Religion, War, and Revolution
E. N. Trubetskoi’s Liberal Construction of Russian National Identity, 1912–20

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Rarely has religion been as closely associated with national identity as in the case of Russia, at least at the level of conscious representation. Religion, the very essence of “Holy Russia,” is central to most versions of the “Russian Idea.” The religious element has been most conspicuous in conservative thought (e.g., Slavophilism), but radical representations of Russia were also often religious in form if not (consciously) in content, as in the undeniable eschatological and millenarian features of Bolshevism. The Russian religious-philosophical renaissance at the beginning of the 20th century was especially rich in diverse ideas about Russian national identity. These are more difficult to classify, in large part because they tended to reflect the complex, ambiguous legacy of Vladimir Solov’ev (1853–1900), Russia’s greatest religious philosopher. Solov’ev condemned nationalism but assigned Russia a messianic role in his grand utopian project of “free theocracy,” which would unify Eastern and Western Christianity under the spiritual authority of the pope and the imperial authority of the tsar.

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This brief overview suggests that the prominent religious component in Russian national identity has been, in general, an illiberal one. Against this history, the work of Evgenii Nikolaevich Trubetskoi (1863–1920), one of Russia’s major religious philosophers, merits consideration.

Prince Trubetskoi came from one of Russia’s most distinguished aristocratic families. One of his brothers, Sergei (1862–1905), was also a famous idealist philosopher, disciple of Vladimir Solov’ev, and Moscow University professor; another brother, Grigorii (1873–1930), was an influential diplomat. After graduating from the Faculty of Law at Moscow University in 1885, Evgenii began his academic career at the Demidov Juridical Lycée in Iaroslavl’, where he taught philosophy of law. His magister and doctoral dissertations were critical studies in the intellectual history of theocracy in medieval Europe. His university appointments were in the history and philosophy of law, first at St. Vladimir University in Kiev (1892–1905) and then at Moscow University (1906–18), where he in effect succeeded his brother Sergei. He had a prominent role in Russia’s first and most important philosophical society, the Moscow Psychological Society (1885–1922), as well as in the Vladimir Solov’ev Religious-Philosophical Society in Moscow (1905–18). He was deeply influenced by Solov’ev, whom he met during the winter of 1886–87. From their first meeting, Trubetskoi later wrote, “all my intellectual life was connected with Solov’ev. My whole philosophic and religious Weltanschauung was full of Solov’evian content and expressed in formulations very close to Solov’ev.” His two-volume study, Mirosozertanie VI. S. Solov’evo (VI. S. Solov’ev’s Weltanschauung [1913]), is the classic work on the philosopher. Taking Solov’ev as his point of departure, he advanced a powerful synthesis of religious philosophy (a metaphysics of vseedinstvo or the “unity of all”), Kantian transcendental idealism, and philosophical liberalism.

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4 Trubetskoi’s most original works came toward the end of his life: Metafizicheskie predpolozheniiia poznaniia: Opit preodo lenii Kanta i kantianstva (Moscow: Put’, 1917); and Smysl zbicii (Moscow: Sytin, 1918). For recent overviews of his philosophical system, see I. D. Osipov, Filosofia russkogo liberalizma (St. Petersburg: Izdatel’stvo Sankt-Peterburgskogo universiteta, 1996), 116–24; and Philip Grier, “Trubetskoi,
In politics, Trubetskoi was a member of the Beseda circle of zemstvo opposition, the Union of Zemstvo Constitutionalists, and the Union of Liberation; through these organizations he was active in the Russian Liberation Movement that culminated in the Revolution of 1905. He was one of the founders of the Constitutional Democratic (Kadet) Party but resigned from it in January 1906 (he rejoined the party in 1917). He served on the State Council from February 1907 to August 1908 (and again in 1915–17). Later in 1906, he joined the Party of Peaceful Renewal, which shared with the right Kadets and left Octobrists a political program of moderate liberalism. This program was advanced in the newspaper that Trubetskoi and his younger brother Grigorii published from March 1906 to August 1910, Moskovskii ezhegodnik. After the newspaper’s demise, he turned his energies to the religious-philosophical publishing house and editorial society Put', founded in 1910 by the Moscow financier and philanthropist Margarita Kirillovna Morozova. Trubetskoi was Morozova’s closest collaborator and a major force behind the venture’s success. Under their direction, Put’ brought out a whole series of classics in Russian and Western religious philosophy before it closed in 1919. It was the main venue within which he developed his ideas on Russian national identity.

As a liberal philosopher, Trubetskoi was concerned with the specification and theoretical justification of first principles. For him, the first principle of liberal political philosophy was personhood (lichnost’), the idea that human beings bear an absolute value and dignity because they are persons or, in Kant’s terminology, ends-in-themselves. Absolute value and dignity mean that persons share a fundamental equality, another first principle of liberalism. Further, persons are free and purposeful moral agents and are entitled to the maximum scope of liberty consistent with the same liberty for everyone else. Trubetskoi believed that the fullest possible self-development of the person ought to be the supreme value and justification of any social or political order. For him, liberalism rested on


6 Put’ is the subject of a major monograph by Evgenii Gollerbach, K nezrimomu gradu. Religioznio-filosofskia gruppa “Put’” (1910–1919) v poiskakh novoi russkoi identichnosti (St. Petersburg: Aleteia, 2000). This meticulously researched study is very rich in historical, biographical, and institutional detail. Gollerbach shows less interest, however, in the philosophical ideas of Put’ members, which he tends to dismiss as “essentially an avant-garde variant of an archaic political doctrine of the Christian transformation of the world” (29), as harboring “totalitarian tendencies” (405), and as demonstrating the “practical absurdity of philosophy in politics” (454).
natural or human rights, norms that helped define the rule of law and set the limits of state power and the power of one person over another.\textsuperscript{7}

In Trubetskoi's time and ours, liberal theorists have debated whether personhood entails a theistic metaphysics. Trubetskoi was convinced that it did, that the liberal values of dignity, equality, and freedom could not be sustained on empirical or even transcendental foundations alone. Although he was a man of deep faith, he held that theism was reasonable and did not shrink from the task of rationally defending it. Other Russian liberal theorists who shared his broadly ontological or metaphysical approach included his brother Sergei, Boris Chicherin, Pavel Novgorodtsev, and Sergei Korliarevskii. Some Russian neo-Kantians, such as Bogdan Kistiakovskii (in fact a Ukrainian) and Vladimir Gessen, were happy without explicit theistic conclusions, much like John Rawls today.\textsuperscript{8} The idealists (both the ontologists and more strictly transcendentalists) were generally the leading theorists of Russian liberalism.\textsuperscript{9} Most Russian liberals, like Sergei Muromtsev and Pavel Miliukov, were positivists who had little interest in theoretical philosophy.

Evgenii Trubetskoi offers us a powerful and sensitive philosophical response to the experience of war and revolution. His philosophy of nationality and critique of nationalism, both before and during World War I, clearly reflect his commitment to liberalism's first principles. Trubetskoi diagnosed the root cause of nationalism as the loss or rejection of higher spiritual values, which permitted human beings to be treated not as persons but rather as mere instruments of ever increasing national and state power. Nationalism led to militarism, total war, and Bolshevism. Trubetskoi's

\textsuperscript{7} A succinct statement of Trubetskoi's idea of personhood can be found in his essay, "Svoboda i bessmertie," \textit{Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii} 17, 4, kn. 84 (1906): 368–77. On freedom and the rule of law, including his defense of natural law, see his \textit{Leksii po entsiklopedii prava} (Moscow: A. I. Mamontov, 1916): 1–11, 30–36, 52–69; and n. 80, below. Also see E. N. Trubetskoi, \textit{Trudy po filosofii prava}, ed. I. I. Evlampiev (St. Petersburg: RKhGI, 2001). For an overview of his legal philosophy, see Osipov, \textit{Filosofija russkogo liberalizma}, 123–24.

\textsuperscript{8} The issue here is whether Kant's system of transcendental idealism holds ontological or metaphysical implications about a transcendent realm of being. Most Russian idealists believed it did. A case in point is Trubetskoi's \textit{Metafizicheskie predpodelenija poznanija}. On the importance of Kant in the development of Russian idealism, see Randall A. Poole, "The Neo-Idealist Reception of Kant in the Moscow Psychological Society," \textit{Journal of the History of Ideas} 60, 2 (1999): 319–43. Rawls has tried to make Kant compatible with "the canons of a respectable empiricism." See John Rawls, "The Basic Structure as Subject," \textit{American Philosophical Quarterly} 14 (April 1977): 159–65 (here 165); also see his "Justice as Fairness: Political Not Metaphysical," \textit{Philosophy and Public Affairs} 15, 3 (1985): 223–51.

\textsuperscript{9} Five of the six main theorists treated by Andrzej Walicki in his magisterial \textit{Legal Philosophies of Russian Liberalism} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) were idealists.
analysis of the continuities among these phenomena is impressive. Yet in
the midst of world catastrophe, the philosopher found new grounds for
belief in human dignity. The result was Smysl zhizni (The Meaning of Life
[1918]), a classic work of Russian religious philosophy and profound theo-
logical reaffirmation of Trubetskoi’s liberalism. His writings throughout
this period can be read as a project to “imagine” a liberal national identity
for Russia by eliciting and, in a sense, “nationalizing” the liberal meaning
of certain religious ideas and images prominent in Orthodoxy.

National Messianism and Russian National Identity
In 1912, two years before the outbreak of World War I, Trubetskoi pub-
lished an important essay, “The Old National Messianism and the New.”
10 The essay draws on his study of Solov’ev, published the following year and
devoted in large part to the messianic, theocratic, and generally utopian
dimensions of Solov’ev’s thought. 11 “The Old National Messianism and
the New” is a more general treatment, in which Trubetskoi develops some
of his own basic approaches to thinking about Russian national identity.
According to him, national messianism is the assertion of an exclusive
intimacy between one people and the Messiah, the primacy of a particu-
lar nation in the Messiah, as in the notion of the “Russian Christ.” “The
essential trait of national messianism consists,” Trubetskoi writes, “in the
national exclusiveness of its religious consciousness.” He contends that
this exclusiveness has now come to be (or at least ought to be) recognized
as necessarily incompatible with the universalism characteristic of any
true religion. There was a time when the idea of the “Russian Christ” was
not felt to be contradictory, when people lived by the dream of “Moscow
the Third Rome,” but that time, he declares, is past. 12

10 Trubetskoi, “Staryi i novyi natsional’nyi messianizm,” in his Smysl zhizni (Moscow:
Respublika, 1994): 333–51. Smysl zhizni was Trubetskoi’s last major work, first published
in 1918. This edition also contains several of his essays. “Staryi i novyi natsional’nyi mes-
sianizm” was originally published in Russkaia mysl’ 33 (March 1912): 82–102. He also
spoke on this topic in February 1912 at the Vladimir Solov’ev Religious-Philosophical
Society in Moscow (Gollerbach, K nezrimomu gradu, 157). On the society, see A. V.
Sobolev, “K istorii Religioznofilosofskeho obshchestva pamiati Vladimira Solov’eva,”
Istoriko-filosofskii ezhegodnik ’92, ed. N. V. Motroshilova (Moscow: Nauka, 1993), 102–
14; and Kristiane Burchardi, Die Musawer “Religiöse-Philosophische Vladimir-Solovjov-

11 E. N. Trubetskoi, Miroozertianie Vi. S. Solov’evo, 2 vols. (Moscow: Put’, 1913);
Randall A. Poole, “Utopianism, Idealism, Liberalism: Russian Confrontations with
Vladimir Solov’ev,” Modern Greek Studies Yearbook: Mediterranean, Slavic, and Eastern

Macmillan, 1937), 356–64, is a classic essay on the subject. Andrzej Walicki, Philosophy
The pre-Petrine forms of Russian national messianism persisted until quite recently, Trubetskoi says, and found their most articulate champion in Dostoevskii, for whom Russians were “the only God-bearing people on earth.” This narrowly chauvinistic form of national messianism was rejected by Vladimir Solov’ev, yet Solov’ev himself cherished his own messianic vision of Russia as a theocratic nation providentially called to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth. Only toward the end of his life did Solov’ev abandon his project of “free theocracy.” With this, Trubetskoi states, the dream of Russia’s messianic mission finally collapsed.13

Trubetskoi reads Solov’ev’s development as a microcosm of recent Russian intellectual history, seeing a pattern of de-utopianization and de-messianization in both.14 The problems with this interpretation are that Russian culture of the “Silver Age” remained very rich in utopian currents, and that Solov’ev’s own vast influence on the Silver Age was most evident precisely in the utopianism of its “new religious consciousness.”15 As Trubetskoi himself writes, the current awakening of religious consciousness is also a “critical period of religious seductions and unheard-of temptations,” which are actually inimical to true religious searching. “In our time,” he warns, “there have emerged many interpretations of faith that, for all their profound differences in other respects, converge in the general tendency to localize Christ.”16 This is the new Russian messianism. Trubetskoi is not entirely clear about the differences between the old


14 Trubetskoi, Mirosozertsanie VI. S. Solov’eva, vol. 1, iii–xi, 35–93, 494–585; vol. 2, 3–38. Also see E. N. Trubetskoi, “Krushenie teokratii v tvoreniakh Solov’eva,” Russkaiia mysl’ 33, 1 (1912): 1–35. There was an autobiographical element in this pattern as well. In the 1880s, Trubetskoi later wrote in his memoirs, “I lived in the atmosphere of the Slavophile messianic dream of the realization of the Kingdom of God on earth through Russia.” Only later did he overcome his own messianic utopianism, giving him the critical distance to write his study of Solov’ev (Vospominania, 193).


Russian messianism and the new, but his point is that the new deserves to share the fate of the old, since national messianism as such is incompatible with a liberal conception of national identity, in which any given nation is one member of a genuine community of nations equal under a universal transcendent truth.17

From his consideration of Russian national messianism, Trubetskoi draws certain conclusions about national identity and religious consciousness. "Where there is a true Messiah," he writes, "there is no place for disputes about primacy, neither among people, not among peoples. Every people, like every person, must think only about its duties and about its service, not about its advantages before other peoples."18 This is not national messianism but "missionism," a distinction that he adopts from Nikolai Berdiaev and that he interprets to mean that every nation has its own service to fulfill, its own vocation or mission in the Kingdom of God. This is the only approach consistent with a universal religion.

Trubetskoi finds a rich symbol for his nationality philosophy in the Christian Pentecost,19 when tongues of fire appear over a group of

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17 Trubetskoi focuses on two religious thinkers whom he sees as representative of the new Russian messianism: Nikolai Berdiaev and Sergei Bulgakov. His essay was, in fact, the product of a controversy between him and his Put’ colleagues over Russian messianism. It was initially conceived as a review of Berdiaev’s book on one of the founders of Slavophilism, Aleksei Stepanovich Khomiakov (published by Put’ in 1912), which Trubetskoi wanted to use as an occasion to make clear his conviction that “national messianism is a deeply anti-Christian idea.” The essay was then expanded into a more substantial critique that also included Bulgakov’s two-volume work Dva grada: Isledovaniia o prirode obshchestvennykh idei (published by Put’ in 1911). See Gollerbach, K nezrëmmu gradu, 155–59.

18 Trubetskoi, "Staryi i novyi natsional’nyi messianizm," 343.

19 Pentecost, which connotes the presence of the Holy Spirit, resonates powerfully in the Orthodox world. Orthodox ecclesiology conceives the Church as a “continued Pentecost.” See Timothy Ware, The Orthodox Church, new ed. (London: Penguin, 1993), 242–43. The Holy Spirit is integral to the Orthodox tradition of mystical theology and deification. The special work of the Holy Spirit is sanctification of human persons. According to Vladimir Lossky, “Within the Church the Holy Spirit imparts to human hypostases the fullness of deity after a manner which is unique, ‘personal,’ appropriate to every man as a person created in the image of God.” “The work of Christ unifies; the work of the Holy Spirit diversifies” (Vladimir Lossky, The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church [Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1976], 166–67). Orthodox Trinitarian reverence for the Holy Spirit was an important factor in the Great Schism between Latin and Byzantine Christianity, customarily dated at 1054. The main issue for the Byzantines was the Filioque, the Roman Catholic doctrine (unilaterally inserted into the Nicene Creed, probably in 1014) that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and Son (“double procession”), not from the Father alone. The Orthodox rejected the Filioque, seeing it as a subordination of the Holy Spirit and a diminution of its role in salvation (John Meyendorff, Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes [New York: Fordham University Press, 1979], 91–94).
Christians gathered in Jerusalem. The Christians are filled with the Holy Spirit and begin to speak in foreign tongues but are understood by the other people crowded around them, "men from every nation under heaven," who are bewildered and ask, "how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?" (Acts 2:2–8). For Trubetskoi, the Pentecostal event represents the restoration of mankind's unity, the reversal of Babel and the confusion of tongues that divided mankind. He emphasizes that Pentecost invalidates any national messianism by revealing that true messianism, or salvation, is supranational and universal. Supranational is not, however, non-national. Pentecost confirmed the positive vocation of each nation. National languages were not abolished but given higher affirmation and illumination, while ceasing to be barriers to communication. "The true mystical tongue of each individual nationality rings not in isolation but in the unification of all," Trubetskoi writes.²⁰ True messianism among nations is a unifying principle, the Solov'evian ideal of the "unity of all." In all this, Trubetskoi is using Christian language and symbolism to express his vision of a spiritual community of nations united in recognition of a transcendent truth.

National messianism has impaired the proper development of Russian national identity, according to Trubetskoi. The country's true spiritual image has been chronically overshadowed by the false images of national messianism. With the recent collapse of these images, what was specific and particular in Russian national identity had been obscured for so long that it seemed nothing was left. From extreme exultation followed extreme disappointment.²¹

Insight into Russia's true spiritual identity and vocation could be recovered, however. Trubetskoi sees clear evidence of this possibility in Solov'ev's last, post-utopian period, especially in his final work, War, Progress, and the End of History: Three Conversations, including a Short Story of the Anti-Christ (1899),²² which Trubetskoi reads as a powerful vision of what is specific, particular, and yet infinitely precious in Orthodox and Russian religiosity. There is not a trace, he says, of national messianism in War, Progress, and the End of History, but instead a recognition of the three equally necessary main branches of one Christianity: the

²⁰ Trubetskoi, "Staryi i novyi natsional'nyi messianizm," 347.
²¹ Ibid., 348–50.
Roman Christianity of Peter, the Protestant Christianity of Paul, and the Orthodox Christianity of John. Solov’ev has abandoned the dream that the great synthesis of universal Christianity will be realized through Russia alone. Russia will make only its own contribution, like other nations.

Russia’s particular religious vocation is to mystical theology, the Christianity of John, the eschatological Christianity of the mystery of the incarnate Word, the mystery of humanity deified and made immortal in Christ. Thus, in Solov’ev’s prophetic vision, as at Pentecost, “there is an affirmation of national particularities and an overcoming of national barriers, because every particularity, both national and confessional, makes its own necessary contribution to the general Christian purpose.” Trubetskoi calls this the deathbed revelation of the greatest representative of Russian religious thought. He embraced Solov’ev’s interpretation of the particular essence of the Russian religious idea: the doctrine of salvation as deification or theosis (“becoming” or union with God), a fundamental component of Greek patristic thought and Orthodox theology. This doctrine, which holds that we are created in the “image and likeness” of God and are called to realize our divine potential, is an important theological foundation of the concept of personhood, of the absolute dignity and worth that makes every human being a person. This theistic conception of human nature is at the center of Trubetskoi’s liberal political philosophy. He applies it to nations no less than to individual persons.

The War and Its Meaning
How do the ideas Trubetskoi presented in his 1912 essay inform his understanding of Russia’s national identity, role, and aims in the Great War? Like many Russian liberals, Prince Trubetskoi greeted the outbreak of World War I with enthusiasm, seeing it as an opportunity to create a

more just and humane international order, a genuine community of free nations. The chief enemy was nationalism, German above all but also Russian, the enemy within. In his view, Russia was engaged in a "people's war of liberation" and was fighting for the freedom and self-determination of nationalities, Slavic ones in particular. This conception of Russia's war aims was the common liberal platform, but Trubetskoi attempted to give it a deeper philosophical and religious justification. He devoted a number of wartime writings and lectures to this task. In October 1914, he and other public figures created a lecture committee, "War and Culture." Trubetskoi delivered two of his most famous public lectures under the auspices of the committee: "The National Question, Constantinople, and St. Sophia" and "The Fatherland War and Its Spiritual Meaning." He gave another lecture, "The War and Russia's World Task," at the Vladimir Solov'ev Religious-Philosophical Society, which held a special public meeting on the war in October 1914. This meeting was also the scene of Vladimir Ern's infamous speech, "From Kant to Krupp," in which the radical young Moscow philosopher (and Put' member) asserted that all German philosophy and culture led straight to German militarism, embodied in the Krupp armaments industries. Sergei Bulgakov, too, could be xenophobic, declaring that, "The whole main current of the German spirit is the Protestant break with God, and in this is the


28 Trubetskoi was the chairman; other committee members included Sergei Bulgakov, Nikolai Berdiaev, Viacheslav Ivanov, Sergei Koltiarevskii, Pavel Novgorodtsev, Vladimir Ern, Petr Struve, and Semen Frank (Gollerbach, Knezimomu gradu, 249–55).

29 The lectures were published as brochures: Natsional'nyi vopros, Konstantinopol' i sviaataia Sofiaia (Moscow: I. D. Sytin, 1915), repr. Smysl zhizni (1994 ed.), 355–70; and Otechestvennaia voina i ee dukhovnyi smysl (Moscow: I. D. Sytin, 1915), repr. Smysl zhizni, 381–97.

30 This lecture was also published as a brochure: E. N. Trubetskoi, Voina i mirovaia zadacha Rossiia (Moscow: I. D. Sytin, 1915), repr. Smysl zhizni, 370–81.

world significance of the German tragedy." Trubetskoj objected strongly
to such views, chiding his colleagues for "ignoring the great values of the
German spirit," an indication of the liberal universalism of his own
approach.

In addition to his public lectures, Trubetskoj also wrote several ar-
ticles for Russkie vedomosti in the first three months of the war. These were
collected and published by Put' under the title, The Meaning of the War. In
this popular and widely read brochure, Trubetskoj places the blame
for the war squarely on German nationalism. The reigning principle in
German life is, Trubetskoj writes, "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles."
It is the replacement of morality with nationality, the elevation of the
German Volk to an idol on behalf of which everything is permitted and
for which other nationalities are "useless trash that must be wiped from
the face of the earth." This is the threat against which Russia is waging
a war of liberation and which has evoked the country's own national call-
ing. The struggle is against Germany's "denial of the spiritual personality
of other peoples." German victory would mean, as Trubetskoj put it in
"The War and Russia's World Task," the transformation of Europe into a
cultural horde, where all peoples serve as the slaves of one. "By contrast,
the victory of Russia and its allies—if only we are fated to achieve it—will
resound for the whole world with the good news of liberation."

Trubetskoj elaborates on Russia's war aims and gives them more pre-
cise formulation in his lecture, "The War and Russia's World Task." "We
are fighting for the rights of nationalities in general," he writes, "for the na-
tional principle itself in politics, in all its scope." The criterion is national
self-determination itself, not ethnic identity or religion. Remarkably,

52 Gollerbach, K nezirinomu gradu, 253–55, quoting Bulgakov speaking at the Vladimir
Solov'ev Religious-Philosophical Society in defense of Ern.
53 Ibid., 255, quoting Trubetskoj at the Vladimir Solov'ev Religious-Philosophical
Society.
54 E. N. Trubetskoj, Smyil voiny (Moscow: Put', 1914). According to Gollerbach (K
nezirinomu gradu, 259), proceeds from sales of the brochure were given to the Union of
Zemstvos for the needs of maimed soldiers.
55 Trubetskoj, Smyil voiny, 5–6. Trubetskoj's views were much like Miliukov's more ex-
tensive analysis of German nationalism and the origins of the war, which was, accord-
ing to Stockdale, "so similar in many respects to Fritz Fischer's later interpretation" in
Germany's Aims in the First World War (1967) (Stockdale, Paul Miliukov, 219).
56 Trubetskoj, Smyil voiny, 40–42.
57 Trubetskoj, "Voina i mirovaia zadacha Rossii," in Smyil zhizni, 372.
58 Trubetskoj, Smyil voiny, 8. Trubetskoj lists the following specific war aims: the res-
toration of Poland; the freedom and independence of the Austrian Slavs, including the
creation of a Czech and other Slavic national states; the independence of the Italians
under Austrian control and of the Romanians; and the freedom of Serbia, Montenegro,
Belgium, Holland, and Denmark (ibid., 8, 20; "Voina i mirovaia zadacha Rossii," 374).
Trubetskoi says that a separate Slavic question no longer exists. National liberation is a universal task that extends to all oppressed peoples, not just Slavic or Orthodox ones. For this reason (and because Russia was allied with the Western powers), Trubetskoi suggests that Russia should no longer be conceived, culturally or politically, as the “East.” The restoration of oppressed nationalities and the creation of “small national states” are not only just causes in themselves, they are also in Russia’s national interest, for such nations would be natural allies against aggressor and predator states—above all Germany, which he expects will survive the war as a relatively strong state, even if defeated. This last “strategic” consideration might well reflect the thinking of Evgenii’s brother Grigorii, who was appointed head of the Near Eastern Department in the Russian Foreign Ministry in 1912 and Russian envoy to Serbia in June 1914. In the years before the war, G. N. Trubetskoi argued that, apart from cultural factors, Slavic solidarity and Russian defense of Slavic interests were essential for the international balance of power and deterrence of German aggression, which he considered to be the main threat to peace. In any event, Evgenii thinks that “Russia’s great fortune consists in this concurrence of national interest with the ideal of a just, Christian approach to other nationalities,” Slavic and otherwise.  

The war aims that Trubetskoi has outlined happily coincide with the true essence of Russian national identity—as he conceives, or rather constructs, it. In his telling, it is precisely in wars of liberation, such as the war with Turkey in 1877–78, that Russia finds “its best national self” and realizes in itself the image of God. Russia is truest to itself not when it pursues narrow national interests, but when it serves the universal human cause of culture. This Russian trait is often explained as impractical idealism or even cosmopolitanism, as a lack of healthy national feeling, but Trubetskoi believes it is rather a sound consciousness of national interest, “closely linked with a just and humane approach to other nationalities.”

The supranational quality of Russian national self-consciousness is the mark of Russian patriotism, which Trubetskoi contrasts to nationalism. “Russian patriotism stands against German nationalism,” he declares. In Germany there is naked national egoism; in Russia there is “a mighty surge of patriotic feeling, which unites in one whole all the peoples of

40 Trubetskoi, “Voina i mirovaia zadacha Rossii,” 372. For his patriotic memories of the Russo-Turkish War, see Vospominanitsia, 22–29.
41 Trubetskoi, Smyshl voyny, 8, 17–19.
a great empire, because in it there is no national exclusiveness, no conceit, none of the contempt and hatred for other peoples that is characteristic of nationalism." The hope of other peoples is in Russian patriotism, "in this dedication to goals that are not narrowly national but universally human."\(^{42}\)

In all this, it is clear that Trubetskoi's intention is not to describe Russia as it really was, but rather to "imagine" the nation as it ought to be, as the type of nation worthy of the war aims he has proclaimed for it and as one capable of sustaining them. The moral distinction between "what is" and "what ought to be" was a fundamental one for Russian idealists,\(^{43}\) and it was an important element in Trubetskoi's construction of Russian national identity. His vision of Russia as it ought to be was posited as an ideal toward which Russia as it really was obviously needed to progress. In his patriotic enthusiasm, he often wrote as though his construction of Russian national identity were already an accomplished fact, hoping to make his vision of liberal Russia a reality by already describing it that way. The distinction between "is" and "ought" may also have enabled the philosopher prince to reconcile himself more easily to statements that sometimes have the ring of propaganda.

Trubetskoi was hardly blind to the gulf between Russia in reality and as he imagined it. He dwells in particular on the reality of Russian nationalism, on "the fact that Russian state policy has until now often departed from the right path and has often shown the very nationalism that we now so unanimously condemn in the Germans." This reference to "state policy" is revealing: Trubetskoi distinguishes between official, bureaucratic Russia and "people's Russia." He is highly critical of official Russia, vesting all his hopes in "national" or people's Russia. Nationalism is a product of the Russian state, not of people's Russia, "for which nationalism is something foreign and incomprehensible." Official nationalism is, furthermore, a reflection of German influence. But it is a bad copy of the German, an unsuccessful imitation "that until now could exist among us only thanks to the weak development of our national self-consciousness. Now, when the Russian people itself has come onto the scene, full of the

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42 Ibid., 7–9.

43 It was one of the central concepts advanced in the 1902 symposium "Problems of Idealism," to which E. N. Trubetskoi contributed an important essay on Marxist philosophy of history: Problems of Idealism: Essays in Russian Social Philosophy, trans., ed., intro. Randall A. Poole, foreword by Caryl Emerson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). Eric Lohr, "The Ideal Citizen and Real Subject in Late Imperial Russia," in this issue of Critique, shows the importance of the distinction for V. M. Gessen's theory of citizenship.
consciousness of its unity and dignity, this nationalism has disappeared like smoke.\textsuperscript{44}

It was, of course, the (liberal) development of Russian national identity that Trubetskoi was trying to bring about, and he knew well that it had not yet defeated Russian nationalism. In practically the same breadth he warns that “we must first of all renounce barbaric nationalism, ruinous for any nationality and for any state.” Trubetskoi refers in this connection to the “inner German” that must finally be conquered if the Russian and Allied victory that he hopes for is to be an enduring one, one that can truly usher in a new era in the life of nations. He even suggests that nationalism could make Russia the enemy of all humanity, as it has done to Germany—the home, he reminds us, of Schiller and Goethe, Kant and Hegel.\textsuperscript{45}

In “The War and Russia’s World Task,” Trubetskoi voices concern that Russia, in the event of victory and ensuing world power, might retrace the path of nationalism and conquest that Germany followed after 1871 and that led to world war. A Russian victory must therefore be a spiritual victory, a victory over itself, over “that terrible and evil beast that hides in the soul of every people.” The terrible beast is nationalism, and it must be defeated at home no less than abroad. “Russia’s salvation,” he writes, “consists exclusively in the [liberationist] banner it serves, in victory over nationalism and greed, in resolution of the whole task of world culture, which is also a moral task—the national question in its universal scope and significance.” The ultimate goal is the spiritual unification of nations, as at Pentecost. The recent improvement of relations between Russia and Poland (see below) provides hope that the apparition of fiery tongues may one day become a reality in the life of nations. But the path is a long and difficult one, and Russia may yet follow the example of Germany, idolizing its own nationality and proclaiming, “Russland, Russland über alles.” To avert such an outcome, the true Russian nation must prevail, for it reflects the Pentecostal ideal, which Trubetskoi defines as “the broad unification of nationalities in all spheres of spiritual life while preserving the particularities of each of them, the realization of the unity of world culture in the diversity of its national expressions.”\textsuperscript{46}

Trubetskoi thought that the “inner German” was felt most in Russian state policy toward other nationalities. For him the clearest example of official nationalism in Russia, and the greatest obstacle to the realization of Russia’s liberationist mission, especially among the Slavs, was Poland. Despite his assertion that a separate Slavic question no longer existed,

\textsuperscript{44} Trubetskoi, \textit{Smyel voiny}, 8–9, 27 (italics added).

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 10, 29.

Slavic unity was a precious cause for Trubetskoi. He was a main proponent of "neo-Slavism" and one of the organizers of the Society of Slavic Culture, founded in Moscow in 1908. In 1914, he became chairman of the society. His brother Grigorii was also a member (vice-chairman from 1910). Their newspaper, Moskovskii eshenedel’nik, championed neo-Slavism. Throughout this period they believed that an essential condition of Slavic unity was Russo-Polish reconciliation, which they hoped could be achieved if Poland were restored politically and granted full autonomy within the Russian empire. In his 1914 articles, Evgenii wrote that Russia’s participation in the partition of Poland was one of the country’s great historical sins—and the result of German influence. The partition opened a deep rift between Russia and other Slavic peoples, especially those in the Austrian empire. The restoration of Poland at Russian initiative would reverse all this and open the way toward resolution of the Slavic question, which for Trubetskoi meant the unification of Slavdom around Russia. These hopes explain the importance he gave to the government’s appeal to the Poles, issued by Supreme Headquarters on 1 August 1914 and written by none other than G. N. Trubetskoi. It promised the restoration of a united Poland, free in its language, faith, and self-government.

In his public lectures and newspaper articles, Evgenii Trubetskoi expounded his interpretation of the meaning of the Polish proclamation, not only for Slavic unity but also for the inner restoration of Russia. He claimed that the partition of Poland made Russia the unwilling instrument of German policy and created (or at least widened) the chasm between the Russian nation and the Russian state. The state fell under Prussian influence, resulting in the official nationalism that is so foreign to true Russian national identity. “There is nothing more repulsive,” the philosopher says, “to Russian national character than a Prussian approach to other nationalities and Prussian methods of governing them. Russifying

47 Gollerbach, K nezrimomu gradu, 46–47.
50 For E. N. Trubetskoi’s views on the Polish question, see his articles “Rossiia, Pol’sha i slavianstvo,” “Russkoe narodnoe delo,” and “Vozvraschenie Pol’shi i russkii vopros,” in Smysl voiny. For G. N. Trubetskoi’s authorship of the Polish appeal, see Gollerbach, K nezrimomu gradu, 48.
tendencies in relation to non-Russians [inorodcy] are in essence foreign to us, and I do not at all doubt that they are the fruit of German influence.” This is a rather inventive approach to the construction of Russian national identity; on other occasions, as we have seen, Trubetskoi makes clear that nationalism is a beast that hides in the soul of every people, not one transplanted there by Germany. But here the Russian patriot, speaking before the Society of Slavic Culture, indulges himself in further imagining Russian national character as it ought to be, one distinguished, he says, by a “fine and sympathetic understanding of all that is individual and singular in the culture of other countries.”51 The restoration of Poland will free Russia from Prussian tutelage, remove the contradiction between official Russia and people’s Russia, and permit the Russian state at last to embody the principles of the Russian nation.

Russia’s treatment of Poland was not its only historical sin. Trubetskoi also refers to the Jews. Despite the injustices long dealt them, they are now sacrificing themselves in the war for the Russian national idea and the liberation of all peoples. “Both in Russia and in foreign lands Jews are struggling and dying for their Russian homeland,” he exclaims. “Of course, Russia cannot and will not ever forget this. But if Jews can die for Russia, then why can they also not live anywhere in Russia, why can they not be officers in the Russian army? Why can so many of them not study in Russia?” It is a matter of national dignity, duty, and purpose that Russia live up to its ideals and truly show that it is the homeland of the Jews and all the peoples living within its borders. Otherwise, Trubetskoi writes, there is no point in struggling against German hegemony, since Russian hegemony would be no better. “Let us remember that nationalism is the ruin of any nation,” he concludes. “And let us strive to extirpate it at root and without trace from our national soul.”52

Trubetskoi found it possible to combine his critique of nationalism with a strong defense of Russia’s main imperial war aims—annexation of Constantinople and control of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles (“the Straits”). He made his case in one of his most successful public lectures, “The National Question, Constantinople and St. Sophia,” first delivered in December 1914 and January 1915.53 Acquiring Constantinople and the Straits constituted Russia’s most tangible and strategically important war

51 Trubetskoi, Smysl voiny, 43–44, from a speech (“Vozrozhdenie Pol’shi i russkii vopros”) given to the Society of Slavic Culture on 26 October 1914.
52 Ibid., 30–31.
aim, certainly after Turkey entered the war on the side of the Central Powers in October 1914. Britain and France gave their consent to the Russian demands in secret treaties signed in March and April 1915, as Trubetskoi would have known from his brother Grigorii. Trubetskoi begins his lecture with an impassioned plea on behalf of the Russian claims. Constantinople, he says, is a question of our daily bread, of our economic and political existence, of our cultural mission, indeed of Russia’s spiritual self. Control of the Straits is the key to enormous international power, which is why Constantinople is Tsar’grad—whoever possesses it is king.

Strategic considerations were not, however, the most important ones. The prince was concerned above all with the religious significance of Constantinople, and in particular of Hagia Sophia, the magnificent basilica built there under Justinian between 532 and 537 and converted by the Ottomans into a mosque in 1453. For Trubetskoi, the church represents what is deepest and most valuable in the Russian national soul, the central idea of Russian religiosity, “the gospel pearl for the sake of which Russia should be ready to give up everything she has.” The Church of St. Sophia expresses the meaning of Russian national life and that for which the country is now waging war. “Every question of Russian life raised by the present war turns upon this one central question,” he declares. “Will Russia succeed in restoring the desecrated church and again show the world the light extinguished by the Turks?” Trubetskoi cautions, however, that he is referring here not so much to the physical restoration of the church as to the all-encompassing religious and cultural task it represents. With that, he enters into an exposition of the idea of Sophia and the importance it has for Russian religious consciousness.

Sophia is the eternal Wisdom by which God created the world. It is the very idea of creation, the prototype of all creation, the creative principle itself in God, "eternal reality in God," as Trubetskoi says. The highest form of creation is humanity, the point where creation most reflects its creator. This is the sense in which humanity is "created in the

55 Trubetskoi, "Natsional’nyi vopros, Konstantinopol’ i sviataia Sophia," 355–56. In modern Russian theology, the concept of Sophia has been developed most systematically by Sergei Bulgakov, the most important Russian sophiologist. Important recent explications of the concept can be found in Catherine Evtuhov, The Cross and the Sickle: Sergei Bulgakov and the Fate of Russian Religious Philosophy, 1890–1920 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); the essays by Michael A. Meerson, Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, and Paul Vallaire in Russian Religious Thought; and in Paul Vallaire, Modern Russian Theology. Also see Frederick C. Copleston, Russian Religious Philosophy: Selected Aspects (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 81–99.
image and likeness of God,” and why the Wisdom of God can be said to be human. Trubetskoi uses the phrase, “the humanity of the Wisdom of God,” to define the most paradoxical, the most original, and the deepest meaning of Sophia. This is what gives Sophia its central significance in Orthodox and especially Russian religious understanding, and why the Orthodox always represent Sophia in human form. The humanity of the divine is most precious in the image of Sophia, but it penetrates the whole religious attitude of Orthodoxy. For this attitude, the world is divine and human at one and the same time. For it, Trubetskoi writes, “there can be nothing more important and valuable than faith in the humanity of the Divine Wisdom and in the possibility of man becoming a vessel of the Divine.” From this it is clear that Sophia expresses a powerful religious ideal. “It is an appeal,” he says, “to the realization of the eternal prototype of all creation and therefore, first of all, to the realization of that perfect, integral, and pure humanity which … is worthy of being immortalized and reigning over creation.”

Sophia represents whole, true and complete humanity. “Humanity, gathered by the Spirit of God into one whole, and deified in this form,” Trubetskoi proclaims, “is the highest expression of God’s design for the world, what ought to reign in the world.” The Sophian unity preserves the individual identity of its parts, not only persons but also nations. “In Sophia every human individual and every people,” the philosopher writes, “has its own individual idea, its own throne and crown, its own dwelling place and glory.” In Sophia, “all peoples are called to reign together.” The Sophian ideal of a spiritual community of nations is the same as was revealed at Pentecost, a comparison Trubetskoi draws here as well.

This Sophiological justification of his nationality philosophy is a bold move by Trubetskoi, and the main direction of his lecture now becomes clear: nationalism is the denial of Sophian unity among nations; and Russia, if it truly cherishes the image in itself of Sophia, has a special responsibility to work for the rights of nationalities and national self-determination both abroad and within its own borders. Its claims to Constantinople depend on the successful worldwide resolution of the national question. At one level this connection is an empirical, political one for Trubetskoi: were Russia to be utterly transformed in its nationality policy with corresponding transformations in the international environment, then it might earn the right to the crown of Tsar’grad, as he puts it.

On another level, this connection is part of the broader metaphysics of Sophia, in which the freedom of person and nation ought to serve the

57 Ibid., 358–59, 364.
58 Ibid., 365–68.
higher end of the absolute dignity of man. Externally liberated peoples may remain internally alienated from each other. Freedom and the renunciation of nationalism are necessary but negative conditions for overcoming this alienation, for the positive realization of the Sophian unity in the deification of humanity. Obviously this is a transcendent salvation and fulfillment, in which it is not clear how anything so mundane as Russian annexation of Constantinople and the Straits fits in. At any rate Trubetskoi thought people and nations ought to be guided by the following precept: “Sophia’ is the image of God in man and humanity. He who bears this reigning image in his soul, he who discerns it in every person and in every people, will not be able to bear any diminishment of human dignity.” Trubetskoi saw evidence of Russia’s progress in this direction. He recalls that Russian popular conscience recently cleared itself of one heavy sin of hatred toward man and solemnly recognized the dignity of “the people who gave birth to Christ,” referring here to the jury’s acquittal of Mendel Beilis in October 1913, after a spectacular trial for ritual murder. As far as the question of Trubetskoi’s defense of Russian claims to Constantinople is concerned, clearly his main motivation was to take advantage of the popularity of this particular war aim to enlist the idea of Sophia in promoting a more liberal nationality and foreign policy. But in doing so, he may well have also betrayed his own principles.

Trubetskoi further develops his ideas on Russian national identity in “The Fatherland War and Its Spiritual Meaning,” the third of his lectures delivered in the “War and Culture” series. Although it may seem premature to ask about the spiritual meaning of the war before it is over and without the benefit of historical perspective, he thinks the question should be posed just now, when the intensity of the war has heightened people’s spiritual sensitivity and keenness. In ordinary times the “supraregional” fades from view, the essential gets lost in everyday detail, and the “meaning of life” disappears in the chaos of fleeting events. Immersed in the particular, the sense of the whole is lost. Before the war, “everywhere the group eclipsed the nation, and the nation—humanity.” Now the war has focused attention on what truly matters. It is one of these rare historical moments “when the supratemporal meaning of personal, national, and universal human life shines extraordinarily clearly and strongly.” The war has brought a profound sense of the “absolute, supranational meaning of life that ought to unite nations.” Trubetskoi makes much of this paradox: for all the war’s fierce enmity and hatred, its intensity evokes unique

60 The lecture was delivered in November 1914 in Moscow, Petrograd, and Saratov (Gollerbach, K nezrimomu gradu, 255).
spiritual experiences of unity and oneness, “the wholeness of person, nation, and humanity.”

Trubetskoi refers to one especially vivid example of the power of human solidarity: the famous 1914 Christmas celebration on the Western Front, when English and German soldiers left their trenches to embrace each other and sing hymns. From the depths of war came this powerful protest of life against death. The more war evokes mutual hatred among nations, the stronger is the spiritual force that strives to restore the wholeness of humanity. “This explains the at first paradoxical fact that in war the feeling of universal human solidarity achieves an extent hardly possible in peace.” For this religious philosopher, there is something almost supernatural about the triumph of spirit in the midst of war, precisely because war is where one would most expect man to be reduced to base instinct. Instead, enemies come together and sing Christmas hymns. Here is the revelation of “another plane of being,” as Trubetskoi puts it. “We have come into living contact with other worlds,” with spiritual forces that are hidden from us in everyday life, immersed as we ordinarily are in material concerns. The intensity of the war has dispersed the gray of prosaic existence and cast the world in new light. It has revealed a future whole humanity. This vision, Trubetskoi implores his audiences, must be committed to memory before it is too late, before it fades with the return of ordinary times, so that it can guide the difficult creative work after the war and serve as an ideal of progress in the life of nations. Otherwise the “spiritual meaning of the war” will be lost, and its great sacrifices will be in vain.

Trubetskoi’s philosophical approach to nations and nationality, as presented in his wartime essays, is deeply indebted to Vladimir Solov’ev’s critique of nationalism. Solov’ev believed that nations were valuable as parts of the whole of humanity, and that they ought to work for universal human unity. Nationality and national diversity were positive and enriching factors that contributed to the higher unity of humanity. Nationalism was the degeneration of nationality, the self-assertion of one nation over others and the betrayal of the universal ideal. Solov’ev distinguished nationalism from patriotism, or love of country as a part of all of humanity and as an instrument of truth and justice. He maintained that (Christian)

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61 E. N. Trubetskoi, Otechestvennaia voina i ee dukhovniy smysl (Moscow: I. D. Sytin, 1915), 4–5.
63 Trubetskoi, Otechestvennaia voina i ee dukhovniy smysl, 28–32.
universal moral principles applied to states and nations no less than to individuals, and that “Christian politics” ought to replace Realpolitik in international relations. He defended national self-determination and argued that “every nationality has the right to live and freely develop its strengths to the extent that they do not hinder these same rights of other nationalities”; nationalism was the violation of this “supreme moral idea.” Solov’ev was highly critical of Russian nationalism, Russification, and Pan-Slavism. He wrote that Russification was not truly Russian, but an imitation of the German model. He was deeply sympathetic to the Jews and condemned antisemitism. The extent to which Trubetskoi’s ideas on nationality were shaped by Solov’ev is obvious from this summary. Trubetskoi also shared what Greg Gaut describes as the limits of Solov’ev’s vision, notably the failure to extend the right of national self-determination to non-Russians within the empire (both philosophers supported autonomy within the confines of empire).

The Mystique of the State

By late 1915, Trubetskoi was having doubts about whether the world war would lead to the spiritualization of the life of nations. He began to consider Russia more a part of the world crisis than its solution, and to recognize that Russia remained much prone to the dangers of nationalism and militarism. The prince never abandoned hope in the liberating potential of the Russian nation, but he became much more pessimistic about the soundness and reformability of the Russian state. The obscurantist principles of the bureaucracy were proving highly resistant to the liberal principles he ascribed to the Russian nation. With the course of the war, Trubetskoi came to put more emphasis on the involvement of the Russian state in the politics of nationalism and militarism that led to the world confrontation and less emphasis on the liberating mission of the Russian nation. Certainly the Rasputin phenomenon, exposing the general decrepitude of the old regime, had a major impact on his assessment.

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65 Ibid., 83–85, 88.
66 Quoted in ibid., 87.
67 Ibid., 89–91.
68 Ibid., 91, 94. Trubetskoi opposed what he called “Ukrainian nationalism,” as did Petr Struve, more famously and with far less moderation. Trubetskoi briefly notes his opposition in “Razvchenanie natsionalizma: Otkrytoe pis’mo P. B. Struve,” Russkaia mysl’ 37 (April 1916): 79–87, here 86. For the debate between Struve and Bogdan Kistiakovskii on the Ukrainian national question, see Susan Heuman, Kistiakovsky: The Struggle for National and Constitutional Rights in the Last Years of Tsarism (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Ukrainian Research Institute, 1998), 129–46.
69 Gollerbach, Knezrinnomu gradu, 259–60, draws the connection to Rasputin. He quotes a letter Trubetskoi wrote to M. K. Morozova from Petrograd in February 1916: “Here
The change in Trubetskoi’s outlook would not completely take shape until the Bolshevik revolution revealed to him the depths of Russia’s crisis (and the world’s), but an indication of the shift can be found in a series of articles on nationalism published in Russkaia mysl’ between April 1916 and January 1917. The essays took the form of an exchange with Petr Struve over the ideas of a third party, Dmitrii Muretov. The theme of the exchange is Muretov’s endorsement of nationalism as a type of “political eros” in which love of country is a supreme principle not subject to moral or any other limitations; in acting on behalf of one’s country, everything is permitted.70 Trubetskoi regards Muretov’s thinking as unworthy of reply, but he is concerned that Struve seems to approve of his approach, or at least insufficiently critical of it. There were good grounds for his misgivings: in his famous 1908 essay, “Great Russia,” Struve advanced a Darwinian conception of the state as a “special organism” that lived by its own supreme laws of existence (such as the striving for power) and was not subject to any higher law.71

Struve generally sympathizes with Muretov’s ideas. He writes, in a short reply to him, that nationalism is not only eros but also ethos, in the broad sense that it is a spiritual or moral force capable of inspiring people to sacrifice themselves.72 Trubetskoi calls Struve’s position “ethical nationalism,” but this imputes a more specifically ethical content to Struve’s views than is warranted.73 (Trubetskoi’s polemical, and disingenuous, strategy here is to make Struve’s position seem closer to his own, so that he can then say that Struve is contradicting himself in sympathizing with Muretov.) Interestingly, “ethical nationalism” is an accurate description of an earlier period of Struve’s intellectual development, when, in one of his best essays, “What Is True Nationalism?” (1901), he held that any true form of nationalism (or nationality) must be based on natural law and other basic liberal values.74 But now, in 1916, Struve maintains that while state and nation have some type of general moral basis, they are not

73 Trubetskoi, “Razvchenie natsionalizma.”
74 Borisov [Struve], “V chem zhe istinnyi natsionalizm?” Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii 12, 4, kn. 59 (1901): 493–528; reprinted in Struve’s collection of articles, Na rasnye temy (St. Petersburg: A. E. Kolpinskii, 1902), 526–55. For analysis, see Richard Pipes,
subject to absolute moral norms and are outside the sphere of ordinary individual morality. This is the heart of Trubetskoi’s disagreement with him (and Muretov): the moral law, according to Trubetskoi, is by its very nature absolute and universal. To permit any exception to it (e.g., on behalf of national interests) is to undermine the whole idea of morality. Without moral standards, it becomes impossible to judge one nationalism as better or worse than another, and his example here is telling: "What right do we have to condemn pogroms or any other outrage, if the point of view of justice is inapplicable to nationalism?"

Trubetskoi’s overall approach—thinking that people are bound by absolute moral principles when they act in the state sphere no less than in private life—is unmistakably Kantian. His critics (Muretov, Struve, and Nikolai Berdiaev) charge him with abstract moralism. Trubetskoi replies that there is, of course, a profound difference between individual and state ethics: the first prescribes non-resistance to evil and personal perfection, the second mandates resistance to evil by means of external force and state power. (This is a point that has larger significance for Trubetskoi and one to which he returns in other works.) The ultimate goal of the world process is, he believes, the total inner overcoming of evil and the transformation of human nature. Until that is accomplished, evil must be contained by state force. As long as earth is not heaven, only the state prevents it from becoming hell, as he puts it. Individual and state ethics operate on different levels but are justified and reconciled by Christian teaching. (In this connection Trubetskoi attacks


77 Trubetskoi, "Razvenchanie natsionalizma," 81–82. He also asks, "Wouldn’t the pogromists have the right to defend themselves with Muretov’s words: love of one’s people is not subject to ethical measure, because it is a love that is blind, ‘higher than reason, higher than justice.’" Furthermore, he takes the opportunity here to regret that from nationalist eros or passion so much foreign and especially Jewish property has been ruined; even many lives have been ruined, in which he suspects the police are to blame. Formulations such as Muretov’s are always used, he continues, to justify pogromist theory and practice. In the 1905 pogroms in Kiev, for example, Trubetskoi recalls how he heard about the ‘moral impossibility’ of resisting the sacred national feeling that had been offended by the “Yids” and about the impossibility in such cases of refraining from “hatred” and violations of law. On the broad significance of expropriations, looting, deportations, and popular violence against enemy aliens, Jews, and other minorities in the Russian empire during the war, see Etc. Loht, Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

Lev Tolstoi’s anarchistic condemnation of the state as alien to Christ and the Gospels, criticizing it as utopianism and “false maximalism.”) While he thus recognizes the difference in content between state and individual ethics, he insists that it is another matter altogether to maintain that the state is not subject to any ethics. “The whole essence of my views on national policy,” he declares, “is that there is a supranational truth [pravda] above nations, that among nations there are laws that ought not to be violated by other nations, that it is necessary to respect the spiritual personality of any given nation.”79 Trubetskoi was a firm defender of the idea of natural law.80 The luminous core of natural-law doctrine, as well as its underlying moral and religious foundation, is the absolute value of the human person, which he regarded as the basis and the end of national and state life.81

Struve adopted a very different conception, in which the state itself was the highest value. Trubetskoi believed this conception reflected contemporary political reality, most conspicuously in Germany but not only there. The most dangerous aspect of this “state absolutism” and “vulgar Machiavellianism” was the spiritual enslavement of the person and the sacrifice of one’s conscience. This subordination of life to the state had long been underway in Germany, “which prepared for the war for 43 years”; Germany’s opponents had to imitate it out of military necessity. Trubetskoi feared that state absolutism and militarism might not be temporary. In a significant change in his perspective since 1914, he writes that it is no longer possible to think that the present war will be the last one. The world crisis will continue and the world of nations will remain at war.

80 He treated natural-law theory more explicitly in other works, including his university lecture courses on the history and philosophy of law, which were published and seen as classics in the teaching of jurisprudence. See E. N. Trubetskoi, Istoriia filosofii prava, dvurei i novoi (Kiev: Milevskii, 1894, 1898); Lektsii po istorii filosofii prava (Moscow: Izdanie Obshchestva studentov-iuristov Moskovskogo universiteta, 1907); and Lektsii po entsiklopedii prava (Moscow: A. I. Mamontov, 1916). Several of his essays also deal directly with natural law: “Filosofiya prava professora L. I. Petrazhitskogo,” Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii 12, 2, kn. 57 (1901): 23–29; “Novoe issledovanie o filosofii prava Kant i Hegel’” [review of P. I. Novgorodtsev, Kant i Hegel’ v ikh ucheniakh o prave i gosudarstve], Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii 13, 1, kn. 61 (1902): 581–605; “Toward Characterization of the Theory of Marx and Engels on the Significance of Ideas in History,” in Problems of Idealism: Essays in Russian Social Philosophy, ed. Poole, 124–42; and “Uchenie B. N. Chicherina o sushchnosti i smysle prava,” Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii 16, 5, kn. 80 (1905): 353–81. Trubetskoi was, in general, one of the main figures in the Russian revival of natural law, together with P. I. Novgorodtsev and V. M. Gessen. See Walicki, Legal Philosophies, 291–341; P. I. Novgorodtsev, “Ethical Idealism in the Philosophy of Law (On the Question of the Revival of Natural Law),” Problems of Idealism, 274–324; and Lohr, “Ideal Citizen.”
81 Trubetskoi, “Gosudarstvennaia mistika i soblazn griadushchego rabstva,” 79.
with itself, at least potentially. The slogan “all for war” might well carry
over into “peacetime” and become the highest end of national life. “Then
will begin the universal Prussification of nations.” This is the danger of
Struve’s “mystique of the state” and its future slavery. To prevent it, the
state must be kept subordinate to the supreme value of the human person.
In particular, “we must not make the state, even a ‘national’ state, the
master of our conscience.”

“Political eros,” which makes love of country the supreme principle
and subordinates all human life to state politics and eventually militarism,
harbors within itself other dangers. Its consequences, Trubetskoi warns,
may not be confined to the international sphere. The object of this type
of eros can be class as easily as nation. “Why can its object not become in
one excellent moment the proletariat, the working peasantry, or anything
else in this category?” The ideology of “political eros” shifts imperceptibly
from nationalism to the class struggle, for “it accustoms people to think
that a human being does not have independent value but is valuable only
as an instrument or slave of a collective whole.” The shift is predictable,
since people find it “psychologically impossible to flout the image of God
in man in one sphere of life and to respect it in another.” Here Trubetskoi
has clearly taken to heart Vladimir Solov’ev’s observation that national
eoism and international cannibalism inevitably ruin personal morality
because “man is a logical creature and cannot long endure the monstrous
duality between the rules for personal and political behavior.” He will
further develop this seminal idea of the “morality of war” and the slide
from international to class and civil war in his last book, The Meaning of
Life, on which he was already working.

For Trubetskoi, the root cause of nationalism was the loss or rejection of
moral and spiritual values above state and national life, the exclusive self-asser-
tion of the nation as the supreme and absolute principle, and the treatment of
man as a means, rather than the end, of the state and nation. His recognition
of the persistence and strength of nationalism led him, not surprisingly, to
place even greater emphasis on religious ideas and symbols in his construction
of Russian national identity. These ideas and symbols tended to converge on
the core belief in absolute human value and dignity, which Trubetskoi in-
separably linked with theism (he thought it was nonsense to speak of absolute
human worth on naturalistic or atheistic premises) and which he regarded as
the supreme principle above state and nation. He believed that this theistic

82 Ibid., 89–92, 93.
83 Ibid., 94–95.
84 As quoted in Gaut, “Can a Christian Be a Nationalist,” 85.
85 For a succinct statement of Trubetskoi’s position on human worth, see his eloquent
conception of absolute human value, were it clearly represented and cherished in national self-consciousness, could help reverse the degeneration of nationality into nationalism, which is why it is so prominent an element in his overall project. To this end, in 1915 and 1916 he wrote two of his famous studies of icons, clearly hoping to invest Russian national identity with the spiritual values depicted in these sacred symbols.\footnote{The first, "Umozrenie v kraskakh: Vopros o smysle zhizni v drevnerusskoi religioznoi zhivopisi," was delivered at a public meeting of the Solov'ev Religious-Philosophical Society in late November 1915 and published as a brochure (Moscow: I. D. Sytin, 1916). The second, "Dva mira v drevnerusskoi ikonopisi," was delivered as a public lecture during the spring of 1916 and published as a brochure (Moscow: Put', 1916). In 1918, Trubetskoi wrote the third of his essays on icons, "Rossiia v ee ikone," \textit{Russkaia mys'} 39 (January–February 1918): 21–44. (See Gollerbach, \textit{K nezrimomu gradu}, 260.) These studies are of obvious interest in the context of Trubetskoi's construction of Russian national identity; I return to them below.}

Trubetskoi concluded his January 1917 \textit{Russkaia mys'} essay on a strong religious note. There is, he writes, a higher love than "political eros." It was not with political love that the Israelite prophets loved their people, calling them to be the people of God; and "it is not with political but rather suprapolitical love that one's people is loved by all who envision the image of God over it and want this image to be realized in its life and causes." Such divinely inspired (and thus properly restrained) love finds satisfaction least of all in politics, "because in this comparatively low sphere of spiritual life a people's divine image is expressed relatively rarely and weakly." This disparagement of politics by a prominent Russian liberal is telling; partly it reflects Trubetskoi's deliberate effort to ground liberal values more firmly in religious imagery in the hope of making them "more national" (and thus more capable of resisting nationalism), and partly it reflects his despair in the face of a disintegrating Russian polity and his psychological need to take refuge from the collapse. The unity and wholeness of the Russian national spirit are to be found, he says, not in politics but on the highest peaks of religious inspiration, such as icons. Illuminated by the iconic vision, "Russia's podvizhniki and teachers, its saints, artists, and philosophers, found the word of love for all nations and all creation."\footnote{Trubetskoi, "Gosudarstvennaia mistika i soblazn graidushchego rabstva," 96–97.}
especially in the Balkans and the Black Sea basin. This meant resisting German expansionism and a firm commitment to the Triple Entente. Liberal imperialists like Struve argued that Russia’s liberal, bourgeois, and industrial development at home both depended on and was a condition of the country’s power and prestige abroad. The program was unabashedly pro-Slav. Richard Pipes, evaluating the 1908 articles in which Struve set forth his nationalist and imperialist plans for a “Great Russia,” wrote that “in his career as a publicist Struve had rarely displayed so little judgment as in these essays.”

Although Trubetskoï criticizes Struve for his nationalism and “state absolutism,” he says nothing against his imperialism or neo-Slavism—and for good reason. Trubetskoï was, as we have seen, a fervent champion of the Slav idea. He was also closely associated with the liberal imperialist program through his brother Grigoriï, who was one of Struve’s closest friends. Moskovskii ezhegodnik, the newspaper published by the Trubetskoïs, was, while it lasted, one of the main organs of the liberal-imperialist cause. G. N. Trubetskoï seems, however, as Dominic Lieven argues, to have valued neo-Slav liberal imperialism primarily as a means to restore the balance of power in Europe and deter Germany’s drive to world power. Russia’s relatively cautious foreign policy in 1912–14 (until the July crisis), under Foreign Minister Sergei Sazonov, reflected G. N. Trubetskoï’s prudent focus on deterrence. At the same time, Russian public opinion (to some extent) and the centrist political parties (to a much larger extent) were, after Russia’s humiliation in the Bosnia-Herzegovina crisis of 1908–9, increasingly dissatisfied with the government’s policy of restraint and pressured it to take a more assertive stance. Liberal imperialist and neo-Slav ideas contributed mightily to this sentiment. Nationalist and pro-Slav public sympathies were strong enough, at least, to narrow the government’s range of options in July 1914 and thus made more likely a war that Russia, together with its prospects for liberal development (whatever they were), was unlikely to survive intact. In this E. N. Trubetskoï must bear no

88 For more on Nolde, see Holquist, “Dilemmas.”
89 The liberal imperialist program is well described in Lieven, Russia and the Origins, 91–101, 122–29, 135; and Pipes, Struve: Liberal on the Right, 179–86.
90 Pipes, Struve: Liberal on the Right, 92.
91 Lieven, Russia and the Origins, 94–95, 98–101.
93 Lieven, Russia and the Origins, 140–46; David MacLaren McDonald, United Government and Foreign Policy in Russia, 1900–1914 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 204–7, 217–18. P. N. Durnovo’s February 1914 memorandum to Nicholas II famously predicted, with uncanny accuracy, that war would result in
small measure of responsibility, even if he thought, with his brother, that
neo-Slavism served the purposes of deterrence, and even if the failure of
deterrence had much more to do with German than with Russian nation-
alism. Once war broke out, however, the freedom and self-determination
of Slavic and other nationalities was on the whole a noble, liberal vision. A
similar one was contained in Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points.

**Trubetskoi in the Russian Revolution**

Trubetskoi, again like most Russian liberals, welcomed the February
Revolution, thinking it would liberate Russia from the bureaucratic ob-
stacles of the old regime and better enable Russia to wage a true “people’s
war.” The Revolution was, he wrote at the time, the triumph of Russian
patriotism and national dignity. He rejoined the Kadets at the party’s sev-
enth congress in March 1917, adopting republicanism instead of his earlier
support for constitutional monarchy. His enthusiasm for the Revolution
was short-lived. Already by the Eighth Kadet Congress in May he was
calling for the strict observation in politics of “state principles” (e.g., law
and order) and warning against anarchy. The deepening of the revolu-
tion and social polarization meant that the “crisis of Russian patriotism,”
one of Trubetskoi’s main categories from this point on, was far from sur-
mounted. Nor, as a result, was the need for strong emphasis on religious
values and symbols in Russian national identity.

On 29 April the Russian Orthodox Church declared its intent finally
to convene a national council (sobor), a goal Trubetskoi had long sought.

the revolutionary destruction of Russian government and society. Durnovo wished to
avoid war not, however, to maximize the chances of Russia’s liberal development (as Petr
Stolypin did when he said in 1909 that with 20 years of peace Russia would be trans-
formed by his agrarian reforms) but to preserve the old authoritarian–bureaucratic or-
der. On the Durnovo memo, see Lieven, *Russia and the Origins*, 77–83; and McDonald,

97 Ibid., 265. Trubetskoi was a member of the Holy Synod’s pre-sobor commission (pred-
sobornoe prisutstvie) that met between 8 March and 15 December 1906, following the
tsar’s approval in March 1905 of plans for a sobor. On the proposed sobor, see James
W. Cunningham, *A Vanquished Hope: The Movement for Church Renewal in Russia,
1905–1906* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1981); Nicolas Zernov,
The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century (New York: Harper and
Row, 1963), 63–85; John Sheldon Curtiss, *Church and State in Russia: The Last Years
of the Empire, 1900–1917* (New York: Octagon Books, 1965), 214, 225–27; and Paul R.
Valliere, “The Idea of a Council in Russian Orthodoxy in 1905,” *Russian Orthodoxy un-
der the Old Regime*, ed. Robert L. Nichols and Theofanis George Stavrout (Minneapolis:
A Congress of Clergy and Laity met in Moscow from 1 to 14 June in preparation for the sobor. Trubetskoi was elected deputy chair. The congress passed resolutions against separation of church and state but for freedom of religion. Orthodoxy was to have primacy before other religions and enjoy a privileged position as the established church.98 When the church sobor itself opened on 15 August in Moscow, Trubetskoi was elected lay deputy chairman and was instrumental, as was S. N. Bulgakov, in its reestablishment of the patriarchate, which took place on 21 November in a magnificent ceremony in the Uspenskii Cathedral in the Kremlin.99 Less than a month before the sobor convened, the Kadet party held its ninth congress. Trubetskoi, together with P. I. Novgorodtsev, strongly supported changing the party program to designate the Orthodox Church an "institution of public-legal character." The amendments passed.100

Trubetskoi's support for Orthodoxy as the established Russian church contradicts separation of church and state and (although perhaps not necessarily) freedom of conscience, principles he had long championed as axioms of liberalism. In the years prior to 1917, he deplored the condition of the Russian "state church" (as he often referred to it) and consistently emphasized the importance of mutual autonomy of church and state.101 In his study of Solov'ev, he wrote that freedom of conscience was the "most precious of all freedoms."102 Trubetskoi's compromise of this principle four years later was a stark indication of the depths of his own anxiety and fear. He may have thought that the Russian Orthodox Church, with its restored patriarch, was so powerful a symbol of national unity that in conditions of growing revolutionary anarchy, it had to be elevated over the normative principle of church-state autonomy.

It is not surprising that Trubetskoi—Russian aristocrat, religious philosopher, and liberal—resisted the Bolsheviks. He supported General Lavr Kornilov at the Ninth Kadet Congress and at the First Conference of Public Figures in Moscow (8–10 August 1917), at which Trubetskoi served as deputy chairman. He became a member of the Council of Public Figures that was elected by the conference. He was also deputy

98 Gollerbach, Knezrimomu gradu, 269–70.
100 Rosenberg, Liberals, 204.
101 His insistence on autonomy was a response not only to the Russian Church's lack of it, but to Vladimir Solov'ev's utopia of "free theocracy," in which Trubetskoi saw the mirror-image of subordination of church to state in modern Russian history. Theocracy and caesaropapism were illiberal in the same way: each infringed on the necessary autonomy of church and state. This was one of the main conclusions of his two volumes on the idea of theocracy in medieval Europe.
102 Trubetskoi, Mirosozertsanie Vl. S. Solov'eva, vol. 1, 177.
chairman of the Second Conference of Public Figures (12–14 October). In February–March 1918, he helped organize the Right Center, made up of the leadership of the Kadet Party and Council of Public Figures, among other organizations. On its behalf he conducted negotiations with the Allies to secure military assistance against the Bolsheviks. In May–June 1918, the Right Center was reorganized as the National Center, which directed Trubetskoi to negotiate (fruitlessly, as it turned out) with leftist parties in the hope of creating a broad anti-Bolshevik coalition. In September 1918, he left Moscow for Ukraine. In Kiev, he became a member of the bureau of the Council for the National Unification of Russia. The Bolsheviks regarded him as one of the “most active leaders and organizers of the south Russian counterrevolution”; in reality his activities consisted mostly of lecturing and writing. He died of typhus in Novorossiisk on 23 January 1920.

The Meaning of Life
Trubetskoi’s last major work, The Meaning of Life, first published in the summer of 1918, is an extended philosophical reflection on the Great War and the Russian Revolution. It is also a classic work of Russian religious philosophy. The book was written during the Revolution. When it was completed, Russia and much of Europe lay in ruins. In such catastrophic periods, Trubetskoi writes, the question of the meaning of life is posed more sharply, and the answer may emerge more clearly, than in ordinary times. “Where the sorrow is deepest, the spiritual joy is greatest. The more tormenting the sensation of senselessness reigning all around us, the more brilliant and beautiful is the vision of absolute meaning that constitutes the resolution of the world tragedy.” This approach is similar to the one he took in his public lecture “The Fatherland War and Its Spiritual Meaning,” but it is much more elaborate in The Meaning of Life, in which he discerns transcendent meaning from the world crisis. The tract is, in

104 Gollerbach, K nezrimomu gradu, 281–82; Rosenberg, Liberals, 289–90, 297.
105 In the summer of 1919, Trubetskoi wrote memoirs of his flight from Moscow and subsequent experiences in Ukraine and southern Russia: Iz putevykh zametok bezechansa, first published in Kislodovsk (1919), then in Arkhiv russkoi revoliutsii, no. 18 (Berlin, 1926), 137–207. They are included in the volume of memoirs reprinted by Oriental Research Partners, Newtonville, MA, 1976.
106 Gollerbach, K nezrimomu gradu, 286–87; Rosenberg, Liberals, 350.
108 Trubetskoi, Smysh zhizni (Berlin, 1922), 7. Subsequent page references cited in text.
short, an attempt at theodicy in the midst of so much suffering and evil. Trubetskoi believed that his religious vision of the meaning of life could yet infuse a renewed sense of Russian national identity.

In his first chapter, Trubetskoi presents a striking feature of the human condition: human beings believe that life ought to have meaning and never cease to search for it, despite the apparent fact of meaninglessness. The meaning that we seek is not given or apparent to us; everyday experience testifies rather to meaninglessness (32). This is abundantly clear in the biological world, where every life cycle ends in death, where the preservation of species is achieved though an infinite series of individual deaths, and where the struggle for existence reigns supreme. This is not life, Trubetskoi remarks, only the empty appearance of life (34). Human beings endure the same fate—death—as the rest of the biological world but are immeasurably more tormented because we are conscious of that fate (36). The human mind strives for meaning beyond the cycle of life and death, yet cannot escape that cycle. Trubetskoi describes this lamentable situation as the “slavery of the spirit”: our best thoughts, hopes, and aspirations fall victim to the iron laws of biology. Religion, philosophy, art—all are monuments to this slavery. Ultimately they are merely diversions and coping mechanisms—“if the biological law is everything in life, if there is nothing above the biological in it” (37-38).

For Trubetskoi, the most obvious manifestation of world meaninglessness is war. It is the culmination of the struggle for existence, “biologism” operating at the level of international relations. Four years of total war have left a terrible impression on Trubetskoi. He writes about states and peoples armed from head to toe for mutual annihilation (38). The modern state, even before the war, had become completely militarized and all-consuming, seeking to enlist all human effort and subordinate the “whole person with nothing left over” (39). Modern industrial economies serve the needs of the military, and industrial expansion drives new military conquests: “war for industry” and “industry for war.” Humanity, instead of rising above the natural struggle for existence, has perfected its mechanism in the modern militaristic state and industrialized military economy. By all indications, “war has turned out to be the final goal of all human progress, the highest content of human culture” (40).

This is a stark picture of the meaninglessness of life, but it gets worse. Trubetskoi has depicted war as the human extension of the natural struggle for existence, but it is clear that human violence is “excessive” from a naturalistic point of view and cannot be explained solely in biological terms. Trubetskoi refers to the “bestialization of the spirit” [ozverenie dukha] in human beings. His argument, although as yet he
only suggests it, is that there is an irreducible spiritual element in hu-
man beings that cannot be explained naturalistically but can be turned
to bestial purposes. The result is not merely the natural struggle for
existence, but evil (42). He first outlined this argument in January 1917.
Contemporary militaristic nationalism, he wrote, is a phenomenon of a
higher order, not merely the natural bestial principle in man, but satan-
ism: supernatural evil, not subhuman evil. Trubetskoi remarks. “No matter
how much he resembles a beast, man nonetheless preserves one essential
difference from it—his freedom” (42).

The implication of all this is that a world without meaning but with
man is not only meaningless, but truly hell. Human beings are the only
creatures acutely conscious of suffering and the only ones who deliber-
ately make their fellow beings suffer. If this condition yields no higher
meaning, if somehow nature has just gone horribly wrong in giving rise
to creatures such as us, if the human capacity for evil is not a (perversion)
indication of a higher moral and ultimately spiritual reality but “only”
a monstrous aberration of nature, then the result is a world that is sheer
terror, because human suffering is never made right. This cannot be, and
Trubetskoi has in effect already shown that the world, or at least the hu-
man world, is too wicked to be meaningless. Evil, he will argue, entails a
higher spiritual meaning, since its very presence refutes naturalism.

The first step toward finding meaning amidst meaninglessness lies in
the startling human awareness of meaninglessness. “The world is sense-
less,” Trubetskoi writes, “but I am conscious of this, and therefore my con-
sciousness is free of this senselessness” (43). Consciousness transcends
world chaos as something other. Were we wholly immersed in this imma-

cent chaos, not only would we have no awareness of it, but it is difficult to
see how self-consciousness itself would be possible. Not only do I as a con-
scious subject stand apart from the world, but I judge it as a moral being,
experiencing revulsion and terror. My distress is possible only because I
have some intuition of a meaning that the world lacks. “As the human ear
does not hear discord if it does not sense harmony, so our thought could
not be conscious of meaninglessness were it not illuminated by some kind
of meaning” (45). We sense, at least, that the world is not as it “ought to
be” (nedolzhnoe) (46).

Here Trubetskoi returns to the Kantian distinction between “what
is” and “what ought to be.” Kantianism was an important frame of reference for Trubetskoi, both positive and
negative. A year earlier, he published his major study of Kantianism, Metafizicheskie
practical judgment, independent of any theoretical statement about "what is." The force of the distinction is that "ought" is a higher truth than the world that "is," the one that confronts us in empirical reality. "Conscience about what ought to be—protesting against chaos and ignignant at the degradation of human dignity—here is a new, vivid manifestation of our inherent consciousness of life's meaning," the philosopher proclaims. "It is consciousness of some absolute pravda that ought to be realized in life despite the nepravda reigning in it" (47). Conscience, in short, tells us that life has meaning, despite all empirical evidence to the contrary. It is the main element of Trubetskoi's philosophical refutation of naturalism. Its testimony enables us to believe that humankind belongs to another plane of being. Otherwise, Trubetskoi asks, how could human consciousness rise above this one (47)?

With this, Trubetskoi turns to the positive meaning of life and explication of his religious philosophy. "Belief in the meaning of life," he declares, "is inextricably tied to belief in man as the bearer of this meaning, to belief in man's absolute, majestic dignity" (38). The absolute value and dignity of the human person was the core of Trubetskoi's whole philosophy. He believed that human dignity was the immediate testimony of conscience, the main content of morality: it, at least, is "what ought to be." Since nothing in the empirical world suggests absolute value or "ought"—the contingency of everything there is precisely why it seems meaningless—Trubetskoi concludes that these moral ideas entail the existence of God. How else could they arise? (This, too, is a Kantian approach, which "postulates" freedom, immortality, and God from the fact of moral experience.) The question of the meaning of life, "as everyone understands," is thus the question of God. "Although we live in the kingdom of death ... although we sense with all our essence this terror of a world forsaken by God, nonetheless man will 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 his life is the ineradicable obvious presence of meaning despite the testimony of experience to meaninglessness" (62).

Godmanhood
The main idea that Trubetskoi develops in his central chapters on religious philosophy is Godmanhood or divine humanity (bogochelovechestvo). It is

predpolozhenia poznaniiia. This difficult work, together with S. N. Bulgakov's classic book on religious philosophy, Svet nevycherniia: Svoetsraniiia i umozreniia (Sergiev Posad: Put', 1917), was requested by the executive committee of the Moscow Soviet, in response to readers' interest (Gollerbach, K nezirinomu gradu, 263). On sacred feeling and vision among workers, see Mark D. Steinberg, Proletarian Imagination: Self, Modernity, and the Sacred in Russia, 1910–1925 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 224–81.
the theological foundation of his liberal vision of Russian Orthodoxy and Russian national identity. The concept was first systematically formulated by Vladimir Solov’ev in his Chitienia o bogochelovechestve (Lectures on Godmanhood [1877–81]) and has ever since been at the center of Russian religious thought.\textsuperscript{11} The concept refers to humanity’s divine potential and vocation, the ideal of our divine self-realization in and unity with God. It is the idea that man is created in the image and likeness of God and is called to return to divine reality. We must actively respond to this call by positively working for the realization of the Kingdom of God and universal transformation in the unity of all, in which all will be one in God. Humanity is the key link in this metaphysics of cosmic redemption, the mediating principle between God and world.

The theological basis of Godmanhood is the patristic doctrine of salvation as deification (\textit{theosis}), which has been fundamental to the Orthodox tradition since its inception; Godmanhood represents a broadening and deepening of the doctrine in modern Russian theology. Solov’ev, Trubetskoï, and their followers shift the emphasis from mysticism and monastic contemplation to active human participation and positive work toward deification. Godmanhood is a joint project, a genuine divine–human process. Salvation through deification is the realization of a potential intrinsic to humanity; hence the “divinity of humanity,” one meaning of \textit{bogochelovechestvo}. Although it is not entirely a self-realization, the emphasis is on human participation, freedom, and autonomy in the salvific process. Godmanhood is something to be achieved, not awaited as divine grace. It is, in short, a liberal theology of process and progress.\textsuperscript{12} Trubetskoï, in particular, develops it in this direction.

Trubetskoï depicts Godmanhood as the essence of Christianity—and only Christianity. It is not the incarnation of God that is distinctive to Christianity; the divine takes human form in many religions. What is distinctive is a unity of the divine and human that preserves the distinct identity, fullness, and integrity of the two natures. He believes that only this type of unity (and, he might have added, the complex history of Christological debate required to work it out) can affirm that each of the two natures is valuable in itself; the human retains its distinct identity even alongside the divine, a clear vindication of its intrinsic worth. The terms “Godman” and “Godmanhood” are efforts to describe this “indivisible and unmerged unity of the divine and human” (63–64).


\textsuperscript{12} On Godmanhood, see Korabblatt and Gustafson, eds., \textit{Russian Religious Thought}; and Paul Valliere, \textit{Modern Russian Theology}.
Trubetskoi regards this as a unique and powerful affirmation of human value—indeed, he emphatically states that it is the only positive solution to the question of the meaning of life (with disparaging comparisons to the religions of India, among others). Even after its deification and transcendent fulfillment in Godmanhood, humanity preserves its distinct identity.

Human freedom is the very condition of Godmanhood. “The justification of freedom consists precisely in the fact that without it partnership [druzhestvo] between God and creation would be impossible. A creature deprived of freedom, that is, the possibility of self-determination, could not be a free collaborator [sotrudnik] with God, a co-participant in His creative work. And this is precisely what God wants from His partner” (104–5). Self-determination toward the good necessarily entails the possibility of its opposite, self-determination toward evil. Godmanhood is thus Trubetskoi’s solution to the theodicy problem; human freedom is both the cause and the justification of evil. This is a fairly traditional approach, as Trubetskoi admits, although the concept of Godmanhood may bring out the value of human freedom more clearly: freedom is necessary for the self-realization of our divine potential. Trubetskoi asks why the world was not created as a sphere of embodied divine perfection: “Why go to this goal stage by stage, when divine omnipotence could have realized it at once?” His answer is that “perfection for the created world means deification” (108). Deification is an achieved perfection, and thus a greater perfection than one through grace alone. A clear implication of Trubetskoi’s argument (although not one he specifies) is that God himself is enriched in the process of our perfection—that is, in Godmanhood.

The costs of freedom (and thus of Godmanhood)—evil—are unfathomable, and no theodicy is adequate in the face of them. Trubetskoi’s overall approach is that evil is itself testimony to human possibilities: satanic, to be sure, but also divine, and the first is as supernatural as the second. Evil is the result of one’s free choice to reject God; it is a negation or perversion of the divine image in man, and is possible only through such negation (134–35). In other words, evil is itself proof of the divine idea that it rejects. A naturalistic world, one without God, would not know the depths of human depravity, only the biological struggle for existence. As Trubetskoi puts it, natural chaos is intensified and deepened by human freedom. “Here meaninglessness is not the simple absence of meaning, for man knows the satanic depths of conscious rejection of God and battle against Him” (176). Evil, it might be said, is both worse and better than a naturalistic “simple absence of meaning”: worse because it results in the world we live in, better because it offers hope of another one to come.
Trubetskoi’s religious philosophy is consistently liberal in its defense of the dignity and autonomy of the human person. Personhood is the main value of Godmanhood and the principal criterion he uses in interpreting (and revising) Christian thought on key topics such as miracle, Christ, revelation, and church authority. First, he argues that miracles, if they happened, would coerce faith and thus diminish or destroy the possibility of self-determination toward the good, which is a condition of deification. “Man, called to be God’s partner, cannot be only a passive object or material for the accomplishment of miracle: the latter must be an answer to his autonomous, free self-determination” (196). Trubetskoi’s conception of Christ is likewise philosophical and universalistic. Christ is to be understood not as the incarnation of God in one isolated human person but as the indivisible and unmerged unity of the divine and human in humanity as a whole (201). Remarkably, he writes that “Christ’s complete sacrifice saves man not as sorcery from outside, but as spiritual influence liberating him from inside and transforming his nature only on the condition of the autonomous self-determination of his will” (204). In a striking characterization, he calls Christ a “noumenon” (206), suggesting that Jesus would not have appeared as Christ in space and time (as phenomena do) but could only have been known from within, by active participants in the divine life whose nature was already in the process of deification.

Trubetskoi took a similar approach to revelation. Revelation is possible “only to the extent that man incorporates within himself the divine life, only to the extent he becomes an active participant in it” (226). Revelation depends on the ontological relation of the conscious human subject to the divine: “Experience of God [bogopoznanie] is accessible to man only to the extent that the inner, metaphysical process of the deification of human nature is being realized in him” (231). Revelation is not the unilateral action of God on man; it is not a divine monologue but a dialogue, in Trubetskoi’s phrase. “It is an act not only divine and not only human, but divine-human” (236). It can happen only to someone “who has real spiritual experience of the divine—that is, who is in essential living intercourse and unity with God” (237). Revelation is not a closed system of dogma but rather an open-ended process of discovery and transformation (238).

On the basis of his understanding of the nature of revelation, Trubetskoi defends freedom of conscience as a vital principle of religious life. That freedom is a condition of the inner spiritual development that makes revelation itself possible. Conscience is the judge of the authenticity of revelation; it takes precedence over the external authority of church and
dogma (235). Trubetskoi goes about as far as possible in asserting the primacy of conscience: "We must judge every manifestation of Christ—the individual manifestation of His Person and the manifestations of Him in the sobornal life of the Church—by means of the image of God that the Heavenly Father put at the basis of our spiritual life. Without this image the apostles could not have recognized Christ upon meeting Him" (240). Clearly this was a very different attitude from the one long extolled by the Russian Church. Trubetskoi believed that the absence in Russia of this type of freedom had much to do with the origins of the Russian Revolution (see below).

Prince Trubetskoi tried to relate his philosophy of Godmanship to the more concrete and tangible expressions of Russian religious life, no doubt to show that his liberal theology had popular roots and would resonate in national consciousness. Godmanship esteems not only humanity but all of creation: "through it the whole world must be deified" (64). The philosopher believed that this "material" dimension of Godmanship was especially close to the Russian Orthodox religious imagination. The "new earth" is a favorite icon theme, for example, while arid spiritualism and contempt for the material are alien to the Orthodox worldview (71–72). Christ’s Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, a vivid symbol of spiritualized matter and body, is a precious image in Orthodoxy. Trubetskoi also points to the lives of saints as examples of the Orthodox feeling for the sanctity of matter and its future transformation, “which will make the whole world the bodily incarnation of eternal spiritual meaning" (72). He thought Russian icons were brilliant representations of the Christian understanding of the divine, in both its "material" and its spiritual dimensions (74–75). Finally, he includes an entire chapter on “Sophia”—God's eternal, creative conception of the world and humanity—the Divine Wisdom, “as it was impressed on the Christian consciousness of the Orthodox world” (154).

Icons are essential reflections of the Russian religious outlook. Trubetskoi presents them as the concrete links between his religious philosophy and Russian national identity. During this period he produced three essay-length icon studies: “Umozrenie v kraskakh: Vopros o smysle zhizni v drevnerusskoi religioznoi zhivotopisi” (Theology in Color: The Question of the Meaning of Life in Old Russian Religious Painting [1916]), “Dva mira v drevnerusskoi ikonopisi” (Two Worlds in Old Russian Icon-Painting [1916]), and “Rossia v ee ikone” (Russia in Its Icons [1918]).113 The first echoes The Meaning of Life in its opening sentence: “The meaning of life

may never have been a more pressing issue than it is today, when the world's evil and senselessness stand exposed for all to see.” There follows the now familiar account of the natural struggle for existence, with the human revulsion to it on the one hand and perfection of it in militaristic “biologism” on the other. Russian icon-painters, too, faced the horror of war; and their response was “the vision of a different truth of life, a different meaning of the world,” embodied in their art. Important elements of this vision were universal unity and peace and “the inner union of all beings in God,” or Godmanhood.\textsuperscript{14}

Trubetskoi focuses on the ascetic motifs in icon-painting. What do the attenuated bodies and gaunt faces mean? “It means outright rejection of the ‘biologism’ that makes the body's gratification an absolute law justifying not only man's grossly utilitarian and cruel view of the lower creatures but also the right of any nation to wage bloody war on other nations if they happen to prevent it from getting its fill.”\textsuperscript{15} An important icon-theme, he notes, is Pentecost. In another parallel, he suggests that it was not a coincidence that the Russian icon was being rediscovered in the midst of world war, since spiritual meaning often emerges most clearly in times of great suffering—his very justification for writing \textit{The Meaning of Life}.\textsuperscript{16} He ends on a provocative note: despite its ideal of universal unity and peace, the icon does not sanction the “lie of non-resistance to evil,” as St. Sergius of Radonezh understood when he blessed Dmitrii Donskoi and prayed for victory over the Tatars.\textsuperscript{17} This seemingly incongruous point is in fact consistent with Trubetskoi’s distinction between personal and state ethics: universal peace and unity can be achieved only with the inner overcoming of evil in human nature through personal perfection; meanwhile, the state has a responsibility to resist evil through its external means.

Trubetskoi’s icon studies and \textit{The Meaning of Life} were clearly designed to go together. The essays, devoted to sacred symbols of Russian religious and national consciousness, were written for a wide readership. They pointedly introduce \textit{The Meaning of Life}, as if to suggest that the treatise as a whole was a further explication of the spiritual worldview of the icon. Trubetskoi, in short, wanted his own religious philosophy to be read as iconic, as a true reflection of Russian spirituality. As we have seen, that religious philosophy is distinctive in its overall liberal character. Trubetskoi’s abiding conviction was that theism was reasonable and not merely a matter of revelation. Conscience and its immediate testimony,

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 13, 16, 19.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 21.

\textsuperscript{16} This theme is further developed in “Two Worlds in Old Russian Icon-Painting.”

\textsuperscript{17} Trubetskoi, \textit{Icons: Theology in Color}, 38.
absolute human dignity, were the basis of his theology, which he developed as the idea of Godmanhood. This was the spiritual content that he hoped could be invested into Russian national identity.

Beastmanhood: From Militarism to Bolshevism
In the last chapter of The Meaning of Life, Trubetskoi returns to the “world catastrophe”: not only the world war but also the Russian Revolution. These events have ushered in the reign not of Godmanhood, but of “beastmanhood” (zverochelovechestvo). Trubetskoi views the contemporary militaristic state as the concrete embodiment of the principle of beastmanhood (246). The amorality of the state was first evident in international relations, in the lawlessness and anarchy among states that culminated in world war, which has only made more obvious the long-reigning principle of international relations: “war of all against all” (246–48). The lawlessness of international relations was, he thought, one of the major causes of the Russian Revolution. The fact that the state had rarely recognized any moral law in its relations with other states introduced a deep split in human conscience: in the private sphere a person was expected to follow accepted (Christian) moral standards, but in the state sphere the same person, as a citizen acting in the interests of his people and his state, was not only permitted but obliged to commit any vileness (249, ital. in orig.). This stark contradiction between private and state morality was itself a factor leading to world war; once the war broke out, the artificial and tenuous distinction collapsed altogether, and the “morality of war” became the dominant one in human relations (249).

In Russia as elsewhere, this perverse morality consumed all society. Belief in the absolute value of human life disappeared, replaced by purely utilitarian considerations. Firing squads, requisitions, looting, and other forms of violence became everyday occurrences. Killing of enemy prisoners and other outrages were justified by the needs of national security (250–51). By the end of the war—under the strain of successive military defeat and the growing influence of socialist parties (“tempters”) that replaced the “collective egoism of the nation” with the “collective egoism of class” and that promised the people an earthly paradise—the anarchy that had been the rule among states engulfed Russia itself. International anarchy became internal anarchy. Tsarism collapsed, destroyed by the same “morality of war” and “struggle for existence” that dominated international politics (251–52). “The sword of the state, having fallen from its hands, was turned against it: the people, armed by the state, became the greatest threat to its very existence. War was taken to its last
and extreme limit—to the complete collapse of any civic consciousness [obschestvennost’]” (250).

The Russian Revolution, in Trubetskoi’s view, has permitted the “morality of war” to penetrate even more deeply into all social relations. Attitudes formerly directed toward the external enemy have been transferred to the internal enemy. The Bolsheviks and their sympathizers greet with cruel joy any news of mass beatings of the “bourgeoisie” and officers; “the attitude toward the Bolsheviks of their opponents is hardly much better” (252). The techniques and terminology of the war have been carried over to class enemies at home (253). Trubetskoi saw revolution and anarchy not as isolated developments confined to Russia, but as world phenomena that had only struck Russia first and most intensely. They are inevitable consequences of the culture and morality of war, and they threaten all belligerent states. Russia succumbed first, he argues, because its state apparatus was weaker than that of its neighbors, which also have stronger attachments to private property and are thus less prone to socialist utopias. But these are conditional advantages, only temporarily restraining revolution and anarchy in other warring countries (254). The “logic of war” is, he says, a compromise with hell, which will eventually consume any state complicit in it. War comprises the inner law and contradiction of “all states in the world,” which are thus doomed to fall victim sooner or later to its logic (258–59). This devaluation of the state as such seems odd coming from him; the reigning militarism had clearly taken its toll on Trubetskoi, who at times writes like an anarchist, in contradiction to the liberal political philosophy that he had defended all his life and to his own occasional justifications of state resistance to evil. In any event, his prediction about the inevitable, state-destuctive consequences of militarism seemed to be confirmed by the German Revolution, as he observed with muted satisfaction in 1919.

Trubetskoi extended his analysis of the Russian Revolution in two public lectures that he delivered in Rostov in 1919, “The Great Revolution and the Crisis of Patriotism”118 and “The Kingdom of the Beast and the Future Revival of Russia.”119 In both he continues to emphasize the international and military contexts of developments in Russia. Bolshevism, he insists, is a product of the policies and attitudes that led to the world war and of the practices by which it was pursued, a product of decades of the increasing militarization of society, followed by four years of total war. In short, “Bolshevism is born from militarism.”120 It is an internalization of the

118 Trubetskoi, Velikaja revoliutsija i krisis patriotizma (Rostov, 1919), 31 pp.
119 Trubetskoi, Zverinoe tsarstvo i griadushchee vozrozhdenie Rossii (Rostov, 1919), 21 pp.
120 Trubetskoi, Velikaja revoliutsija i krisis patriotizma, 3. With this approach, Trubetskoi, perhaps more than any other contemporary observer, anticipates a direction of research
war, the application of war to all spheres of life. The modern imperialistic state created the technical apparatus of Bolshevism. The Bolsheviks assimilated the methods and terminology of the war (especially from the Germans), such as the taking of hostages, requisitions, seizures of private property, and confiscations. Its disingenuous pacifism notwithstanding, war is the very essence of Bolshevism. Soldiers returning from the war were encouraged to believe that in relation to the enemy, everything was permitted. The Bolsheviks only had to create internal enemies. They call for a war of extermination against the bourgeoisie. They have turned the north of Russia into a war camp penetrating every village and family; the countryside exists in a state of war between “kulaks” and the village poor. In short, the Bolsheviks rule by terror. But, Trubetskoi suggests, we ought not to be too indignant at their amorality, since the world war has shown that the whole modern state system is without principles in just the same measure.

Trubetskoi also considers the Russian Revolution to be the consequence of a crisis of patriotism, likewise worldwide in scope. The surge of Russian patriotism at the beginning of the war did not last, he writes, because it lacked adequate consciousness of absolute values and duties. Without religious ties, patriotism quickly degenerates into a “godless nationalism” that inevitably falls to the logic of war and dooms itself to destruction. “It wants to take the war to the end; but a war taken to the end is the total dissolution of all social bonds—a war of all against all. It is the end of the nation…. The stronger the chauvinistic surge, the more powerful the revolutionary wave that it unleashes is liable to be.” In Russia, the spiritual collapse was evident in the base instincts and appetites that “often took the form of chauvinistic Jewish pogroms” and that now “find satisfaction in Bolshevism.”

In this respect as well, Germany was not likely to be spared Russia’s fate. Even were Germany to win the war, Trubetskoi speculates in 1918, it would eventually fall victim to the ideology of biologism and renewed war. Germany lost, of course, but the rise of Nazism surely confirms

that has been fruitfully pursued by Peter Holquist and Eric Lohr, among others. See Peter Holquist, Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia’s Continuum of Crisis, 1914–1921 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); and Lohr, Nationalizing the Russian Empire.

121 Trubetskoi, Velikiaia revoliutziia i krizis patriotsiia, 4, 15.
122 Trubetskoi, Zverinoe starstvo i griadushebee vozrozhdenie Rossii, 7.
123 Trubetskoi, Velikiaia revoliutziia i krizis patriotsiia, 15–16, 19.
124 Trubetskoi, Zverinoe starstvo i griadushebee vozrozhdenie Rossii, 7.
126 Trubetskoi, Velikiaia revoliutziia i krizis patriotsiia, 11–12.
127 Trubetskoi, Smysl zhizni, 258.
Trubetskoi’s worst fears about the consequences of “biologism” in its virulent nationalistic forms. In 1919, after Germany’s defeat, Trubetskoi wrote no less prophetically that the Allies, with their harsh peace terms, were imitating the worst methods of Germany and were pushing it onto the path of revanche. “Injustice begets hatred and therefore is the source of new dangers for the future. Repeating the enemy’s mistakes, the Allies are preparing its fate for themselves.”

Not surprisingly, Trubetskoi thought that Russia’s overcoming the crisis of patriotism and ordeal of revolution depended on a “decisive turn from the materialistic worldview to lost spiritual values.” Spiritual recovery, he believed, was already beginning to take place in the very midst of the catastrophe Russia was enduring. Understandably enough, he found strength in the Russian insight—he presents it that way, referring to Dostoevskii and the Old Russian tale “O knige golubinoi”—that the greater the suffering, the deeper the spiritualization. Part of the “justification of suffering” is the spiritual meaning that emerges from it, which is precisely what Trubetskoi hoped to capture in The Meaning of Life. As we have seen, for him the underlying meaning of war and revolution was that they revealed beastmanhood as an evil manifestation, but a manifestation nonetheless, of a higher spiritual potential that can also be turned to Godmanhood.

Trubetskoi found a concrete example of the emergence of spiritual meaning out of worldly collapse in the recent fate of the Russian Church. The Revolution has, ironically, brought the Church benefit. It has deprived the Church of the external advantages and official role it had under the old regime, privileges that came at the high cost of “enslavement to secular power.” Liberated from secular captivity, the Church has now acquired the invaluable gift of spiritual freedom. Or, as he put it in one of his 1919 essays: “In the days of secular prosperity under tsarism, the Church found itself in a condition of deep humiliation and decline. By contrast, the catastrophe of the secular order has been for it a source of creative work and ascent.” The process of church renewal began with the sobor that opened in August 1917. Trubetskoi believed that the restoration of the

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128 Trubetskoi, Zverinoe tsarstvo i griadushchee voszroshdenie Rossii, 4.
129 Trubetskoi, Velikaia revoliutsiia i krisis patriotizma, 20.
130 The Book of the Dove was held to contain the answers to all questions of cosmology and eschatology. “Golubinaia” is probably a corruption of “glubinnaia”—the Book of the Depth—which is obscure but may refer to an apocryphal literature dealing with eschatological themes. See George P. Fedorov, The Russian Religious Mind, vol. 1: Kievan Christianity, the Tenth to the Thirteenth Centuries (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1946), 167. Thanks to Caryl Emerson for assistance on this point.
131 Trubetskoi, Smysh abhismi, 263.
132 Trubetskoi, Velikaia revoliutsiia i krisis patriotizma, 24.
patriarchate marked a decisive break with two centuries of the Church’s spiritual slavery, a sad tradition that was itself one of the underlying causes of the Russian Revolution. As he wrote in an article in the last months of his life, “The Bolshevist Utopia and the Religious Movement in Russia,” published abroad in English: “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.”

He pinned his hopes for Russia’s national recovery on the popular religious movement that he thought was developing across the country in the wake of the church sobor.

Created in the Image and Likeness

Despite his emphasis on the international and military contexts, Trubetskoi did not regard Bolshevism as a phenomenon alien to what he called Russian national character. In 1918, he published a collection of six articles originally written between 1906 and 1909. He thought the essays had lost none of their relevance and could shed light on the national roots of Bolshevism, which he found mainly in the utopianism and unconscious religiosity of the Russian intelligentsia. His approach is much like the "Veche" critique and I will not pursue it here. But one of the essays, “Vseobshchee, priamoe, tainoe i ravnoe” (Universal, Direct, Secret, and Equal), dated March 1906, is worth considering because it helps clarify the connection among Trubetskoi’s liberalism, religious philosophy, and conception of Russian national identity. The title of the essay refers to the “four-tail” electoral formula, which Trubetskoi uses as a metaphor for Russian national character. He suggests that the formula can represent two opposing conceptions of universal equality that have long struggled in the depths of Russian national consciousness: “One is expressed in the recognition of the image of God in every human being as such, in universal moral dignity. The other, on the contrary, levels everyone down to being a general nonentity.”

He draws on several examples from Russian history to show the force of the leveling tendency in Russian national experience.

Trubetskoi also formulates the distinction in terms of two different understandings of democracy. One is unlimited democracy (narodovlastie), which does not recognize the inviolable, inalienable rights of the


person and thus always runs the risk of degenerating into mass despotism. The other entails certain unshakable moral principles, “first of all the recognition of human dignity, the absolute value of the human person as such.” Only this conception of democracy “excludes the possibility of reducing the person to the level of a means and guarantees its freedom independent of whether it represents the majority or minority in society.”

A human being is sacred, Trubetskoi writes, but this recognition demands a definite philosophical and religious worldview. “If man is only a temporary, fleeting combination of atoms of matter, then preaching respect for the human person, for its dignity and freedom, is sheer nonsense: it is possible to speak of respect for man only on the supposition that man is a vessel of the absolute, a bearer of the eternal, abiding meaning of life.” This supposition is expressed in the idea that humanity is created in the image and likeness of God. “In the consciousness of our popular masses,” Trubetskoi concludes, “the very concept of the dignity of the human person is inseparably linked with this Christian teaching; therefore Russia’s salvation depends entirely on how firmly this principle is established in the national consciousness.”

Establishing it there more firmly was the justification for his life’s work.

As Trubetskoi explained in The Meaning of Life, “this Christian teaching”—which, of course, received its first and classic articulation in the Hebrew Bible (Genesis 1:26, 9:6)—is the immediate testimony of human conscience. This is precisely why it is a reasonable basis for hoping that life has transcendent meaning, despite all the empirical evidence to the contrary. Trubetskoi emphasized the Christian expression of his religious philosophy because he recognized that that would better resonate in Russian national consciousness. There was, however, a danger to this approach, one that in the end he did not entirely avoid. Identifying liberalism too closely with one faith tradition risks excluding others. This is why Trubetskoi, as we have seen, strove for a philosophical, universalistic conception of Christianity that diminished or revised those aspects of Christian teaching based on revelation—including, remarkably, the nature of Christ. He thought that revelation was coercive, exclusionary, and arbitrary; absolute human value could not rest on so precarious a basis. We have also seen that Trubetskoi defended the Jews and deplored violence against them. It is therefore disappointing to realize that he succumbed, at the end of his life, to “soft antisemitism.”

At the conclusion of his 1919 memoirs he expressed fear that the defeat of the Bolsheviks (which he expected soon) would be followed by

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136 Ibid., 302–3.
137 The term is Gollerbach’s (K nezrimomu gradu, 53).
a powerful reactionary wave of pogroms, which he knew had already begun. Our extreme rightists, he says, identify the kingdom of the beast with “Jew-masonry” (zhidomasonstvo). “A vain illusion—Jew-masons are no more than a partial manifestation of the kingdom of the beast, which is served in no less measure by those who massacre and pillage the Yids [shidy].” 138 The world crisis, he writes, is a consequence both of “Jew-masonry,” “which among us in Russia is most clearly embodied in Bolshevism,” and of the reaction “that Jew-masonry everywhere evokes and that everywhere assumes a more or less beastly form.” 139 In these remarks, at least, Trubetskoï was a man of his times. 140

The works that I have examined here were part of Trubetskoï’s remarkable effort to construct or “imagine” a liberal national identity for Russia. 141 By its nature his project had a certain utopian dimension: “what ought to be,” as a type of Kantian “regulative idea” and spur to progress, cannot be wholly realized in the world of “what is.” For the same reason, it was essentially a moral vision rather than primarily a political one, and in that some will see its weakness. 142 Trubetskoï sought to invest Russian national identity with the liberal content he drew from certain images and ideas precious to Orthodoxy, including, as we have seen, Pentecost, Sophia, and, most important, the principle that human beings are persons because they are created in the image and likeness of God and are called to realize their divine potential in Godmanhood. The abstract but real content of these ideas, if not necessarily their Christian form, has profound implications for human self-understanding and aspiration. This, after all,

138 Trubetskoï, Iz putevikh zametok bezhentsa, 206. This is the only occasion of which I am aware that Trubetskoï uses the pejorative shidy without quotation marks.
139 Ibid., 207.
140 It is plausible, but conjectural, that Trubetskoï’s intent was to use the language of “our extreme rightists” in the hope of better convincing them to stop the escalating violence against the Jews. Oleg Budnitskii has most recently dealt with the problem of Kadet attitudes toward antisemitism, showing that in 1919 the prominent liberals P. I. Novgorodtsev, V. I. Vernadskii, and G. N. Trubetskoï subscribed to the mystical image of Jewish power (Budnitskii, “Russian Liberalism,” 159–60).
141 Also relevant, but beyond the scope of the present essay, is Trubetskoï’s study of Russian folktales: Inoe starstvo i ego iskateli v russkoi narodnoi ikazke (Moscow: Leman, 1922).
142 Budnitskii speaks of Trubetskoï’s “pathological optimism” and “peculiar way of seeing things” (“Russian Liberalism,” 165).
is what makes Evgenii Trubetskoi not only a Russian religious thinker but also a liberal philosopher.

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