intelligentsia, the critical neo-idealism of university philosophers in the Moscow Psychological Society was a programmatic defense of autonomy against scientific positivism as well as against conflation with areas of religious speculation. Autonomy meant resisting both types of reductionism and utopianism. This principle applied not only to philosophy but also to the various other distinct spheres of human need, experience, and aspiration (economy, science, religion, art, and, perhaps most paradigmatically, church and state). These spheres are legitimate in their own domain. Conflating them, or making one absolute at the expense of the others, results in various forms of utopianism, from scientism to chiliasm and millenarianism. In recognizing this, neo-idealism was not only distinctive within the Silver Age, but distinctively liberal.

The critique of utopianism seems to suggest a ready comparison with Vekhi (1909), the famous indictment of the radical Russian intelligentsia and its positivist ideology for the failure of Russian liberalism in the aftermath of the 1905 Revolution. In fact there are important connections between the Moscow Psychological Society and the Vekhi group. The most famous Vekhi authors were also members of the Psychological Society (Sergei Bulgakov from 1898, Nikolai Berdiaev from 1909, Bogdan Kistiakovskii from 1910, Petr Struve from 1912, and Semen Frank from 1914), and all five contributed to the
society's important symposium, *Problems of Idealism* (1902), which can be seen as *Vekhi*’s predecessor volume. Nikolai Berdiaev, writing in *Vekhi*, echoes the neo-idealist defense of the autonomy of philosophy in contrasting “intelligentsia truth” with “philosophic truth.” He laments the continuing politicization and ideologization of philosophy at the hands of the positivist intelligentsia (his example is A. A. Bogdanov). Berdiaev recommends L. M. Lopatin, chairman of the Psychological Society, as a true representative of philosophy, although Bogdanov would no doubt always be preferred since “Lopatin’s philosophy demands serious intellectual effort” and does not yield partisan slogans. A comparison of *Vekhi* with the neo-idealist critique of utopianism in the Psychological Society must be approached cautiously, however. Four of the *Vekhi* authors (Struve, Berdiaev, Bulgakov, and Frank), during their “legal marxist” or revisionist phase, argued that scientific, necessitarian marxism needed to be invigorated with the same ethical ideals it castigated as utopian in the socialist tendencies it opposed (in Russia, populism). Struve referred to this recovery of the Kantian distinction between das Sein (what is) and das Sollen (what ought to be) as the “critical rehabilitation of utopianism.” It marked an important stage in the autonomization of ethics from positivist reductionism in late nineteenth-century Russian thought. Struve, in his subsequent conversion to idealism, remained critical in retaining the Kantian distinction, as did Frank, but Berdiaev and Bulgakov quickly embraced post-Kantian, absolute forms of idealism that tended to conflate the absolute and the relative, the ideal and the real. In his contribution to *Problems of Idealism*, Bulgakov could already propose that the problem of progress be approached from a “metaphysics of history”: “I know that for many Kantians the conflations of the transcendent and immanent appears to be an epistemological contradiction (for example, Rickert’s philosophy of history). Together with Hegel, Schelling, Solov’ev and others I do not see a contradiction here.”

In his classic *History of Russian Social Thought*, R. V. Ivanov-Razumnik describes this legal marxist trajectory from positivism through neo-Kantianism to absolute idealism as a movement from a realist to a romantic type of consciousness. Not all forms of idealism in Russia went to these extremes, he writes, “but the general course of Russian thought rushed with dizzying speed farther along the path to metaphysical idealism, to spiritualism and to mysticism.” Neo-idealism in the Psychological Society resisted the “general course of Russian thought” in the Silver Age, to the extent this refers to a romantic consciousness, with its strong tendency toward utopianism.

As a matter of its history, European romanticism was indeed saturated with eschatological and millenarian impulses that awaited the realization of the Kingdom of God on earth. These hopes transposed the ideal of salvation from a transcendent realm, beyond space and time, to natural and historical existence. In many respects Hegel opposed his romantic contemporaries, but he shared with them an eschatological mentality. “Hegel was convinced... that the ‘little while’ separating humanity from the ‘Kingdom of God’ already was over,” Nicholas Lobkowicz writes. “Obviously it would be wrong to say that Hegel’s thought is no longer eschatological—that he transformed the eschatological enthusiasm of his contemporaries into a resignation to the present.
If anything, Hegel is more eschatologically minded than any of the romantics. However, his eschatology no longer points toward the future.¹⁷ In this Hegel is the logical culmination of eschatological thinking. Romantic millenarians dispensed with the transcendence of the ideal by expecting its realization in the historical future; Hegel took this one step further by claiming that the ideal has already been realized, that what ought to be, is. This is the point where absolute idealism most radically departs from Kant, and where Russian neo-idealism fundamentally returns to him.

Neo-idealists in the Moscow Psychological Society advanced the Kantian idea that the fullness of being (or the absolute) is transcendent or noumenal, and that it cannot be transposed into phenomenal (natural and historical) reality, as a specifically philosophic refutation of the utopian ideologies of the Russian intelligentsia.¹⁸ This critique, in its conception of progress as continuous approximation toward the transcendent ideal, never the claim to the realization (past, present, or future) of this ideal, was central to the neo-idealism of Russian liberalism. At the same time, neo-idealism took the form of an immanent critique of utopianism: it was a "transcendentalization" of ideals that are terrestrialized in utopianism, but the very intensity of Russian utopianism deepened the philosophers' understanding of the irreducibility of human consciousness to empirical reality—a conviction that propelled them to search for connections to a higher level of being, and one that gave Russian neo-idealism its distinctive ontological direction.

Vladimir Solov'ev's enormous influence on fin-de-siècle Russian thought is paradoxical from the perspective of the problem of utopianism and neo-idealism.¹⁹ Solov'ev (1853-1900), Russia's greatest religious philosopher and a powerful frame of reference (positive and negative) for his Psychological Society colleagues, embodied both poles of this opposition. The middle period of his creativity is typically characterized as strongly utopian (see pages 54-65 below). Nonetheless, Psychological Society philosophers could (and did) draw on certain of his works, especially Justification of the Good (1897), in advancing the neo-idealistic insight that philosophy (in contrast to ideological and utopian thought) recognized the absolute ideal as transcendent and not accessible to full realization in human history. At the end of his book on Slavophile conservative utopianism in nineteenth-century Russian thought, Andrzej Walicki emphasizes the anti-utopian philosophic principles in Solov'ev, writing of his "autonomization of philosophical Romanticism."²⁰ The culmination of this trend can be seen in critical neo-idealism among Solov'ev's colleagues in the Moscow Psychological Society.

In the meantime, the complex, heterogeneous, and syncrhetic make-up of Solov'ev's thought, which accounts for the periodization of his career into separate stages that are not easily reconciled, enabled his neo-idealistic critics to identify in him a wider variety of sources of utopianism than might be possible in one-dimensional utopian thinkers. That Solov'ev's utopianism was explicitly Christian rather than a secular surrogate for salvation (as in, for example, "scientific socialism") clarified for his critics the religious sources that span a broad range of utopian thought, secular as well as millenarian. They came to appreciate that utopian ideologies have in common the transposition of eschatological ideas of salvation (soteriology) from a transcendent realm beyond
history to the immanent sphere of man’s existence in history. It is worth re-
marking that in this Russian neo-idealists substantially anticipate the conclu-
sions of subsequent twentieth-century work on utopianism.23

Pavel I. Novgorodtsev (1866-1924) and Evgenii N. Trubetskoi (1863-
1920), both prominent members of the Psychological Society, make excellent
case studies of the neo-idealist response to Solov’ev (pages 47-66 below).24
Their critique of his utopianism furthered the differentiation of neo-idealism
from other currents in the Russian Silver Age. It is, in fact, Solov’ev’s impact
on the Russian religious-philosophic renaissance as a whole, and specifically his
positive influence on millenarianism, Christian utopianism, and symbolist ideas
of art as theurgy, that make the specifically neo-idealist response to him an ex-
cellent measure of the distinctiveness of philosophic culture in the Moscow
Psychological Society.25

Vl. S. Solov’ev’s Weltanschauung (1913), by Trubetskoi, and On the
Social Ideal (1917), by Novgorodtsev, are studies of utopianism.26 Trubetskoi
treats Solov’ev as a case of utopianism, and analyzes the course of his
intellectual development, even its non-utopian aspects, from that perspective.
Novgorodtsev, whose work is not devoted to Solov’ev (it specifically treats him
in parts) but to the structure and sources of utopian thought in general and to
the history of utopian ideas in European and Russian intellectual history,
nevertheless takes Solov’ev as an implicit frame of reference. The two works
go well together, since Trubetskoi’s is a study of Solov’ev with utopianism as
the general frame of reference, while Novgorodtsev’s is a theoretical study of
utopianism with Solov’ev as the general frame of reference. These studies
shaped their authors’ understanding of the Russian Revolution, influenced
post-revolutionary Russian philosophy abroad, and are important chapters in
the intellectual history of Russian liberalism.

The Crisis of Utopianism

Novgorodtsev and Trubetskoi believed they were living through an im-
portant transition period in Russian and European intellectual history. They
define this period as the end of utopian thinking, at least among philosophers
(they were, of course, premature in this judgment). What distinguishes their
time from Solov’ev’s, less than twenty years earlier? According to Trubetskoi,
the new century is marked by loss of faith in the utopias that had been typical
of Russian intellectual life. Recalling the utopian dreams of total social reform
nurtured by enthusiasm over the Emancipation, of national messianism evoked
by the 1877-1878 war with Turkey, and of physical resurrection of the dead in
Fedorov’s scientistic imagination, Trubetskoi writes: “In these illusions it is not
difficult to recognize the general imprint of a whole past epoch of Russian life,
that utopia-saturated social mentality which found expression in Dostoevsky’s
works and in the romantic dreams of Solov’ev’s first two periods,” that is, until
1894 (MVS, 84-85). In contrast to this recent past of utopian deceptions, the
twentieth century is a time of general unmasking. This new, sober sense of
reality permits sound assessment of Solov’ev, which is the task Trubetskoi sets
for himself. He writes: "Namely in our critical epoch, when the catastrophes descending upon us have brought the crushing blow to romantic utopianism in all aspects and forms, the time has come to understand Solovev's thought and give it objective evaluation" (MVS, viii).

Trubetskoi situates Solovev in the general context of the intellectual history of the nineteenth century, a century of philosophical despair because of its denial of meaning in the universe, or at least of the intelligibility of that meaning, and of any metaphysical essence behind existence. Despite the dominance of pessimistic ideologies of nihilism, still there remained a certain belief in and search for meaning. Solovev himself observed that assertions of the senselessness of life are rarely very serious; they are merely theoretical stances not put into practice. According to Trubetskoi, "In particular among us, in Russia, theoretical denial of the meaning of life was always the cause of believing souls" (MVS, 38). The religious impulses that continue to sustain the will to live are no longer consciously recognized but sublimated; they remain powerful, but now misdireced, forces in the lives of men and women. This conclusion about the latent religious sources of Russian radicalism would be developed by Trubetskoi and Novgorodtsev in their own analyses of utopianism.

Although Trubetskoi treats Solovev as a paradigmatic product of Russian utopianism, he values Solovev's own insights into the peculiarities of Russian radicalism. "In Solovev's eyes a most paradoxical phenomenon has taken place: philosophical despair, which appeared in the most diverse currents of thought, is combined with a mistaken religious search. This faith, having lost its object, is subconscious but nevertheless powerful" (MVS, 40). In Russia, where more than anywhere "conscious denial is linked with unconscious religious emotions," the struggle of nihilism "against existing religions is not a struggle of reason against faith, but only of one faith against another," in Solovev's own words (quoted by Trubetskoi). "When the young Solovev abandoned nihilism," Trubetskoi observes, "it was natural for him, first of all, to transfer to the realm of consciousness that which he had already vaguely felt, together with all believing Russian nihilists. And therefore it is not surprising that the transition from unbelief to belief took place in him relatively easily" (MVS, 50). Nor is it surprising that this transition replaced one utopia (positivistic) with another (millenarian).

Trubetskoi's ideas on the contemporary retreat from utopia, as well as his indications (via Solovev) that latent religious aspirations are basic factors in utopianism, receive more elaborate exposition by Novgorodtsev. As a whole, On the Social Ideal is a study of the decline of utopian thinking and the transition to neo-idealistic philosophy. "Before us is taking place the collapse of a very old belief—the belief in the possibility of earthly paradise," Novgorodtsev declares (OOI, 3). While Trubetskoi, as we have seen, also insists on the current demise of utopianism, Novgorodtsev is far more explicit about the ongoing replacement of utopian by philosophical thought:

It seems to me indisputable that nineteenth-century social philosophy was established on the idea of earthly paradise, but it also seems just as indisputable that now this idea is gradually losing its force. And is there need to be
surprised at this? Indeed, in essence, it [earthly paradise] contradicts all the facts of moral philosophy and scientific theory (OOI, 17).

For Novgorodtsev, the “facts of moral philosophy and scientific theory” comprise the basis of neo-idealism, the advance from utopianism to critical philosophical analysis. In his mind utopianism and neo-idealism were exact opposites, since the latter recognized the absolute ideal as transcendent and not susceptible of historical realization in an earthly paradise.

In his earlier work, the Crisis of Modern Legal Consciousness (1909), written before Trubetskoï’s work on Solov’ev, Novgorodtsev critiqued the idea of what might be called legislative utopianism, the view that law could perfect society once the will of the people was expressed and directly translated into reality, which at that moment would be radically transformed. The Crisis of Modern Legal Consciousness and On the Social Ideal thus comprise a set on the reorientation of social thought in fin-de-siècle Europe:

I expressed the general meaning of the crisis that was taking place in the formula of the collapse of the idea of earthly paradise, and in accordance with that general conclusion I recognized the inevitable replacement of the idea of finite [i.e., historical] perfection with the principle of infinite improvement. Such a replacement, removing the label of absolutism from temporary historical ideals, at the same time redirects thought toward the real laws and tasks of historical development (OOI, ix).

This statement, in addition to suggesting that the crisis is the transition from utopian to critical thought, points to two essential themes developed at length in On the Social Ideal. First is the “principle of infinite improvement,” which underlies Novgorodtsev’s neo-idealistic moral philosophy. Here, Novgorodtsev is greatly influenced by the Justification of the Good, which he shows to be resistant to the utopianism of Solov’ev’s earlier periods. Second is the contrast between utopian appropriations of history and critical philosophy of history. Such a contrast reveals the illegitimacy of constructing false absolutes and idols. In this as well, Novgorodtsev was greatly influenced by Solov’ev, this time through the negative example of his theocratic utopianism.

Novgorodtsev credits Trubetskoï with raising the problem of the collapse of utopias, but criticizes him for seeing the end of utopian thinking in “that catastrophic world-feeling which all over the world has been brought about by wars, revolutions, social calamities and countless failures of social reform” (OOI, 144). For Novgorodtsev, such a “philosophy of the end,” presaging the end of the world, is itself a form of utopianism. Possibly this criticism is too hasty (see pages 66-67 below), but Novgorodtsev’s point is an important one, namely, that transpositions of eschatology are a key source of utopianism.

For this reason Novgorodtsev writes, in reference to both Trubetskoï and Solov’ev:

Catastrophic world-feeling and eschatological premonitions have often accompanied the collapse of earthly hopes and utopian dreams. Behind excessive hope follows excessive disappointment, from one extreme is born another. In order to escape from this utopian circle, we must turn to the clarification of
the real tasks and paths of social progress, and then instead of a philosophy of the end we have a philosophy of progress (OOI, 144).

Throughout his works Novgorodtsev sought to demonstrate that neo-idealism provided a truly liberal, truly progressive philosophy of progress. Neo-idealists representations of the ideal as absolute and transcendent continuously propel historical and social development forward, since no relative, historical form can ever be taken as adequate to the ideal. The transcendent absolute is the (Solov'evian) justification for continuously progressive aspirations toward it.

Neo-Idealism and Immanent Critique of Utopianism

An important aspect of the crisis of utopianism, as understood by Novgorodtsev in particular, was the internal link between the collapse of utopianism and the advance to neo-idealism. Neo-idealism emerged, at least in part, from utopianism. The interconnection took the form of immanent critique, the recovery of the absolute transcendent ideal from utopianism. The absolute, in its utopian representations, becomes in a sense more accessible or visible than in abstract, philosophical formulations. In this way Russian neo-idealists recognized, in their study of utopias and the eschatological aspirations which are their source, that man’s perennial search for the absolute testifies to an ultimate significance beyond that which immediately conforms the empirical self. The very presence of millenarianism and secular forms of utopianism, as vastly influential currents in the history of culture, speaks to human awareness of a transcendent source and destiny.

Novgorodtsev’s recovery of the transcendent ideal from utopianism somewhat softens his otherwise severe attitude toward utopianism. This is clear, for example, when he writes: “Utopias, finding broad dissemination, attracting hundreds and thousands of followers, living in human consciousness over many centuries, cannot but possess a certain internal truth” (OOI, 145). Trubetskoi, too, suggests that utopianism expresses a fundamental and natural human longing that is also the ultimate basis of neo-idealist conceptions of philosophy. Consistent with his approach of situating Solov’ev in the overall context of Russian intellectual history in the second half of the nineteenth century, Trubetskoi writes that Solov’ev’s development expresses not only the meaning of his own life, “but the objective significance of a whole historical epoch. The utopias which fascinated him and with which he struggled and over which he finally triumphed—are not only subjective creations of his thought and imagination. The earthly dream that was originally connected in his mind and heart with ideas of the Kingdom of God lives in the soul of every person” (MVS, 91).

Novgorodtsev’s derivation of neo-idealism from utopianism was part of the autonomization of philosophy in late imperial Russia, a process advanced first of all by the Psychological Society. In the course of his immanent critique he drew theoretically precise distinctions among eschatological, utopian, and critical philosophic thought. His tightly-knit explication of the interconnection between utopian and philosophical thought affirms that both philosophical and
utopian constructions of the social ideal “stand on completely correct ground: their quests for the absolute truth of life reveal precisely those aspirations toward the absolute ideal, outside of which cannot be philosophical resolution of the problem” (OOI, 28). Novgorodtsev insists on the sharp contrast between utopia and neo-idealism, but still he emphasizes that both have a common ground in the absolute. In his view, philosophy cannot abandon that which it has in common with utopianism—the search for the absolute—and remain true to itself.

Distinguishing between utopianism and philosophy, Novgorodtsev argues that if utopian constructions start from correct practical desires (salvation in the absolute), “then in their theoretical premises are several radical mistakes, which create fatal and insurmountable complications” (OOI, 28-29). The mistaken theoretical premises of utopianism consist in conceiving the ideal as wholly realizable. This departure from the definition itself of the ideal is the main characteristic of utopian thought. By contrast, neo-idealism recognizes the absolute as suprahistorical and transcendent.

On this basis Novgorodtsev specifies the scope of philosophy, and delimits it from other valid areas of human speculation. “It is necessary to remember that the complete realization of the absolute ideal in the world of human relations is a withdrawal from ordinary conditions, a miracle of universal transformation, and, as such, lies outside human potential and philosophical speculation” (OOI, 32). Whatever the complete realization of the absolute in a miracle of universal transformation would mean is not a subject of theoretical philosophy, least of all social philosophy. Rather it is the domain of eschatology, a branch of religious imagination that “obviously has in mind an exit from natural conditions to the supernatural, when there actually is opened up a ‘new heaven and a new earth.’” Here Novgorodtsev is not at all demeaning properly eschatological speculation. In fact, “it alone can find the words and images corresponding to notions of heavenly bliss.” Eschatological and religious symbolizations of the transcendent realm are fully legitimate, so long as this domain is upheld as suprahistorical. “The only consistent view of this future state,” Novgorodtsev writes, “is that which transfers thought about it beyond the limits of history, to the field of eschatology. Here in this theory of ‘last things,’ believing consciousness takes the place of philosophical analysis.” By definition, speculation in the realm of eschatology deals with the metaphysical and supernatural, and thus cannot be theoretical (precisely in Kant’s sense). Most importantly, eschatology proper recognizes that “last things” are not historical at all; they are external to time in the same sense God is. The advent of these last things would transcend everything we know about the range of possible events in space and time. As a result, Novgorodtsev writes that “such a state does not so much complete, as breaks off history” (OOI, 30).

Novgorodtsev objects not to eschatology itself, only to the conflation of separate spheres of human speculation. In the failure to keep autonomous realms of thought distinct, Novgorodtsev sees the essence of utopianism. Quoting one of Vladimir Ern’s descriptions of eschatological transformation, he writes:
here is the language of religious consciousness, which believes in miracles and mysteries and openly speaks about them. But what is remarkable, such language is appropriated by those who substitute for belief in heavenly paradise ideas of an earthly one. . . . Among them appear the same ideas of miraculous transformation, of catastrophic severing of all earthly relations (OUI, 30).

What in one case is confessed clearly and openly as dogmas of genuine faith is in the other introduced, like contraband, covertly and vaguely as the results of scientific conclusions. Thus, while Novgorodtsev shows sympathy for genuine, self-conscious faith in the realm of last things, he is highly critical of often unconscious intrusions of eschatological notions into the historical domain. This failure to respect the legitimate domains of separate areas of thought is utopianism.

In this way historical, and thus false, representations of eschatology constitute the root source of utopianism. Novgorodtsev defines the scope of philosophical-theoretical knowledge as historical; everything we (theoretically) know, we know within history, which excludes the possibility of knowledge about history as a whole, its outcome, its meaning, or its alleged laws. This does not at all exclude thinking about the supratemporal transcendent realm; it only excludes such a realm from precise theoretical knowledge. Novgorodtsev was a careful student of Kant. It is clear that he is heavily indebted to Kantian transcendental idealism: theoretical knowledge is possible only of objects in space and time, the a priori forms that define the possibilities of sense experience and so of theoretical knowledge. Such a definition obviously excludes eschatology as a field of theoretical knowledge, although it does not exclude the reality of last things transcendent to space and time.

On the face of it, there is something paradoxical in Novgorodtsev’s immanent critique of utopianism. The utopian perspective fails to respect the suprahistorical nature of the absolute by transposing it to the possibilities of human experience in space and time. In this way utopias seek to assert that their claims are known theoretically, as science knows phenomena (objects in space and time). Although the source of utopianism can be seen as an eschatological impulse, utopianism violates the genuinely eschatological perspective. In Kantian terminology, utopianism is the phenomenalization of the noumenal realm. Philosophy must recognize the absolute as suprahistorical, beyond space and time, or, as Novgorodtsev often says, “beyond the realm of philosophical speculation,” since everything that can be known theoretically is known phenomenally, historically, immanently. Thus the paradox: philosophy affirms that its ultimate concern and justification, the absolute, is just that—absolute, transcendent, noumenal—and so outside the realm of theoretical knowledge. Leszek Kolakowski describes this situation as “metaphysical horror.”

This paradox underlies Novgorodtsev’s development of the seminal idea of the autonomy of different spheres of human consciousness. There are two basic parts to his concept of autonomy. The first part, as I have tried to show, is the differentiation or autonomization of philosophy out of utopianism itself, a process well described by the term “neo-idealism.” Part of the meaning of the concept of autonomization thus refers to the delimitation of
distinct spheres of human thought and aspiration, each of which is legitimate in its own domain. In this Novgorodtsev clearly draws on Kant's discrimination between theoretical and practical (or moral) reason.

The second part of the concept of autonomy is that the distinct spheres of consciousness are nevertheless related in an integrated whole. The various realms of human thought and experience are autonomous in the sense that each of them can stand on its own (they cannot), but in the sense that they are distinct from each other and not interchangeable, yet are integral parts of a whole in which each has its own place. Novgorodtsev formulates this sense of autonomy in writing, "Earth and heaven must be connected, not separated. To forget one for the other would mean to deprive the social ideal of one of its necessary elements" (OOI, 41).

The opposite of autonomy (in both its aspects) is the concept of hypostatization—taking a part for the whole. An outstanding example is the hypostatization of the human faculty for rational thought in "rationalistic utopianism," the remote historical roots of which reach back to ancient Greece in the differentiation of rational thought out of the earlier, more compact, mythic consciousness, and in the subsequent "derailment" (Eric Voegelin) of this process of autonomization in the hypostatization of rationalism at the expense of spiritual sensitivity toward the transcendent. As Novgorodtsev later wrote, in his contribution to the 1918 collection of articles, *Iz glubiny (De Profundis),*

> When Socrates and Plato attacked the Sophists for their godless and destructive deeds, they had in mind precisely this falling away of human reason from its eternal and universal foundations. . . . The enlightening activity of the Sophists represents a classic example of utopian consciousness. . . . Individual human reason declares itself all powerful and self-satisfied, and bows to no powers higher than itself.28

It is obvious already in the case of Platonic idealism and the Sophists that there is a deep and omnipresent tension between the differentiation and autonomization of faculties of consciousness, on the one hand, and their hypostatization, on the other.

In identifying the sources of utopian thought as the transposition, secularization, or immanentization of eschatology, Psychological Society neo-idealists saw that the transcendence of the absolute was a principle of fundamental philosophical importance. Appreciation of the human longing for the absolute, the force of which utopianism left no doubt, brought the philosophers closer to the nature of self-consciousness. Their insight can be seen as part of one of the most interesting recoveries in early twentieth-century European history of philosophy: that among the ancient Greeks the "leap of being" from pre-conscious (or mythical) to self-conscious (or philosophical) thought took place simultaneously with the rise of the idea of a transcendent God in Greek religion, replacing the mythology of everyday divine interference in human affairs. Moreover, the subsequent growth, in classical Greece, of philosophy from these roots coincided with awareness that the ideal could not to be fully realized in the earthly *polis,* already in decline. The decline of utopianism and rise of idealism in fin-de-siècle European and Russian philosophical thought
could be seen as an analogous process. This parallel did not escape Russian philosophers, and helps explain their interest in Greek philosophy, which formed an important current in the philosophical culture of the Moscow Psychological Society. Both Novgorodtsev and E. N. Trubetskoi wrote book-length studies on Greek philosophy, as did Evgenii's brother Sergei.\textsuperscript{37}

The Dimensions of Solov'evian Utopianism

Trubetskoi divides Solov'ev's career into three periods: 1873-82 ("preparatory"), 1882-94 ("utopian"), and 1894-1900 ("positive"). He analyzes Solov'ev's utopianism in both its metaphysical and social dimensions (the social element consists, in turn, of Russian national messianism and the theocratic project). Of the rich combination of these utopian strains of thought, he writes,

in Solov'ev they are united not mechanically, but organically, in one faith, which by itself expresses the general presupposition and content of all possible utopias. This is faith in the actual, all-round transformation of the universe. This dream sparkles with all colors of the rainbow: in it is combined socialism, nationalism, and religious faith (MVS, 90).

It is not true, of course, that Solov'ev was simply a utopian thinker.

If there were in Solov'ev's philosophy nothing other than the Schelling-inspired gnosticism of his metaphysics, his national-messianic dream of the Third Rome, his theocratic scheme of the "Kingdom of God" within the framework of the church-state organization, and his romantic daydreams about the realization of immortality through sexual love, then negative judgments of him would be perfectly correct and appropriate (MVS, x).

But his highly syncretic thought contains aspects which are resistant to utopianism, and this accounts for Trubetskoi's description of his last period in particular as "positive." "In the consciousness of the philosopher himself, in the last period of his creativity, the Kingdom of God is distinguished from utopia and erected on its ruins" (MVS, 90).

In his last period, Solov'ev affirms the Kingdom of God as transcendent; its advent is truly eschatological, not the culmination of history but its end. According to Trubetskoi:

The philosopher is finally convinced of the fact that the true integrity [tselostnost'] of life is not achieved in some intermediate or even penultimate stage of the world process: it does not at all intervene in that universe where sin and death reign. Its accomplishment is a universal resurrection, which expresses itself as the end of the world in a dual sense—its absolute goal and the end of the process of world evolution (MVS, 90-91).

This recognition coincides with Solov'ev's appreciation of the permanent presence of evil in immanent reality. And the greatest work of the late Solov'ev,
Justification of the Good, can be seen as a profound valuation of historical and relative forms, the progressive improvement (and not utopian transformation) of which provides the very concept of the justification of the good. Not only in his last period, but in his first as well there are positive anti-utopian elements, such as that which Trubetskoj calls the “great principle of the relativity of human knowledge” (MVS, 46), as well as Solov’ev’s liberal philosophy of law in Critique of Abstract Principles. 

Trubetskoj’s analysis of Solov’ev’s utopianism traces its various dimensions (metaphysical, messianic, and theocratic) to a basic source common to all forms of Christian utopias:

The worst enemy of Christian religious thought is immanentism, the essence of which consists in the affirmation of the earthly present as ultimate and absolute. In its pure aspect it is expressed in the complete and total denial of the transcendent. For religious thought this open paganism is of comparatively little danger. ... Much more dangerous for Christian philosophy in general and Solov’ev’s philosophy in particular are those mixed, compromised forms of immanentism ... where the transcendent and Divine are imperceptibly ... overshadowed by one or another earthly value (MVS, 88).

From the standpoint of Christian dogma, the immanentization (relativization or terrestrialization) of that which is transcendent has been treated as the heresy of millenarianism. From this point of view, Christian utopianism, millenarianism and historical or false representations of eschatology are all similar concepts. From our explication of Novgorodtsev, it is clear that not only millenarianism per se, but also putatively secular or atheistic forms (socialism, for example) of utopian thought derive from conceptions of the absolute as historical or immanent.

Trubetskoj identifies the metaphysical sources of utopianism in Solov’ev by tracing Schelling’s influence on him. In Schelling’s pantheistic utopia, “for which the world, in its given present reality, is already a phenomenon of the eternal divine essence” (MVS, 89), Trubetskoj sees part of the background, which Solov’ev inherited, of neo-Platonic and Christian theology. This highly influential current in the history of philosophy, as Leszek Kolakowski has shown with remarkable perspective in his three-volume history of marxism, envisages universal and human history as God’s “self-enriching alienation,” providing the metaphysical foundations for an all-encompassing utopian unity. According to this tradition, the absolute posits itself as extended reality, which thus takes the form of an other in which the absolute can come to know and fully recognize itself. The return of the other to itself achieves the self-actualization of the absolute and is the end of cosmic history. These strivings for the recovery of lost unity between subject and object, for identity of self and other, are profoundly monistic worldviews which deny the real existence of evil. They comprise an elaborate theodicy in an attempt to diminish the anxiety caused by the presence of evil. Such an approach represents evil as part of the exteriorization or emanation of the absolute, destined to be overcome as the absolute returns to itself in its other. This projection of the eventual metaphysical re-absorption of evil denies it distinct reality and
conceives it as a mere phenominalistic part of a striving toward future harmony. So conceived, evil is part of the absolute in the process of becoming, rather than man’s fault.

Solov’ev proved particularly prone to the temptations of this metaphysical schema. According to Trubetskoj,

In this consists one of the basic sources of the errors of his metaphysics. . . . He triumphed easily over the rationalist elements of western European philosophy, but was not in sufficient measure wary of that incomparably more refined temptation which is contained in many of its religious and mystical systems, in particular in Schelling’s gnosticism, from which he never could clearly detach himself (MVS, 58-59).

Here Trubetskoj anticipates the detailed attention which twentieth-century scholarship has given to gnosticism as a key source of utopianism. He singles out Solov’ev’s susceptibility to the easy resolution of the problem of evil which is offered by these metaphysics of self-enriching alienation. The metaphysics of Solov’ev’s first period is permeated by utopianism, “because he does not clearly distinguish the worldly from the Divine and inadequately penetrates the nature of evil.” He could not discern the positive period from his earlier stages. Noting that at twenty years of age Solov’ev does not believe in the devil, Trubetskoj contends that, “perhaps namely this devil expresses in full relief the difference between the earlier views of the philosopher and the metaphysics of his Three Conversations which, on the contrary, proceeds from a deep understanding of evil and allocates to the ‘devil’ a highly visible place in the world process” (MVS, 89).

We can turn to a work from Solov’ev’s first period, Chtenia o Bogochelovechestve (Lectures on Godliness), delivered in St. Petersburg and published in 1878, for illustration of Trubetskoj’s indications that Solov’ev combines metaphysical utopianism with concepts that are already anti-utopian in their implications. In the Lectures, Solov’ev’s approach to the problem of evil strives for a synthesis of two somewhat discordant elements. The first element is clearly part of the metaphysical idea of self-enriching alienation. According to Solov’ev, “the world that . . . ‘lieth in evil’ is not some new world absolutely distinct from the divine world. . . . It is only a different, improper interrelation of the same elements that also form the being of the divine world.” Moreover, Solov’ev strongly suggests that the roots of evil are in God himself, who to actualize himself posits reality. “For if God . . . contains in Himself all that is, or all entities, then, consequently, there cannot be entities that would have the basis of their being outside God . . . Consequently, nature . . . can only be a different positing or transposition of given essential elements that have substantially been in the divine world.”

By itself, this conception of evil denies men responsibility for evil. V. V. Zenkovsky, following Trubetskoj, singles this out for criticism. Zenkovsky understands that, “if the world were of a different nature from God, i.e., were genuinely ‘created’ being, its imperfection could be explained as a result of its createdness.” On this basis he opposers Solov’ev to Christian dogma,
because in Solov'ev the evil and dissolution of nature follow from God's "need" for external, real diversity; whereas, according to Christian doctrine (in St. Paul), "sin came into the world through man," and the world can be freed from evil only through man's salvation... In Christian doctrine, man provides the key both to the origin of evil in the world and to the method of vanishing it.

In speaking of emanation rather than genuine creation, ideas of self-enriching alienation are philosophically monistic, and Zenkovsky is right to observe that "metaphysical monism always tends to minimize the significance of human freedom."32

Solov'ev, as if to correct the utopian implications of evil conceived as part of the self-enriching alienation of the absolute, introduces another element into his philosophical synthesis. In his attempt to situate individual self-responsibility within his all-encompassing metaphysical framework of all-unity, Solov'ev asks why evil is necessary in the first place. "The answer to this question," he writes, "is wholly contained in a single word, which expresses something without which neither God nor nature can be conceived—this word is freedom." This is the second element in Solov'ev's metaphysics, by which man assumes responsibility for the return of the other back to itself, the absolute, and for the achievement of cosmic regeneration and the Kingdom of God on earth. This is called the "theurgical" principle; by making man himself responsible it loses many of the tyrannical implications of, for example, the Engelsian formula of "necessity understood." Solov'ev leaves no doubt that it is man who is responsible for the metaphysical solution: "The principle of evil, that is, the exclusive self-assertion that had plunged all existence into primordial chaos... now again emerges in a new form as the conscious free act of an individual person, and the new process has as its goal the inner moral overcoming of this evil principle."33

Trubetskoi, in turning from the metaphysical to social aspects of Solov'ev's utopianism, focuses on Solov'ev's project for the unification of Eastern and Western Christianity in a world theocracy under the spiritual authority of Rome and the imperial rule of Moscow. Trubetskoi considers it in its specifically Russian as well as more broadly European intellectual contexts, writing that, "in his theocratic project Solov'ev continues a partly Russian national, partly western tradition" (MVS, 89). More specifically, Solov'ev combined Roman Catholic ideas of theocracy with Russian national traditions, including the notion of Moscow as the Third Rome and nineteenth-century Slavophilism. Trubetskoi identifies in Slavophilism a mistaken identification of the nationally Russian with the universally Christian. The peculiarities which the Slavophiles (Kireevskii) depicted as quintessentially Russian—integrity and wisdom—belong in fact to no one, Trubetskoi objects, "but are an unattained ideal for all peoples, and in that category for the Russian people. To depict integrity [tsel'nost'] as a quality which the Russian people already have in reality means to suppose that the Christian ideal is already realized in Russia" (MVS, 62).

It is significant that Solov'ev appropriated and transformed Slavophilism under the influence of the liberation epoch of Alexander II.
Before then, in the days of Kireevski and Khomiakov, nationalist dreams of Russia and its messianic future were offset by the obvious inadequacies of Russia in reality, most of all, serfdom (MVS, 62). Properly speaking, it is not accurate to suggest that Slavophilism was messianic, since its ideology was not progressive in the sense of anticipating future transformation. "This does not mean," however, as Walicki writes, "that there was no possibility of a 'Messianization' of Slavophilism." This possibility was realized by Solov'ev, who first saw in the emancipation evidence of Russia's destiny to realize the kingdom of truth and justice on earth. He often cited the emancipation proclamation as a model of Christian politics (MVS, 63). Next came the war of 1877-1878 with Turkey, which evoked in Russia a sense of her special mission among the Slavs and further encouraged her messianic dreams. Evaluating the influence on Solov'ev of classical Slavophilism, Trubetskoi distinguishes between the true and utopian in him: "the true—that serene faith in the universal truth of Christianity and the religious vocation of Russia, and the utopian—nationalistic exaggeration of this vocation, the utopia of Russian national messianism associated with the false antithesis of the west European and the Russian" (MVS, 66).

Classical Slavophilism was rather apolitical, seeking to unburden the Russian land of political responsibilities by concentrating them in the hands of the tsar. Autocracy meant undivided but not unlimited authority; the state was to confine itself to politics, not intervening in the communal life of the Russian Orthodox countryside. For this reason, Walicki writes, "to the anti-Messianistic aspects of Russian Slavophilism belongs also its conception of the state." Solov'ev clearly departs from the Slavophiles in attributing to the Russian state (rather than to mainly the Russian people) special religious significance, and in this he returns to the earlier tradition of Moscow, the Third Rome. Trubetskoi emphasizes the strong messianic element in Solov'ev's theocratic idea. "The great secret of the universal embodiment of God in his eyes must take place through Russia, and not only through the Russian people, but also through the Russian state" (MVS, 539). Trubetskoi unfavorably contrasts varieties of religious nationalism (whether Russian or Jewish) to true Christian universalism, and declares that Solov'ev's messianic transformations of the deficiencies of the Russian past and present into utopian dreams of a great future were "hallucinations."

Both Trubetskoi and Novgorodtsev were especially interested in the specifically theocratic element of Solov'ev's utopian project, and drew from their analyses conclusions about normative relations between church and state. In his utopia of "free theocracy," Solov'ev's Psychological Society colleagues could see the mirror-image of caesaropapism (subordination of church to state). They came to a clear appreciation that theocracy and the "state church" in Russia (as Trubetskoi referred to it) were illiberal in the same way: both infringed the necessary autonomy of the separate spheres of church and state. In explication of the parallel the Psychological Society hosted a considerable literature on church history, church-state relations, and the role of religion in civic life.36

Solov'ev's efforts to separate his own idea of free theocracy from the coercive theocracy of medieval Christendom notwithstanding, Trubetskoi sees
in free theocracy only an obfuscation, a contradiction in terms, which he evaluates as a “clearly utopian trait of this project of the earthly transformation of humanity” (MVS, 175-76). He locates the main source of the utopian quality of Solov’ev’s theocratic vision in the illegitimate fusion of the autonomous realms of church and state: “The utopia consists not, of course, in the very idea of the Kingdom of God, nor in the demand that it be revealed on earth, but in the attempt to introduce the state, with its external compulsory mechanism, into the Kingdom of God” (MVS, 178). Far from separation of church and state, Solov’ev maintains that in Christian society, secular power should recognize itself as servant of the Kingdom of God; there is no separation of powers, nothing similar to the doctrine of the “two swords.” “Render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s”: Solov’ev rejects this principle as pre-Christian, appropriate only to the pagan state” (MVS, 548). The source of the three main powers in the world (priestly, princely, and prophetic) is Christ, and there can be no delimitation among them since they are aspects of tri-unity. According to Trubetskoi, “In his eyes, between the worldly kingdom and the churchly sphere there must be such indivisible unity as between the divine and human nature in Christ” (MVS, 553). Thus, a mystery so deep as Christ’s divine and human natures is to serve as basis for the organization of institutions in society.

As part of the false identification of the separate functions of church and state, Trubetskoi indicates two subsidiary mistakes of Solov’ev’s theocratic utopianism. The first is that it necessarily violates freedom of conscience. Free theocracy, as Solov’ev himself writes, “presupposes that all members of the given society belong equally to both church and state.” This condition cannot, however, be freely met, and therefore violates the “most precious of all freedoms—freedom of conscience” (MVS, 176). Moreover, the fact that it is the premise of free theocracy and yet cannot be freely met reveals the utopian character of the whole project (MVS, 178). Trubetskoi points out that the violation of freedom of conscience in Solov’ev’s theoretical constructions is paradoxical, in view of his consistent advocacy of the principle of religious freedom in tsarist Russia (MVS, 568-69). The second misunderstanding relates to the nature of the state itself. Once Solov’ev includes the state in his conception of free theocracy, there emerges a contradiction, for the state by its very nature is coercive (MVS, 567). This is a basic reason for the utopian quality of Solov’ev’s theocratic project; the state can be a part of free theocracy (that is, theocracy can be free) only by redefining the state. The real Kingdom of God, Trubetskoi affirms, leaves behind the state together with everything else terrestrial (MVS, 576). The final ideal of Christianity, as conceived by Trubetskoi, is transcendent because in it earthly relations no longer are what they are, having been surpassed by the advent of last things. In the meantime, “the state presupposes just that condition of humanity when social life has not yet become the embodiment of the Divine, when accordingly there has not been an internal victory of good over evil. . . . This is the whole sense of the coercive organization of the state, and it is also the explanation why the state cannot be transformed into the Kingdom of God or enter as a link into its composition” (MVS, 578).

The gist of Trubetskoi’s critique of Solov’ev’s theocratic utopianism, it bears repeating, is that separate and autonomous realms of human thought and
experience must not be conflated, one realm cannot be taken for another; relative parts, each indispensable in its own right, must not be absolutized as the whole. Solov’ev’s theocratic project is a striking example of these errors, fundamental to utopianism, of hypostatization and absolutization, because it concretely represents otherwise abstract aspects of consciousness in visible social institutions. The need for autonomy is only most apparent in Solov’ev’s theocracy. But Trubetskoj clearly has in mind the larger context of utopianism in general, of which theocracy is only an illustration: “It is not difficult to be convinced that this is only a variant of the basic error of Solov’ev’s whole thought . . . He settles the problem of the realization of the Kingdom of God on earth by, in essence, constantly neglecting the border between the two worlds” (MVS, 573-74).

From the central role of the concept of autonomy in Novgorodtsev’s analysis of utopianism, it would be expected that the concept informs his understanding of the significance of theocracy. Novgorodtsev begins by making some far-reaching claims about the relevance of theocracy to the study of utopianism in general. Every social ideal “secretly or openly relying on the idea of earthly paradise, in essence reproduces the idea of medieval theocracy about the salvation of people through a society of the faithful” (OOI, 17-18). In their resemblance to theocracy, utopias proceed from the same merging of separate areas of human concern. In them, Novgorodtsev writes, “the social principle receives absolute character. Dedication to society takes the place of religious aspiration, the promise of earthly paradise takes the place of religious expectations” (OOI, 18). Instead of this absolutization of a part for the whole, Novgorodtsev stresses the importance of the autonomy of each of the parts in maintaining the integrity of the whole: “‘Render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s, and unto God what is God’s’—this eternal precept remains in force for our ideas. It is the recognition of the autonomy of spiritual affairs, as of political affairs; each sphere possesses its own paths and tasks, and each must preserve its own significance for man” (OOI, 19).

Novgorodtsev develops medieval theocracy as an example of the absolutization of the relative and of the resulting distortions. According to him, Catholicism’s striving toward the supernatural and divine led, ironically, to the deification of the historical and relative as the church came to view itself as the embodiment of its aspirations.

Such was the fate of medieval Christianity, classically anticipated by St. Augustine. The renunciation of history in the name of absolute perfection leads here only to the elevation of the historical to the absolute: historically formed and existing in historical conditions, the Church proclaims itself to be the realized divine order, the Kingdom of God on earth. In this there is a peculiar concession to the conditional and relative, together with a need for activity on earth, a desire for influence in the world. This explains that paradoxical position that rejection of the world led the medieval Church to power over the world, and power over the world completed the enslavement of the Church to the world, to its interests, projects, and passions (OOI, 40).
These conjectures are questionable, or at least apply only to the medieval period in isolation. Western societies did manage, after all, to preserve autonomy of church and state, despite major lapses. In Russia, representatives of absolute (spiritual) perfection were defeated by those who courted the state’s favor and as a result reduced the church to an instrument of the state (in the famous dispute over monastic properties between Nil Sorskii and Joseph Sanin of Volokolamsk). The Russian Church therefore never had the opportunity of experiencing the “paradoxical position” of being enslaved to the world by having power over it, and yet the result was a far more drastic secularization than in the West where, according to Novgorodtsev, the church had the power to represent itself as the earthly form of the absolute, resulting in its compromise with the world. On balance, it seems the strong church, by creating a second source of power and loyalties, was the variable in resisting the absolutizing forces of the state. For all that, Novgorodtsev’s point is clear, namely, that in its failure to distinguish between the relative and the absolute, to respect the autonomy of areas of society apart from itself, and to restrict itself to its own legitimate domain, the church fell victim to itself in medieval theocracy, which stands as a paradigmatic example of the course of utopia in power.

From the early 1880s, Solov’ev himself sharply criticized the subordination of church to state in Russian history. He leveled this critique in a series of articles between 1881 and 1883, published in Ivan Aksakov’s *Rus’*. In the first, “O duxhovnoi vlasti v Rossii” (On the spiritual power in Russia), Solov’ev traces the weakness of the church to Patriarch Nikon, who sacrificed spiritual purity for competition in secular power (under Latin influence), and to the Schism that began in 1666-1667 with official (synodal) acceptance of the changes Nikon proposed to bring Russian religious practices more in line with the Greek. These changes led to mass defections from the church of people, henceforth known as Old Believers, devoted to the pre-reform rituals. To curb the exodus, the church relied on state violence, deeply compromising its independence and spiritual authority. In the second article, “O raskole v russkom narode i obshchestve” (On the schism in the Russian people and society), Solov’ev put part of the blame on the Old Believers themselves, whose parochialism robbed the church of the strength it would have derived from a united commitment to universalism. In the third essay, the most lengthy, “Velikii spor i khristianskaia politika” (The great schism and Christian politics), he concludes that the problems of the Russian Church go back to Byzantine particularism and caesaropapism.37

Facing the weakness of the Russian Church, Solov’ev placed his theocratic hopes in the 1880s on Roman Catholicism. But under the impact of the great famine of 1891-1892, he began to dismantle his theocratic project. “Free theocracy” was reoriented from a practical goal for the near or intermediate future to an ideal that could be realized only after a vast qualitative transformation in the moral, cultural, and economic level of society, or perhaps only beyond history altogether. The famine convinced Solov’ev of the huge gap between Russian reality and the theocratic ideal. In conversations with friends at the time, “he openly spoke of his disappointment in our contemporary state order and of the necessity of representative, constitutional institutions,” Trubetskoi recalls. “In these circumstances Solov’ev very soon faced the
necessity of choosing between theocracy and constitution." The example of Solov'ev's dramatic intellectual evolution reinforced his Psychological Society colleagues in their conviction that separation of church and state and freedom of conscience were fundamental premises of liberalism.

Solov'ev signaled the beginning of his disillusionment with theocratic utopianism in a major public lecture, "O prichinakh upadka srednevekovogo mirovschetsiania" (On the reasons for the collapse of the medieval worldview), delivered before the Psychological Society on 19 October 1891. The lecture could be seen as an important step forward: if ten years earlier Solov'ev had exposed the baneful effects of state domination of the church, now he seemed to come closer to recognizing that theocracy was the reverse side of the coin. What mattered was the principle of separation of church and state, the defense of the autonomous rights of the sacred and secular realms that medieval theocracy and the state church in Russia alike denied (true, Solov'ev's lecture was far less a clear defense of this principle itself than a valuation of secular work from the perspective of Christian progress). More generally, the enthusiasm Russia's most visible idealist philosopher had shown for theocracy, which could hardly be seen as a progressive social ideal, reinforced the long-held association of idealism with obscurantism in social philosophy. The de-utopianization of Solov'ev's thought cleared the way for the Psychological Society to take up a forthright idealist defense of liberalism.

Although Solov'ev appears never to have altogether abandoned the theocratic ideal, any further talk of its possible realization took a distant second place to the immediate task at hand—real progress. This is the message behind "On the Reasons for the Collapse of the Medieval Worldview": the medieval worldview was not progressive, the modern one is. Modernity is progressive in its recognition of the autonomy and value of secular activity. In this it is truer to the spirit of Christianity than medievalism, with its "monstrous doctrine" that the only path to salvation is faith in church dogma. God-manhood cannot be achieved without the active participation of man. "For it is clear," Solov'ev writes, "that the spiritual rebirth of humanity cannot take place apart from man himself. It cannot be only an external fact; it is a deed with which we are charged, a task which we must solve." Unbelievers who work contribute to Christian progress no less than believers, sometimes much more so, as modern times show. If Christians in name only ("nominal Christians") betray Christ's work, then why should it be denied that people who work, although not necessarily in Christ's name, nonetheless serve his purposes? A teasing comment Solov'ev made to Trubetskoï in 1892 suggests the extent to which he had come to value common work toward progress, and the freedom of conscience that was a necessary condition of it, over divisive confessional questions (and hypocrisy): "You appeal to Christians of all confessions to unite in a common struggle against unbelief; I would, on the contrary, join contemporary unbelievers in a struggle against contemporary Christians." Solov'ev's lecture heralded a new conception of liberal progress. Ten years later, Novgorodtsev, in an article assessing Solov'ev's significance for Russian liberalism, interpreted the central idea of the lecture as an original and bold combination of the Christian ideal with westernizing progress. Liberal westernizers had always stressed the value of energetic cultural work and
external forms of social life, providing for the free development of persons. To this Solov’ev added the new philosophic foundation of a Christian-inspired idealism. This revision of the traditional (often rather vague) association of liberalism and positivism in favor of an idealist substantiation set the agenda of the Psychological Society in social philosophy.

The culmination of the secularization (valuing the autonomy of the secular sphere) and de-utopianization (relegating theocracy to a remote ideal) of Solov’ev’s thought came in 1897 with the appearance of Justification of the Good. The treatise produced a great impression on Russian society, requiring a second edition in 1899, raising interest in idealist philosophy and further challenging the common assumption that positivism was the natural ally of liberalism. Nowhere in Justification of the Good does Solov’ev invoke “free theocracy.” Walicki formulates very well the significance of the volume in this respect:

Solov’ev now proclaimed the need for a formal separation of church and state, expressing his hostility to state-promoted religious intolerance in Russia. The cause of religious and moral progress, consisting in the Christianization of political and social life, was thereby radically divorced from the ideal of binding together the spiritual power of the church with the coercive power of the state. On the contrary: the realization of the idea of Godmanhood in history was made dependent on man’s maturity, on his full moral autonomy, incompatible with any form of tutelage in the spiritual sphere.

Solov’ev had made the autonomy of the sacred and secular a central part of his liberal philosophy of progress.

Utopia-Resistant Principles in Solov’ev’s Thought

For all its utopianism, Novgorodtsev and Trubetskoi find, in Solov’ev’s highly syncretic philosophy, principles resistant to utopianism. Trubetskoi endorses important aspects of Solov’ev’s epistemology in his preparatory period (which includes the Critique of Abstract Principles by his periodization). Solov’ev maintains that the absolute is a transcendental condition of logic. Nevertheless, Trubetskoi writes, “it is remarkable that Solov’ev connects, in an uninterrupted logical whole, this decisive affirmation of the absolute, as the basis of any logic or cognition, with categorical acknowledgment of the relativity of human knowledge” (MVS, 100-101). Solov’ev denies the accessibility of the absolute to theoretical knowledge alone and rejects the possibility of rationalistic, dogmatic metaphysics; instead, as Trubetskoi notes, he accepts the positivist affirmation of the relativity of theoretical knowledge (MVS, 111). Under the heading, “The concept of the absolute and the source of philosophical misunderstandings in judgments about it,” Trubetskoi shows that in the sphere of pure theoretical philosophy Solov’ev warned against the utopian habit of mind of absolutizing the relative, taking a part for the whole. Solov’ev calls the source of philosophical mistakes in thinking about the absolute the “hypostatization of predicates,” or the identification of the absolute itself with
the attributes which our relative and limited cognition gives it. The predicates, taken in isolation and hypostatization, can never be adequate to absolute essence. According to Trubetskoi, who especially values this point, "the root of basic philosophical errors inevitably consists in the substitution of something else for the absolute, in putting in its place something relative, conditional" (MVS, 112).

The theoretical philosophy of Solov'ev's first period treats realism and rationalism as equally "abstract principles," the first of which locates the criteria of truth in external reality, the second in the knowing subject. Both realism and rationalism are intellectual abstractions of substantial truth; both are hypostatizations of different aspects of the process of knowledge. According to Trubetskoi, "the phenomena of our experience [realism] and the concepts of our understanding [rationalism] can have authentic reality and universality only in connection with true being or all-unity," and this connection requires a third, religious principle (MVS, 228). Integral knowledge is thus a synthesis of empirical, rational, and religious principles. Trubetskoi empathetically describes Solov'ev's view of B. N. Chicherin as a telling example of "dogmatic rationalism." According to their characterization, Chicherin assumes that reason, proceeding from its own internal laws, can re-create the necessary unity of the universe. As Trubetskoi writes, "to assert that reason can arrive at the truth of all existence from its own internal laws, without assistance of empiria, means to recognize it as independent of anything—that is, as absolute." For Chicherin, the laws of reason are also those of the universe (MVS, 224). Dogmatic rationalism is an important source of utopianism to which Solov'ev was not susceptible, as Trubetskoi confirms in judging that "his critique of absolute rationalism . . . in general remains perfectly satisfactory" (MVS, 225). In this Solov'ev represents a significant departure from a main current of Western utopian thought, which M. M. Bakhtin describes in the following terms: "The consolidation of monologism and its permeation into all spheres and ideological life was promoted in modern times by European rationalism, with its cult of a unified and exclusive reason, and especially by the Enlightenment. . . . All of European utopianism was likewise built on this monologic principle."

In a significant discussion of "philosophical immanentism and the transcendence of truth," Trubetskoi positively evaluates Solov'ev's view that both empiricism and rationalism are forms of philosophical immanentism, minimally maintaining that whatever can be known is immanent to the subject. Trubetskoi suggests that most forms of immanentism go beyond this minimum in claiming not only that transcendent truth cannot be known, but that it does not exist. Solov'ev rejects the possibility of immanentism, arguing that empiricism and rationalism are only relations between the subject and that which transcends it. Knowledge itself is not possible under true immanentism, but only through a certain relation of the subject toward the transcendent.

At the basis of the process of knowledge is the conviction that behind the phenomenal (the only concern for immanentists) is absolute or transcendent being. According to Trubetskoi, "We ask about the ground of a given phenomenon. This means, first, that we recognize its existence as relative and conditional and, second, that we cannot be satisfied with the recognition of
such existence. Everything relative we must invariably relate to that which is absolute, unconditional. . . . Before every inquiry we are convinced that there is an absolute” (MVS, 231-32). In this way knowledge requires an absolute transcendent to the subject. “The absolute truth is not given but posed to us, otherwise we would not seek it. . . . In a word, in the process of knowledge the truth from beginning to end is presupposed as a reality independent of the knower” (MVS, 232). Since the transcendent absolute is a prerequisite of knowledge, consistent immanentism (or phenomenalism) is not possible, and inevitably transforms itself into unconscious or bad metaphysics. Taking empiriocriticism as an example of this process, Trubetskoi observes how “it elevates sensations to the absolute. . . . In the end sensations are here turned into being itself: in this way the immanentism of the empiriocritics becomes its opposite—ontology, and, moreover, an extraordinarily coarse and dogmatic ontology” (MVS, 232-33). Trubetskoi’s ontological conviction in transcendence and rejection of the phenomenalistic reduction of being to consciousness (immanence) help to corroborate these principles as distinctive to neo-idealism in the Moscow Psychological Society, especially since their relevance to Solov’ev is not all that obvious.

While Trubetskoi values aspects of Solov’ev’s epistemology for their anti-utopian implications, Novgorodtsev turns to Solov’ev for moral and social philosophy, and finds in his *Justification of the Good* sound formulation of the social ideal. Indeed, Novgorodtsev takes the very concept of the justification of the good as the basis for his own social philosophy, which can be described as a “philosophy of infinite progress or development.” In his words:

> Having established the suprahistorical nature of the absolute ideal, we explained the significance of this definition in the sense that in relation to the world of conditional reality the absolute ideal always remains a demand: never can this demand be fully realized, and therefore its realization can be expressed only by the formula of infinite development. On every path and step of this development is the aspiration toward the absolute; but this striving always ends only in a relative approximation to the ideal. Such is the law of historical progress, that the way to the absolute lies through relative stages of elevation, through partial manifestations of the moral principle. But namely from this flows the justification of these relative steps and partial manifestations of the good.

Novgorodtsev acknowledges his debt to Solov’ev:

> As VI. Solov’ev explains perfectly well, the very essence of the absolute moral law, as commandments or demands, “already includes recognition of the relative element in the moral sphere. For it is clear that the demand of perfection can be directed only toward imperfection; obliging it to become like the higher essence, this imperative presupposes lower states and relative stages of elevation” (OOI, 55).

Not only does Novgorodtsev offer here a fine conceptualization of the justification of the good, but he makes clear its deep resistance to utopianism. He further emphasizes the contrast between utopian absolutization of relative
approximations and their justification by the real absolute: "Only the absolute ideal can serve as the ultimate end for each relative step; to take these stages apart from the universal ideal, to isolate and close them off in themselves, would mean to take temporary and ephemeral demands, perhaps mistaken and false, for final and absolute ones. Only in light of higher ideal principles do temporary demands receive justification" (OOI, 56). In this way, Novgorodtsev’s assimilation of Solovev’s justification of the good once more expresses the neo-idealist insight that the autonomy of parts is essential to the integrity of the whole.

S. A. Kotliarevskii

In 1913 Sergei A. Kotliarevskii (1873-1939), another prominent member of the Psychological Society, published a review of Trubetskoï’s study of Solovev. The review, “Filosofia kontsa” (The philosophy of the end), is a significant essay in its own right that further demonstrates the importance the neo-idealist critique of utopianism had for the philosophic development of Russian liberalism in the Psychological Society. Kotliarevskii regards Trubetskoï’s work as an event in the history of contemporary Russian culture, and hopes to anticipate how it might be approached by a future historian of Russian culture. He is sure, in any event, that such a historian will need to take serious account of Trubetskoï’s study. Like Novgorodtsev and Trubetskoï, Kotliarevskii sees the current period in Russian life as a time of transition, with 1905-6 as the pivotal point, not only politically but also intellectually. One result of the revolution has been a growth in spiritual maturity, marked by the collapse of utopianism. The spirit of utopianism, which Kotliarevskii thinks the experience of revolution has defeated, consists in the loss of a sense of perspective, when the relative is easily mistaken for the absolute.

The utopian psychology of the Russian intelligentsia, so influential before 1905, is increasingly a thing of the past (in Kotliarevskii’s account, no less than in Novgorodtsev’s and Trubetskoï’s) as people are gradually learning to invest their everyday prosaic work with a sense of measured moral idealism. Religious interests, so long dormant in Russian society, are beginning to awaken. Although the church reforms put forward in 1905 and 1906 were initially seen as part of the general political overhauls, now the imperative of church reform issues from internal religious, not external political, considerations. The classics of German idealism, as well as Henri Bergson and William James, have come to enjoy popularity. Vokhi had great resonance. In all this Kotliarevskii sees a genuine reorientation in Russian cultural values.

In this atmosphere of religious searching three Russian thinkers attract special attention to themselves: Tolstoi, Dostoevsky, and Solovev, “but only the latter can be made the source of a new religious-philosophical tradition.” In drawing on Solovev for the type of vital religious consciousness that Kotliarevskii thought could alone realize the prospects of Russian liberalism, it would be necessary to be selective. The utopian elements in Solovev need to be identified and abandoned, in order to disclose the eternal living core of his
philosophy. In this process of discrimination, Kotliarevskii closely follows Trubetskoi. He endorses, for example, Trubetskoi’s view that Solov’ev’s denial of personal substantiality (until the soul’s transcendent transformation) reflected the overall de-utopianization of his thought. Kotliarevskii gives full due to the theocratic project and its fate. Like Novgorodtsev and Trubetskoi, he attaches special significance to the fact that, “already in Justification of the Good only a pale, fading specter remains of theocracy; instead of the former conflation we find here a much more precise delimitation of church and state.”

Kotliarevskii differs with Novgorodtsev over the meaning of the “philosophy of the end.” True, it is the complete opposite of the philosophy of progress, which is concerned with the constant betterment of the relative sphere of man’s existence in nature and history. The philosophy of the end is rather a reaffirmation of the presence of the absolute, a presence that can be lost among the relative concerns of daily life, leading to the creation, in turn, of false absolutes. “Utopianism, from which we have so cruelly suffered, can be overcome only by genuine idealism,” Kotliarevskii writes, by clear consciousness of the reality of the absolute. In the genuinely eschatological imagination, such as Solov’ev’s at the end of his life, the absolute emerges amidst the sense of impending destruction of accustomed earthly values. Such catastrophic feeling, when captured and conveyed by someone with Solov’ev’s poetic gifts, restores a necessary balance, since in ordinary times most people, immersed in their relative existence, lose sight of the absolute. This loss of perspective opens the way toward false absolutes. For these reasons, Kotliarevskii maintains that the philosophy of the end in Trubetskoi’s V. S. Solov’ev’s Weltanschauung is no less necessary than the philosophy of progress in Novgorodtsev’s Crisis of Modern Legal Consciousness. The combination yields a realism that resists theocratic and messianic dreams, and meets the general liberal requirement that “the public-state sphere must be decisively secularized,” rather than made the object of religious hopes that do not belong to it.

Across the Revolutionary Threshold

The Russian Revolution of 1917 gave even greater urgency to the philosophical analysis of utopianism. The two Psychological Society philosophers most interested in the critical study of utopianism, Evgenii Trubetskoi and Pavel Novgorodtsev, survived the revolution long enough—until 1920 and 1924, respectively—to devote their last works to interpretation of it. I have stressed that the neo-idealist critique of Solov’ev’s theocratic utopianism had special relevance for understanding Russia’s political evolution. Theocracy and caesaropapism violated, each in its own way, separation of church and state and freedom of conscience, without which was possible neither the free and full development of religious life nor, in turn, a society capable of self-government. These conclusions decisively informed the way Novgorodtsev and Trubetskoi
understood the failure of Russian liberalism and the intellectual origins of the Russian Revolution.

Two of Novgorodtsev's articles written after the revolution, "Democracy at the Crossroads," from 1923, and "Restoration of the Sacred," from the same year but published only posthumously in 1926, drew heavily from the Crisis of Modern Legal Consciousness and, to a lesser extent, from On the Social Ideal. In 1906, the Crisis of Modern Legal Consciousness proclaimed a loss of utopian faith in the transforming power of political institutions and forms. According to Novgorodtsev, political theorists were coming to the realization that the introduction of political democracy does not lead to the perfection of state and society. From the de-utopianization of what could be expected from the liberal state and politics, Novgorodtsev turned, in On the Social Ideal, to the ongoing de-utopianization of what could be expected from socialism. In both books he hoped to show that utopianism in political and social thought was rapidly becoming outdated, at least among scholars. His clear intent was to encourage the abandonment of utopian ideologies in Russia, by driving home the point that their incompatibility with nauka or Wissenschaft was gaining widespread recognition in Europe. In writing of the current demise of utopianism, it was not so much that Novgorodtsev underestimated the continued hold utopianism had on the Russian intelligentsia. Rather, he hoped to make utopianism a thing of the past by already describing it that way. When 1917 left no doubt of the vitality of Russian utopianism, Novgorodtsev had no choice but to recognize the vast gap between, on the one hand, "the prevailing currents of Russian social consciousness," as he put it in 1918, and, on the other, the philosophic rudiments of liberalism that he still maintained nauka had come to widely recognize.

In his 1923 essays Novgorodtsev continued to stress that the idea of democracy in recent European thought no longer designates a political panacea but rather only one of several possible ways of state organization. Democracy is a relative means, not an absolute end in itself. It has a certain advantage in that it gives free play to creative forces in society, but this advantage is quickly lost unless such forces serve higher principles. For this reason, democracy requires a high level of religious consciousness. The future of democracy, Novgorodtsev writes, depends on the future of religion. Democracy is always at the crossroads because it must go beyond itself. In all this, Novgorodtsev's message is that the spiritual prerequisites of democracy were lacking in Russia. This message is left implicit in "Democracy at the Crossroads," which is a survey of contemporary European literature, but is quite explicit in "Restoration of the Sacred." There he writes that Russian democracy after the February Revolution quickly degenerated, in the absence of consciousness of the sacred, to anarchy. The legalization of anarchy under G. E. Lvov and A. F. Kerenskii inevitably made way for Lenin's demagogic despotism. In revolutionary Russia, according to Novgorodtsev, "the path of autonomous morality and democratic politics led to the destruction in the human soul of eternal bonds and all that is sacred. This is why we now propose, in place of autonomous morality, theonomic morality, and in place of democracy and popular sovereignty—hagiocracy [agiokratía], the rule of the sacred."
These formulae are perhaps not as obscure as they sound. Novgorodtsev was using florid language to describe what he called "rationalistic utopianism" in his better-known essay, "On the Paths and Tasks of the Russian Intelligentsia," from Iz glubiny (De Profundis). "If the loftiest foundation and sacred object of life is religion, that is, the link of man with God, and the link of individual consciousness with the objective and universal law of the good, as with the law of God, then," Novgorodtsev explains, "rationalistic utopianism is a denial of this link. It is falling away or a dissociation of human reason from divine reason."65 This is not a peculiarly Russian phenomenon; rationalistic utopianism has parallels among other intelligentsias. But Novgorodtsev also maintains that this ideology, in the forms of anarchism and socialism, was unusually widespread in Russia and "penetrated deeply into the entire worldview of Russian enlightened society,"66 not just the radical intelligentsia. The general absence of civic culture, not the mere presence of a radical intelligentsia that only took advantage of the opportunity to come to power, explains in large measure the miscarriage of Russian liberal democracy in 1917. In any event, this is Novgorodtsev's line of reasoning.67 But why was civic culture in Russia so much weaker than in Western Europe (Novgorodtsev speaks of the long experience there in responsible civic activity)? Novgorodtsev insisted that civic culture and a tenable democracy fundamentally rested on the vitality of religious consciousness. In Russia, the church's lack of autonomy relative to the autocratic state, its resulting slight influence on educated society, and violation of freedom of conscience all militated against such vitality, and hence against the prospects of Russian liberalism.

Evgenii Trubetskoi was even more explicit in making this argument. In his 1918 article, "The Bolshevist Utopia and the Religious Movement in Russia," published abroad in English, he wrote, "The period which preceded the revolution was one of religious decadence. . . . The empty triumph of Bolshevism would have been impossible but for the utter enfeeblement of the religious life of the nation."68 Trubetskoi saw some positive significance behind the revolution in the revival the church experienced once it was freed of its official role under the old regime. In the midst of revolution, "the Church, pillaged and persecuted, lost all the material advantages it had hitherto enjoyed; in return, the loss of all these relative values was made good by the absolute value of spiritual independence. . . . My point," Trubetskoi writes, "is that independence of ecclesiastical power brought into the life of the Church independence of spirit and of thought."69

Trubetskoi's last major work, the Meaning of Life, first published in the summer of 1918, is an extended and profound philosophical meditation on the Great War and the Russian Revolution. If the weakness of the Russian Church and the atrophy of religious life were the underlying causes of the revolution, its proximate cause was the world war. Trubetskoi uses the term zvorochno-vechestevo to describe the animalization brought about by the war. This moral degradation paved the way for unprecedented revolutionary violence and class war in Russia.70 For Trubetskoi, total war and the militarization of human society epitomized the apparent meaninglessness of human existence that was the spur to writing a book entitled the Meaning of Life. The tract is, in short, an attempt at theodicy in the face of so much suffering and evil.
The first step toward finding meaning amidst meaninglessness lies in the human awareness itself, really quite startling, of meaninglessness. "The world is senseless," Trubetskoi writes, "but I am conscious of this, and therefore my consciousness is free of this senselessness." Consciousness transcends chaos as something other. Were consciousness wholly immersed in immanent chaos, not only would we have no awareness of chaos, but it is difficult to see how consciousness itself, awareness of self, would be possible. Self-consciousness, awareness of self as something that transcends or stands apart from everything else, is inextricably tied up with the awareness that somehow this everything else—the world or what is—is not what ought to be. This distinction between what is and what ought to be is a fundamental tenet of idealist philosophy, and Trubetskoi returns to it here. The category of meaninglessness requires, in short, the category of meaning. Yet, nothing in the empirical, chaotic world can account for the category of meaning. Where does it come from? Trubetskoi is explicit that it comes from a transcendent ontological reality, God.

Trubetskoi’s overall approach in the *Meaning of Life* is very much like the “spirit of the ontological proof” (see pages 76-77 below), the notion that the very idea of God already entails its ontological reality, since nothing in the empirical world suggests the idea of God (conceived not anthropomorphically, of course, but as transcendent perfect being). As Trubetskoi writes, “Although we live in the kingdom of death . . . although we sense with all our very essence this horror of a world forsaken by God, nonetheless we never cease to ask, where is meaning, where is God. . . . As long as man lives, this search will not die: for at the very basis of our life is the ineradicable obvious presence of meaning despite the testimony of experience to the contrary.” For Trubetskoi, the very search for the meaning of life entailed its ontological ground.

Understandably enough, Trubetskoi found strength in the Russian insight—he refers to Dostoevsky in this connection—that the greater the suffering, the deeper the spiritualization. “The path of salvation,” Trubetskoi says, “is in general a catastrophic path.” This might suggest that the experience of war and revolution had intensified what Novgorodtsev criticized five years earlier as Trubetskoi’s philosophy of the end. And indeed it is possible to find places in the *Meaning of Life* that certainly read like false, that is, historical, conceptions of eschatology, including statements that the present world catastrophe was ushering in the last days. Yet, Trubetskoi himself now warns against literal interpretation of the proximity of the end. For the Kingdom of God, he writes, begins in the internal world of man. Trubetskoi held out hope that this internal transformation might be brought about by the collapse of utopianism, the idea of earthly perfection, in the wake of the war and the realization that although the Bolsheviks were in power, communism was as impossible as it had always been. Paradoxically, he writes that the failure of utopias is always a sign that the Kingdom of God is at hand, “because precisely through rejection of the utopian and relative does man in his heart come closer to the eternal and absolute.”
Post-Revolutionary Continuations: S. I. Hessen

The neo-idealist critique of utopianism had significant influence on post-revolutionary Russian philosophy in emigration. Georges Florovsky dedicated his 1926 essay, "The Metaphysical Premises of Utopianism," to Novgorodtsev. Twenty years later S. L. Frank published an article entitled, "The Heresy of Utopianism," which focuses on the idea of utopianism as a secular transposition of Christian soteriology and on the parallels with theocracy. But S. I. Hessen's essay, "The Conflict between Utopia and the Autonomy of the Good in the Weltanschaung of Dostoevsky and Vl. Solov'ev," first published in German in 1929 and then in French and Russian during the next two years, is closest to the specific form of immanent critique. It is, aside from that, a profound philosophical study of these two Russian thinkers. Hessen's essay deserves attention in the context of the present study, since its subject is the intricate connection between two main (Kantian) moments in the neo-idealist development of Russian liberalism: the metaphysical implications of the autonomy of the good, implications which uphold the possibility of the substantiality of the self; and the critique of utopianism. In its conceptualization Hessen's essay is, moreover, deeply indebted to Novgorodtsev and Trubetski.  

Hessen argues that the de-utopianization of Solov'ev's thought reached its completion in Justification of the Good. He interprets Solov'ev's defense of the autonomy of the good as a philosophic restatement of an idea expressed symbolically in the Brothers Karamazov. The publication of both Dostoevsky's great novel and Solov'ev's Critique of Abstract Principles was completed in the same year, 1880. Hessen tends to regard the utopian spirit of Solov'ev's project of free theocracy as already dominating the Critique of Abstract Principles, and for this reason disputes Trubetski's periodization. Hessen ascribes the doctoral dissertation to Solov'ev's utopian period, arguing that Trubetski himself, "characterizing Solov'ev's theocratic utopia, is all the time compelled to turn to the Critique of Abstract Principles, and correctly so, for the idea of free theocracy in its most essential outlines is already wholly explicated in it." In contrast to Solov'ev's utopianism, Dostoevsky had by 1880 transcended in his artistic intuition the tendentiousness characteristic of his own utopian political ideology, and this accounts for the success of his representation of the autonomy of the good in the Brothers Karamazov.  

A key part of Hessen's idea is namely the process of the autonomization of the good from utopianism. Through Dostoevsky Hessen works out his own philosophical framework, which he then applies to Solov'ev. To set the stage, he asks, "In what measure is it possible to speak about the overcoming of the utopianism of free theocracy in The Brothers Karamazov?" (1, 279-80). He answers by citing Zosima's objection to free theocracy, that it cannot be realized in time. According to Hessen, "That the ideal of free theocracy is practically transformed by the elder Zosima's very words into the idea of the Heavenly Kingdom, and that these ideas do not just happen to appear together, but that rather the first is precisely a distorted understanding of the second, best of all demonstrates that a philosophy of the Good is deliberately incorporated into
the general symbolization of *The Brothers Karamazov* (I, 281). In this, Hessen suggests that Zosima reveals that the theocratic utopia is the transposition into historical existence of the ideal of the Kingdom of God, and that in the philosophy of the good underlying the novel Dostoevsky has come to recognize the necessary transcendence or autonomy of the ideal.

In arguing that the *Brothers Karamazov* is Dostoevsky's autonomization of the good from utopianism itself, Hessen's approach is very much like Novgorodtsev's (and somewhat less explicitly Trubetskoi's) immanent critique of utopianism. Neither his essay on Dostoevsky and Solov'ev, nor an earlier one, "The Collapse of Utopianism," referred to Novgorodtsev, but Hessen knew his work well.66 Certainly Hessen's description of utopianism recalls Novgorodtsev:

The essence of any utopia, including the utopia of "free theocracy," consists in the conflation of the absolute and relative, in the understanding of the absolute as the last, complete stage of temporal development, culminating the historical process on the horizontal plane, as it were, of historical being. In the utopia of free theocracy the Kingdom of God is actually conceived as realizable on earth in the sense of the immediate extension of concrete social and political forms, as they historically formed in Russia (I, 281).

Dostoevsky has overcome such a conception of the Kingdom of God, realizing that "it in general is not a 'kingdom' in the sense of an earthly state but exists on a completely different plane of being." The Kingdom of God is not envisaged horizontally or historically but vertically. "With rays from another world it illuminates the historical life of humanity in all times and periods." Hessen writes, "because no form of historical being can be absolutized as the exclusive bearer of the Kingdom of God" (I, 282).

The autonomy of the good to which Dostoevsky (and later Solov'ev) arrives refers not only to the process of autonomization of the good from utopianism, but also to the nature of the good itself. Both aspects of the concept are tightly interwoven in Hessen. The recognition that the good is not susceptible to total realization in historical existence coincides with the understanding that the good as transcendent, metaphysical truth is not an object of theoretical knowledge (as typically claimed in scientific utopias) but must rather be freely accepted. Authentic faith in God issues from the autonomous nature of the good itself as directly intuited in moral experience, not from theoretical knowledge or (even least of all) miracles, which can be seen as a vivid, visible analogy to theoretical arguments for God. As Hessen points out, Zosima shows that miracles are not only superfluous but contradict the very nature of the good since they would coerce faith, or, rather, destroy faith by replacing it with knowledge (I, 287-88).67 By forcing assent to the existence of the supernatural (God and immortality), miracles would impede the realization of freedom in the choice to do what one ought, or to act according to conscience or duty. Miracles would prove the existence of God, and as a consequence of such knowledge people would be "good" because of fear or the expectation of reward, leading to the atrophy of conscience and dulling intuition of authentic moral obligation, making genuine ethics impossible. The good would not be
autonomous, but heteronomous, or dependent on empirical knowledge of God (knowledge obtained through observation of miracles). The clear implication of Hessen's interpretation of Dostoevsky is that autonomy is the nature of the good itself. A heteronomous good is no longer the good, for the good is inextricably bound up with specifically moral obligation, duty or conscience. The good is possible only with free will, that is, if human conduct can be determined by duty rather than by external compulsion (sensuous impulse or miracles all the same). What is more, an "empirical" miracle would actually strike a blow against belief in God, since it would call into question whether moral conduct was in fact freely-determined—and a genuinely moral or autonomous act is the real miracle.

Miraculous demonstration of the existence of God is only a strong version of theoretical proofs of God. Therefore, Hessen affirms that the good must also be autonomous from dogmatic, absolute metaphysics and speculative theology. He writes that in Dostoevsky,

> Rejection of knowledge of the Absolute is definitely motivated by... considerations of the defense of human freedom and the autonomy of the good, correctly understood. As faith, coerced by miracles, would not be a free approach of man to God, since "faith is not born from a miracle, but a miracle from faith," so in the same way the comprehension of absolute metaphysical truths is a consequence of the good as active love,

not of theoretical knowledge (II, 336). These absolute metaphysical truths are God and the immortality of the soul. "Just as a miracle is the consequence of faith, and not its source," Hessen explains, "so certainty [wernost'] in the existence of God and in the immortality of the soul is a consequence of active love, and not its basis. This thought the elder Zosima never tires of repeating" (I, 287). The logical conclusion to Hessen's explication is that God and immortality can be entailed only if the will can be determined by moral obligation or duty alone, or autonomously, breaking the chain of causality that reigns without exception in the natural world. Free will, if it is really that, is, in other words, its own type of miracle and so would seem to entail or make possible other miracles, namely God and immortality. But for the will to be free, it must be determined by the moral law alone, which requires that God and immortality follow from, not condition, the primary testimony of moral consciousness, for otherwise the autonomy of the good is diminished. Ironically, God and immortality, if they were preliminary to ethics, would naturalize the will by conditioning it in the manner of external stimuli, thus robbing the will of its authentically moral, autonomous, miraculous nature, and so depriving us of our surest basis for rational belief in God and immortality.

The upshot is that any claim to theoretical knowledge of the existence of God, let alone miraculous demonstration, makes his existence less certain than in truly autonomous assent to the good. This is very much like Kant's moral or practical argument for the existence of God and immortality. Hessen makes clear that his understanding of the autonomy of the good is Kantian, referring to the concept "as it was affirmed by Kant" (II, 342) and showing that Solov'ev's autonomization of the good coincided with his drawing closer to
Kant. While he suggests that his own formulation of Dostoevsky's moral philosophy may not have been so conceived by the novelist himself, Hessen notes that among the literature Dostoevsky requested upon release from labor camp was the *Critique of Pure Reason* (I, 289). He also quotes Zosima's remark that, "philosophers correctly say we cannot understand the essence of things" (II, 336), probably a reference to Kant's idea of the theoretical unknowability of the noumenal (Hessen suggests the influence of the young Schelling).

On the basis of the independence of ethics from theory, of virtue from knowledge, Hessen draws a striking parallel between the autonomy of the good and apophatic or negative theology, which denies that God can be an object of theoretical knowledge or positive attribution. The apophatic approach perfectly fits Hessen's argument that by its very nature the good, although rooted in God, must be autonomous from knowledge of him. This intricate complex of ideas directly opposes utopian thought: "it [utopianism] makes the absolute an object of positive knowledge, pretending to ultimate and complete knowledge of the absolute" (I, 282). Although this "basic sin of every utopia" is characteristic of Dostoevsky's politics, "in The Brothers Karamazov Dostoevsky decisively breaks with this temptation of positive theology." Dostoevsky thinks of the Kingdom of God as transcending all categories of identity and difference, outside of which human knowledge is impossible.

In this sense the philosophy of *The Brothers Karamazov* comes very close to the tradition of negative theology, the essence of which consists not so much in a simple rejection of the knowability of the Absolute (criticism and even positivism do this), as in the affirmation of the transcendence of the Absolute, its inexpressibility by any form of our earthly existence (I, 283).

In short, Hessen identifies the heteronomy of the good and utopianism with positive or "cataphatic" theology, and the autonomy of the good with apophaticism.

Hessen's next link is the problem of evil. Theodicies comprise a large chapter in the history of positive theology. I described above the elaborate theodicies of rationalist, monistic, metaphysical systems that seek to lessen the reality of evil by including it as part of the phenomenalological emanation of the absolute in the process of becoming ("self-enriching alienation"). Hessen writes that no positive theology can manage without some such optimistic denial of the reality of evil. By contrast, "in The Brothers Karamazov Dostoevsky refutes every theodicy and all optimism as well, without which no utopia works" (I, 283-84). The presence of evil is an integral part of the refutation of naturalism by the miracle of the autonomy of the good. Since sense experience gives no indication of what ought to be, it is hard to see how the distinction between right and wrong or good and evil could arise on consistent naturalistic premises. By such premises, things should be for us as they are for nature, just neutrally there, not good or evil (although of course they would cause pleasure and pain). We should be content with the world as it is, rather than evaluating it according to the category of what ought to be. In short, evil should not exist in a naturalistic world. Its presence therefore suggests that nature and being are not co-extensive. Thus, although the patent inadequacy of theodicies is
often seen as a serious obstacle to belief in God, a more serious obstacle would be the absence of evil. This would appear to be the underlying significance of Hessen's celebration of Dostoevsky's apophatic rejection of the possibility of theodicy.

Hessen easily applies the concept of the autonomy of the good that he has elaborated through Dostoevsky to the de-utopianization of Solov'ev's thought. Having explicated the concept of the autonomy of the good in a way that clearly recalls Kant, Hessen draws attention to Solov'ev's celebration of the German philosopher:

In *Justification of the Good* Solov'ev considers Kant's determination of the rational form of morality "irreproachable." In his words "Kant's apportionment of morality into autonomous and heteronomous elements and the formula of the moral law represent one of the greatest accomplishments of the human mind." "Morality is actually self-legislated—in this Kant did not err, and this great success of consciousness, linked with his name, will not be lost on humanity" (II, 340-41).

Hessen is now explicit that the strict autonomy of the good, inexplicable in natural terms, makes possible and seems to entail God and immortality: "Fully in the spirit of the elder Zosima Solov'ev believes that with the growth of love, happiness and man's faith in God and immortality also grow. More than that: rooted in God, as in its absolute principle, the good already in itself entails [oznachayet] immortality" (II, 341-42). Hessen also ascribes to Solov'ev the other elements of his formulation of the autonomy of the good: apophaticism and the impossibility of theodicy. In *Justification of the Good* Solov'ev writes that God permits evil because to do otherwise would infringe on human freedom and so amount to a greater evil. "In these words Solov'ev himself expressed with complete clarity the tight link between negative theology on the one hand and the ideas of freedom and the autonomy of the good on the other" (II, 347). In support of his claim that "Solov'ev considers negative theology a necessary element of a true understanding of God," Hessen cites Solov'ev's article, "The Concept of God," published in *Voprosy filosofii* the same year as the appearance of *Justification of the Good*.

Referring to the Introduction to *Justification of the Good*, where Solov'ev defends the autonomy of ethics from positive religion and theoretical philosophy, Hessen concludes, "Solov'ev's overcoming of his utopia is nowhere expressed with such vividness as in this defense of the relative autonomy of the good." Solov'ev's conception, like Dostoevsky's, "is equally distinguished from the point of view of the heteronomy of ethics, which makes the good dependent on knowledge of the world and of God, and from the point of view of absolute autonomy, which transforms the independence of the moral sphere from the cognitive sphere (its autonomy in the theoretical respect) into total independence from any higher principle whatsoever" (II, 349). The autonomy of the good, Hessen emphasizes, is not radical, but rather grounded in the higher principles of God and the immortality of the soul.
Neo-Idealism, Utopianism, and the Spirit of the Ontological Proof

Russian neo-idealists, for all their criticism of utopianism in Solov'ev and Russian intellectual history more generally, appreciated that utopian ideas bear an unmistakable resemblance to moral ones: both are testimony to human intuition of what ought to be in an empirical world that speaks to us only of what is. Moral consciousness ceaselessly strives for perfection, while natural and historical existence unceasingly resists our ideal aspirations. "The most righteous life is only a tireless approximation to that which always remains infinitely distant. The result," wrote L. M. Lopatin (Psychological Society chair, 1900-1919), "is a striking disparity: the meaning of human existence consists in the fulfillment of that which is impossible to fulfill." The utopian impulse to overcome this disparity attests to the resilience of the human spirit over nature, to the persistence of the ideal over the resistance of the real. It is a vivid example of the irreducibility of consciousness to empirical reality. In the strength and persistence of utopianism Russian neo-idealists saw further evidence of human awareness of a noumenal source and destiny. For this reason, neo-idealism was, I have stressed, an immanent critique of utopianism.

Kant devoted the essential part of his philosophy to demonstrating the irreducibility of the self to naturalistic determination. He, too, saw utopianism in light of this conviction. To specify the connection, he turned, at the beginning of the Transcendental Dialectic, to Plato: "He knew that our reason naturally exalts itself to modes of knowledge which so far transcend the bounds of experience that no given empirical object can ever coincide with them, but which must none the less be recognised as having their own reality, and which are by no means mere fictions of the brain." These modes of knowledge become available in the exercise of pure practical reason, and in this respect Kant particularly admired Plato’s moral and social philosophy. The impossibility of the complete realization of pure ideas such as virtue is no reason, Kant writes, to bemoan the utopian dimensions of the Republic. We ought to look at Plato’s work as an ideal to be progressively approximated, "rather than to set it aside as useless on the very sorry and harmful pretext of impracticability."

This perfect state may never, indeed, come into being: none the less this does not affect the righteousness of the idea, which, in order to bring the legal organisation of mankind ever nearer to its greatest possible perfection, advances this maximum as an archetype. For what the highest degree may be at which mankind may have come to a stand, and how great a gulf may still have to be left between the idea and its realisation, are questions which no one can, or ought to, answer. For the issue depends on freedom; and it is in the power of freedom to pass beyond any and every specified limit.91

Nowhere could the Kantian inspiration behind the development of Russian neo-idealism, in both its immanent critique of utopianism and liberal philosophy of progress, be more clear.

About the non-empirical ground from which the ideas of pure reason arise, Kant was less explicit than either Plato or the Psychological Society neo-idealists. Yet, Lopatin could refer to him as “one of the greatest dialecticians in
all human history” when it came to his postulation of immortality from analysis of the nature of moral experience. In Lopatin’s formulation of this postulate,

The eternal dignity of the human person entails [podrazumevaet] its eternal reality. We are compelled to think that man belongs to the sensuous, phenomenal world with only one side of his existence; with the other side (the one in which consists his real essence), he is connected to the suprasensuous, eternal world, in which the demands of the good coincide with the laws of the fate of every individual soul.  

In the ontological conclusions it drew from the very presence of moral, ideal aspirations in an empirical world, Russian neo-idealism strongly suggests what might be called the spirit of the ontological proof. Charles Taylor, in his recent work, Sources of the Self, contends that although the ontological argument for the existence of God, first formulated by St. Anselm, may not be all that convincing as a syllogism, the “spiritual stance” underlying it deserves respect. This spiritual stance finds it startling that the idea of absolute necessary perfection (the infinite aggregate of all possible perfections) should occur at all to contingent beings, whose empirical experience conveys nothing from which this idea (God) could be extrapolated.

The spirit of the ontological proof turns on the notion that self-consciousness seems to depend on the a priori idea of necessity or perfection. Descartes’ version develops the proof in this direction. Awareness of the self as contingent and imperfect entails the idea of necessary perfection, an idea that could not arise from extrapolation, but rather one that is already presupposed in awareness of contingency. In Taylor’s gloss on Descartes, “I can only understand myself in the light of a perfection that goes far beyond my powers. How is it that this light is cast upon my thought? It is beyond my powers to have produced it myself, Descartes argues; so it must have come from a being who really enjoys these perfections.” It is ironic that Kant, whose criticism of the logic of the ontological proof has been widely accepted, obviously found its spirit very powerful. His concept of God, which he calls not merely an idea but the ideal of pure reason, can serve as a classic example of “perfect being theology.”

The upshot of the spirit of the ontological proof is that the various perfections toward which we aspire, and which find an infinite unity in the ideal of pure reason, should not even come to mind on naturalistic premises. Nor should the utopian impulse. This was the insight behind the immanent critique of utopianism in Russian neo-idealism. Paul Tillich put it well when he wrote of utopia, “The root of its power is the essential—the ontological—discontent of man in every direction of his being.”

NOTES

Scanlan, Albert V. Sobolev, Philip J. Swoboda, Paul Valliere, Andrzej Walicki, and Richard Wortman for comments on earlier drafts.


2. The society owes its name "psychological" to its founder, M. M. Troitskii (1835-99), an empirical psychologist. Although it did sponsor psychological research, the society's greater importance in the history of Russian philosophy began to emerge by 1888, when its direction was taken over by a group of idealist and religious philosophers, including N. Ia. Grot (1852-99), V. S. Solov'ev (1853-1900), L. M. Lopatin (1855-1920), and S. N. Trubetskoi (1862-1905). In 1889, the Psychological Society began publication of Russia's first regular, specialized journal in philosophy, Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii (Questions of philosophy and psychology). By the end of its activity in 1922, the society had played the major role in the growth of professional philosophy in Russia. On the society, see Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak, Sergeĭ N. Trubetskoi: An Intellectual Among the Intelligentsia in Prerevolutionary Russia (Belmont, Mass.: Nordland, 1976), 63-80; idem, "Filosofija, religija i obschestvennost’ v Rossii v kontse 19-go i nachale 20-go vv," in Russkaya religioznaya-filosofskaya mys’ XX
Russian Confrontations with Vladimir Solov'ev


5. This ontological focus contrasts Russian neo-idealism to the post-Kantian development of German thought which, from absolute idealism through both the positivistic and idealist currents in neo-Kantianism, tended to be anti-ontological in its phenomenalistic reduction of being to its immanent data of consciousness, regardless of whether this was done to "idealize" empirical reality (Hegel) or to "empiricize" thought (positivism). Psychological Society philosophers concluded that idealist constructions which collapsed the distinction between consciousness and being already contained the germs of a positivism that reverted from a pure ontologically-groundless phenomenalism to crude forms of ontology such as materialism. Russian neo-idealism, in its critical ontological direction, was thus a more consistent and thorough-going critique of positivism than contemporary German neo-Kantianism, which historians of European thought have typically singled out for theoretical depth. On the German background, see George Armstrong Kelly, Idealism, Politics and History; Sources of Hegelian Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); Klaus Christian Köhnke, The Rise of Neo-Kantianism: German Academic Philosophy between Idealism and Positivism, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Nicholas Lobkowicz, Theory and Practice: History of a Concept from Aristotle to Marx (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), 123-81; Herbert Schnädelbach, Philosophy in Germany 1831-1833, trans. Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Thomas E. Willey, Back to Kant: The Revival of Kantianism in German Social and Historical Thought, 1860-1914 (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1978).


7. Perhaps the most sophisticated consideration of the transformation of religious ideas of salvation into secular ideologies as a major process in European intellectual history, and of the remote historical, theological, and philosophical background, can be found in Eric Voegelin, Order and History, 5 vols. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956-1987); and idem, Anamnesis, trans. and ed. Gerhart Niemeyer (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1978). Also see Karl Lowith, Meaning in History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949); and J. L. Talmon, The Origins of


9. There is a considerable scholarly literature defining the characteristics of the pre-revolutionary Russian intelligentsia, but the tendency toward utopianism is surely the most distinctive feature, deriving from deep alienation from the state and the weakness of civil society. In an influential study written more than thirty years ago, Marc Raeff, evaluating the impact of Western ideas of the Enlightenment on noble serfsmen well before the emergence of the classic Russian intelligentsia in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, concludes that "they easily acquired the 'Utopian' attitude that man and society could be transformed according to a theoretical blueprint" (Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia: The Eighteenth-Century Nobility [San Diego, Calif.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1966], 167). Nicholas V. Riasanovsky describes a deepening alienation, or "parting of ways," between government and the educated public, writing that during the course of the reign of Nicholas I, "the connection was no more. . . . The thought of Russian intellectuals, and to a certain extent of the government too, was becoming, so to speak, increasingly unreal. . . . The views of Khomiakov, or Constantine Aksakov, or Bakunin, or the orthodox Fourierist Khanykov constituted pure utopia" ("Notes on the Emergence and Nature of the Russian Intelligentsia," in Art and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Russia, ed. Theofanis George Stavrou [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983], 18-19, which is based on Riasanovsky's monograph, A Parting of the Ways: Government and the Educated Public in Russia, 1801-1855 [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976]). More recently, Richard Stites, Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), describes the diversity of utopian manifestations in Russian revolutionary culture and life. Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928-1931 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), examines the resurgence of utopian impulses on the eve of Stalin's "revolution from above." Abbot Gleason, Peter Kenez, and Richard Stites include other studies of Bolshevik utopian experimentation in their edited volume, Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995). Robert C. Tucker ("Lenin's Bolshevism as a Culture in the Making," in Gleason et al., Bolshevik Culture) characterizes the majority conclusions of this recent scholarship on revolutionary utopianism by writing, "There are good grounds for regarding Bolshevism as a millenarian movement" (25).
10. The most important university philosophers in the Psychological Society, with regard to the neo-idealistic defense of autonomy and critique of utopianism, were B. N. Chicherin (1828-1904), S. N. Trubetskoi (1862-1905), L. M. Lopatin (1855-1920), E. N. Trubetskoi (1863-1920), P. I. Novgorodtsev (1866-1924), and S. A. Koltarevskii (1873-1939).


16. The central place of millenarian tendencies in European romantic thought is stressed in Lobkowicz, Theory and Practice, 146-81; and Andrzej Walicki, Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism: The Case of Poland (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 239-333.

17. Lobkowicz, Theory and Practice, 166.

18. According to George Armstrong Kelly (Idealism, Politics and History, 115), "Kant intended his theory of knowledge to undermine, on the one hand, all chiliasm, all utopia and, on the other, all recourse to despotism in the name of a crude, literal authoritarian finalism." Kelly devotes a section of his excellent study to Kant's critique of "utopia and chiliasm" (146-53). Similarly, Karl Jaspers writes, "Kant's philosophy goes counter to the totalizations that began with the systems of German idealism and led by way of Marxism to the practice of total knowledge and total planning" (quoted in Willey, Back to Kant, 32).


20. Andrzej Walicki, The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth-Century Russian Thought, trans. Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), chap. 15. In chapter 3 of Legal Philosophies of Russian Liberalism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), Walicki further develops the anti-utopian implications of Solov'ev's thought, showing, for example, that the Critique of Abstract Principles (1860) embeds a liberal philosophy of law, resistant to utopianism, even within Solov'ev's utopian project of free theocracy. The heterogeneity of Solov'ev's thought, to which Walicki gives full due, led to understandable confu-
sion. A case in point is B. N. Chicherin. According to Walicki, “the word ‘theocracy’ was so strongly associated in his mind with extreme antiliberal values that he could not pay enough attention to Solov’ev’s efforts to make liberalism an inseparable part of the theocratic ideal” (Legal Philosophies, 188).

21. See note 7 above. In many ways M. M. Bakhtin’s critique of utopianism recalls the pre-revolutionary development of Russian neo-idealism. This is true, in particular, of Bakhtin’s consideration of eschatology as a utopian chronotope. See M. Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel,” in The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 148. Cary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson (Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics [Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990], 397-98) single out this aspect of Bakhtin’s thought: “When prosaics and unfinalizability combine, as they do in the chronotope essay, the result is a resolute anti-utopianism.” Bakhtin’s critique of utopianism is central to the “prosaics” interpretation advanced by Morson and Emerson.

22. In this their eminent predecessor was Boris Chicherin, whose Mysticism v nauke (Mysticism in science, 1860) was a critique of Solov’ev’s utopian project of “free theocracy.” Chicherin falls beyond the scope of this essay, but see Walicki, Legal Philosophies, 146-47, 188-89.

23. In addition to critic of Solov’ev’s utopianism, another, closely related aspect of the specifically neo-idealistic response to him was development of his philosophy of law. This too was undertaken largely in the Moscow Psychological Society. Walicki writes that an entire generation of Russian metaphysical idealists and religious thinkers was schooled in Solov’ev’s philosophy, but adds that “this, however, does not apply to his philosophy of law.” For, unlike neo-idealistic philosophers in the Moscow Psychological Society, “Russian religious philosophers,” by which Walicki means most of the other participants in the Russian religious-philosophic renaissance, “remained rather cool towards or sceptical of this part of his universal philosophical synthesis” (Legal Philosophies, 166). Walicki shows on what basis neo-idealistic philosophers could draw a liberal philosophy of law from Solov’ev, and analyzes how this was done by Novgorodtsev in particular.


27. S. N. Trubetzkoi was a well-known historian of Greek philosophy, exploring Greek antecedents to Christianity. He reviewed in Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii Erwin Rohde’s classic work on Greek beliefs about the soul. Later, Bruno Snell (The Discovery of the Mind in Greek Philosophy and Literature, reprint ed. [New York: Dover, 1982]), would relate, in a fascinating argument, the birth of self-consciousness itself to the awareness of divine transcendence. Some of the relevant literature includes: John Burnet, Greek Philosophy (London, 1924); Edward Caird, The Evolution of Theology in the Greek Philosophers, 2 vols. (Glasgow, 1904); F. M. Cornford, From


33. Solov'ev, Chitenie o Bogochelovechestve, 2:137, 141-42.

34. Andrzej Walicki, Russia, Poland, and Universal Regeneration: Studies on Russian and Polish Thought of the Romantic Epoch (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 150.

35. Strémooukhoff, referring to the context of the war of 1877: “it is only with Soloviev that Slavophilism becomes true messianism” (Vladimir Soloviev, 130).

36. E. N. Trubetskoi wrote two substantial volumes on the intellectual history of theocracy in medieval Europe: Religioznos-obshchestvennyi ideal zapadnogo khristianstva v V veke: Mirosozertsanie bl. Avgustina (Moscow, 1892), and Religioznos-obshchestvennyi ideal zapadnogo khristianstva v XI veke: Ideia bozheskogo tsarstva v tvoreniiakh Grigorii VII-go i ego publitistov-sovreminnikov (Kiev, 1897). The historian Vl. I. Ger’e, a close colleague of Trubetskoi and Novgorodtsev in the Psychological Society, devoted three of his later books to church history and the idea of the Kingdom of God in medieval historical and political thought: Blazhennyi Avgustin (Moscow, 1910), Zapadnoe monashestvo i papstvo (Moscow, 1913), and Ratsvet zapadnoi teokratii (Moscow, 1916). His important work, Filosofia istorii ot Avgustina do Gogel’ia (Moscow, 1915), includes a chapter on theocratic ideas of human history. Ger’e’s work stressed that theocracy can be no less transcendent an ideal than the Kingdom of God itself, not a practical goal of mundane politics. Western Christianity, in the final analysis, recognized this. “The papacy,” Ger’e wrote in a review, “even in the epoch of its greatest triumph, did not reject in principle the independence of political power and civil law” (“K voprosu o suschnosti teokratii,” Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii 10, no. 3, kn. 48 [1899]: 311). The great historian V. O. Kliuchevskii, another member of the Psychological Society (although not an idealist in his philosophical views), contributed a series of articles entitled, “Zapadnoe vliianie v Rossii XVII v (istoriko-psikhologicheskii ocherk),” Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii 8, no. 1, 3-4, kn. 36,
38-39 (1897), in which he argued that the impact of Western ideas in Russia was so great because the Russian Church failed to provide a strong source of indigenous intellectual traditions. Kliuchevskii pointed in particular to the debilitating effects of the seventeenth-century schism, which increased the church’s dependence on the state and led to a precipitate decline in its influence on the educated society. Deprived of religious vospitanie, Russians turned to ideology as a surrogate for spiritual satisfaction the church could not provide.

37. The three essays can be found in Solov’ev, Sochinenia, vol. 1. For summary and analysis, see E. N. Trubetskoj, Mirosozertsanie, 1:437-48; Losev, Vladimir Solov’ev, 342-47; Mochul’skii, Vladimir Solov’ev, 134-44; and Strémooukhoff, Vladimir Solov’ev, 141-46, 147-88.

38. E. N. Trubetskoj, Mirosozertsanie, 2:7, 10. Trubetskoj devotes a chapter of the second volume of his study to arguing that Solov’ev’s disappointment in Russian state and society spurred the collapse, or at any rate marked de-utopianization, of his theocratic project (2:3-35).

39. I believe Losev is correct in maintaining this, as he does throughout Vladimir Solov’ev i ego oremia. By contrast, Evgenii Trubetskoj argues for the utter collapse of the theocratic ideal in the 1890s.


41. Ibid., 345. Italics Solov’ev’s.

42. Ibid., 354-55. Dimitri Strémooukhoff appraises the 1891 Psychological Society lecture as particularly revealing of Solov’ev’s new outlook (Vladimir Solov’ev, 247-50). According to Strémooukhoff, “The new elements in this attitude are a more active alliance with the liberals, . . . positive criticism of the Church, and finally a new theory in which the manifestation of the Kingdom of God is taking place through progress” (250).

43. Quoted by Mochul’skii, Vladimir Solov’ev, 185.


45. Walicki, Legal Philosophies, 194-95.


47. Trubetskoj gives an extended analysis of the Justification of the Good in the second volume of his study (Mirosozertsanie, 2:39-194).


49. Ibid., 314-15.

50. Ibid., 316-19.

51. Ibid., 319.

52. Ibid., 325-26. In three late essays on epistemology first published in Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii (1897-99) and later collected under the title, Theoretical Philosophy, Solov’ev abandoned the idea of personal substantiality. He argued, against Descartes’ cogito ergo sum, that the substantiality of the subject is not revealed in and cannot be inferred from consciousness (V. S. Solov’ev, Sochinenia o doukh tomakh, 2d ed. [Moscow: Mysl’, 1990], 1:776). Trubetskoj (Mirosozertsanie, 2:247-59) offers a benign (and persuasive) interpretation of Solov’ev’s new ideas. Solov’ev ascribed substantiality to God alone, who has the power of creation ex nihilo. Souls that were in the strict sense substantial could not be created, since they would have always existed, nor would they be capable of self-improvement, since they would already be perfect. These reasons explain why, according to Trubetskoj, “for Solov’ev in the last period of
his creativity God was the only substance in the real sense of the word,” and why the self was not substantial but rather a hypostasis (ipostas' or podstavka) for God (Mirosozertsanie, 2:247, 248, 251). Or, in Walicki's suggestive formulation, “only after death is man finally substantiated in eternal ideality; substantiality, therefore, is the ultimate destiny and not an innate property of the human soul” (Walicki, A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism, trans. Hilda Andrews-Rusticke [Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1979], 389). Significantly, Trubetskoi sees Solov'ev's conception of personal progress toward substantiality as an aspect of the overall de-utopianization of his thought in this period (Mirosozertsanie, 2:258-59). Self-perfection must be a process and transcendent goal, not a presumed state by virtue of a premature substantiality. Solov'ev did not advance a radical deontologization of the self, only a delay in its substantialization. From this perspective, his new theory had little in common with empiricism and phenomenalism, or at least with their usual metaphysical presuppositions.

54. Ibid., 327.
55. Ibid., 330-31.
56. Kotliarevskii also writes: "The philosophy of the end is . . . an extraordinarily energetic expression of the absolute, which is revealed after the temporal ends. The formal principle of idealism here cannot evoke argument" (ibid., 333).
57. Ibid., 331. Mirosozertsanie VI. S. Solov'eva also evoked a sharp polemic between Trubetskoi and L. M. Lopatin: L. M. Lopatin, "VI. S. Solov'ev i kniaz' E. N. Trubetskoi," Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii 24, no. 4, kn. 119 (1913); 24, no. 5, kn. 120 (1913); and 25, no. 3, kn. 123 (1914); E. N. Trubetskoi, "K voprosu o mirovozrenii V. S. Solov'eva," Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii 24, no. 5, kn. 120 (1913); and idem, "V. S. Solov'ev i L. M. Lopatin," Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii 25, no. 4, kn. 124 (1914).

Although Lopatin did not dwell on Solov'ev's utopianism, and avoided using that term, nonetheless he thought that "extraordinarily clear eschatological expectations" were characteristic of Solov'ev's whole life. According to Lopatin, Solov'ev's philosophy, in all periods of its development, was a "philosophy of the end" ("VI. S. Solov'ev i kniaz' E. N. Trubetskoi," Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii 24, no. 4, kn. 119 [1913]: 354-55). Thus, for Lopatin, the "philosophy of the end" did not have the specific sense it did for Trubetskoi and Kotliarevskii as Solov'ev's overcoming of utopianism at the end of his life. Rather, Lopatin appears to have persuaded that Solov'ev's utopianism was genuinely eschatological. A. F. Losev, Lopatin's student, largely follows him in this respect. (In Vladimir Solov'ev i ego vremia, Losev discusses various aspects of the relations among Solov'ev, Lopatin, and Trubetskoi.) Lopatin did take exception to the theocratic project. He writes that in the very conditions of the rise of the state, "as a coercive union of people for the preservation of general interests, lie insurmountable difficulties for the fulfillment of ideal demands: ruthlessness to the living content of personal life, for the sake of considerations of the general good, will always put an impenetrable boundary between politics and theocracy, that is, the true realization of Divine justice in the state and social structure" ("Teoreticheskie osnovy soznatel'noi naravstvennoi zhizni," Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii 2, no. 1, kn. 5 [1890]: 68).

62. Ibid., 552-53.
64. Ibid., 579.
66. Ibid., 185.
67. Ibid., 186-87.
69. Ibid., 329.
70. E. N. Trubetskoi, Snyad zhitni (Berlin, 1922), 245-53.
71. Ibid., 43.
72. Ibid., 47.
73. Ibid., 62.
74. Ibid., 78-80.
75. Ibid., 268.
76. Ibid., 264-66.
77. Ibid., 267.
78. Ibid., 268.
79. Georges Florovsky, “Metafizicheskie predposylyki utopizma,” Put’, no. 4 (Paris, June-July 1926): 405-24. Marc Raeff, in his fine essay, “Enticements and Rifts: Georges Florovsky as Historian of the Life of the Mind and the Life of the Church in Russia” (Modern Greek Studies Yearbook 6 [1990]: 187-244), appraises highly Florovsky’s analysis of utopian thought. Of naturalistic and deterministic utopianism, such as romantic Naturphilosophie, which denies free spiritual creativity, Raeff writes that Florovsky maintained, “It is a position that no genuine Christian can hold, moreover it is a position particularly alien to the historical traditions of the Russian people, it is a Western lure. And the social utopianism of Christian socialism, derived from romanticism, is as much of a mirage as any secular utopianism. In short, romanticism is but a version of utopianism whose spiritual impossibility and Christian inadmissibility had been clarified by Florovsky earlier in the essay we have summarized [“Metafizicheskie predposylyki utopizma”]. It is only by overcoming the lures of romantic impasses that a truly viable idea can be contributed. This is what some Slavophiles, such as Khomiakov and Samarin saw clearly in their ecclesiological discussions. It is also the conclusions that Dostoevsky came to as he broke away from the lures of romanticism and utopianism when he recovered his belief in the metaphysical freedom and worth of the individual” (231). This reference to Dostoevsky is directly relevant to Hessen’s analysis and speaks to the impressive continuity within the Russian philosophic critique of utopianism.
82. Sergius Hessen (1887-1950), who was not a member of the Psychological Society, was an outstanding and versatile Russian scholar in the fields of philosophy, law, pedagogy, and the history of ideas. Walicki, who studied under Hessen, dedicated his own Legal Philosophies of Russian Liberalism to him and devoted the book’s last chapter to his thought.
83. "Bor'ba utopii i avtomomii dobra v mirovozrenii F. Dostoevskogo i Vl. Solov'eva," Sovremennye zapiski 46 (Paris, 1931): 338. Subsequent page citations in the text ('T' for the first part of the article in vol. 45 of Sovremennye zapiski, "II" for the second part in vol. 46).


85. He reviewed (with praise) Ob obschestvennom ideale in his article, "Nejvovesi ruskí filosofie," Ruch filosoficky, no. 1 (1923): 14-19. Russian typescript original passed on to me courtesy of Professor Andrzej Walicki.

86. Compare Bakhtin. He writes that Dostoevsky condemned all "forces that lie outside consciousness, externally (mechanically) defining it: from environment and violence to miracle, mystery, and authority. Consciousness under the influence of these forces loses its authentic freedom, and personality is destroyed." Bakhtin further notes "the contradictory understanding of the institution of the elder," and, alluding to the unexpected decay of the elder Zosima's body after his death, instead of its hoped-for preservation by miraculous intervention, he refers to "the odor of corruption (a miracle would have enslaved). This is precisely what determined Dostoevsky's artistic vision (but not always his ideology)." See "Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book," in Mikhail Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, 297-98. Hessen cites Bakhtin's 1959 edition of the Dostoevsky book in a note (1, 281).

87. The presence and utter theoretical inexplicability of evil also relate the late Solov'ev to Kant. Leszek Kolakowski, basing his views in part on Kant's theory of radical evil, writes: "in the standard sense of the word utopia, Kant was clearly an antie-utopian." See Kolakowski's essay, "The Death of Utopia Reconsidered," in Modernity on Endless Trial (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 145.


89. Lopatin, "Teoreticheskie osnovy soznatel'noi nравственnoi zhizni," 70.


91. Ibid., 312.


93. Charles Taylor, Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 140. One of the main ideas of this work is the need to explicate the ontological implication of ethics, to articulate a "moral ontology."

94. As Leszek Kolakowski writes, "We do not perceive things as finite, unless we have in mind the idea of... infinity. The two notions are mutually dependent in that neither is intelligible without a reference to the other. ... To assert the priority of infinitude is the same as to assert the contingency or non-self-sufficiency of the finite world, and the real question is: where does this idea come from?" (Religion [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982], 72).

95. Taylor, Sources of the Self, 141.
