Between East and West:
Hegel and the Origins of the
Russian Dilemma

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Nikolai Berdiaev, the eminent twentieth-century Russian philosopher, wrote that the “problem of East and West” was an “eternal” one for Russia. Attempting to make sense of the violent upheavals that shook Russia in 1917, Berdiaev believed that the source of Russian troubles lay in the “inconsistency of the Russian spirit” due to the “conflict of the Eastern and Western elements in her.” Russia, he argued, always contained within its wide territory an invisible and shifting border between two continents, and thus Russian society was forever torn between two cultures. Berdiaev insisted that Russia could not discover its true calling or its place in the world until it resolved its internal conflict between East and West.

Berdiaev was contemplating the course of the nineteenth century, when Russia’s geographical destiny had deeply troubled Russian intellectuals. In the late 1830s Russian thinkers began their minute analyses of cultural and historical sources, hoping to determine the essential character of their nation and believing that their research would enable them to predict Russia’s future. Often, diverse questions of progress and stagnation, tradition and innovation, and the individual and society were all framed within this overarching problem of East versus West.

It is tempting to see this Russian dilemma as longstanding and natural, given Russia’s position between two continents. Indeed, many recent scholars have argued that Russian encounters with Asia, taking place within the framework of Russia’s territorial expansion eastward, forced Russians to examine their rela-

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1 Nikolai Berdiaev, *Sud’ba Rossii: Opyty po psikhologii voiny i natsional’nosti* (Moscow, 1990), 54.
tionships with the Eastern, Asian world. It is true that European geographers and historians have debated the location of the border between Asia and Europe since the Middle Ages. But before the nineteenth century this ambiguity hardly troubled Russian minds. The Muscovite state of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, for example, was well acquainted with cultures and lands to its East, engaging in trade and diplomatic relations with Muslim Tatars and others. Yet there is little evidence to suggest that Muscovy was concerned about its position between Eastern and Western countries.

Even Peter the Great, whom historians have credited for bringing European customs into Russia, was little concerned with the European/Asian divide in Russian culture. For him the most important geographical question was Russia’s place among the northern states, and he was particularly obsessed with Sweden as Russia’s primary military rival.

After Peter’s reign, educated Russians, as they became increasingly acquainted with Western European culture, experienced their first pangs of envy and self-doubt in the face of perceived European superiority. Nonetheless, throughout the eighteenth century few cultured Russians had trouble embracing a diverse historical legacy and national character—German, Slavic, Asian. After all, Europeans themselves were proud of their barbarian past. Peter the Great’s chief historian, V. N. Tatishchev, wrote with full confidence and little concern that the Russian empire was located “in both Europe and Asia,” noting that though more Russian people lived in Europe, Russia had more territory in Asia. In passing he mentioned that “where the border between these two large and most important cultures is located, no one has as yet determined for certain.”

According to him, the Slavic people as a whole could be divided into Asian and European branches, thus both cultures were of importance in Russian history.

The first of the great nineteenth-century Russian historians, Nikolai Karamzin, was proud of Russia’s diverse heritage. Russia, he wrote,

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7 See V. N. Tatishchev, “Russia ili kak nyne zovut Rossii,” in his Izbrannye trudy po geografii Rossii (Moscow, 1950), 112 and 114.

raising its head between the Asiatic and European kingdoms, represented within its civic life the characteristics of these two parts of the world: a mixture of old Eastern customs, brought by the Slavs into Europe and renewed, so to speak, by our long connection with the Mongols; Byzantine customs borrowed by the Russians along with the Christian religion, and some German customs imparted by the Varangians....

This cultural “mixture,” he argued, was a natural product of history, and Russians accepted it as an integral part of their national character.

A transformation in the approach to Russian history and culture occurred in the 1840s and especially in the 1850s, when such casual references to the variegated nature of Russian national character became unfashionable. A new thinking emerged which equated history with destiny and considered geography the arbiter of a nation’s fate. Russian intellectuals were no longer content to see Russia as a medley of races but rather anguished over Russia’s essential nature: whether it was Eastern or Western, European or Asian. In this sense the Russian dilemma must be understood as essentially modern.

Moreover, this new approach to the question of East and West did not arise from any direct encounters with the Russian East. Most of the early nineteenth-century intellectuals who wrote on Asia and Europe had only traveled to the latter. Instead, their soul-searching was prompted by careful reading of the works of European philosophers in general, and of Hegel in particular.

Scholars have long understood the impact of Hegelianism on the development of Russian philosophy. In the 1930s a number of intellectual historians traced Hegel’s philosophical influence on the major nineteenth-century Russian thinkers. Since then, Andrzej Walicki has provided the best and most comprehensive treatment of German thought in Russia in his The Slavophile Controversy. Nonetheless, this literature has not touched upon the question at issue here: the comprehensive effect of Hegel’s historical ideas on Russian thought. From Hegel the Russians derived their conception of the world as irrevocably divided between East and West, Europe and Asia. From him they had accepted the challenge of determining which side of this border they inhabited. All the men discussed here at some point declared their opposition to Hegel’s philosophy, but none of them were able entirely to rid themselves of his historical world view.

9 N. M. Karamzin, Zapiska o drevnei i novoi Rossii (St. Petersburg, 1914), 10-11.
10 Ibid., 11; and see N. M. Karamzin, Istoriia Gosudarstva Rossiiskago (12 vols.; Paris, 1969), VI, 3.
The Russians of the 1830s and 1840s read widely in European history and philosophy, and they particularly cherished German thought. Along with the writings of Friedrich Wilhelm von Schelling and Johann Gottfried von Herder, Hegel’s work had a deep and lasting impact on Russians. Within the highly educated circles of Moscow and St. Petersburg, Hegel became the source for something approaching an obsessive fascination. Aleksandr Herzen, one of Russia’s leading social critics of the time, describe this fascination in an oft-cited quote:

[T]here was not a paragraph in all three parts of the “Logic,” in the two of the “Aesthetic,” in the “Encyclopedia,” etc., which would not have been the subject of desperate disputes for several nights in a row. People who loved each other parted ways for whole weeks at a time because they disagreed about the definition of “all-embracing spirit” or had taken as an insult an opinion on the “absolute personality and its existence in itself.” Every insignificant pamphlet ... in which there was a mere mention of Hegel was ordered and read until it was tattered, smudged, and fell apart in a few days.¹²

Others remembered that in the 1830s and 1840s Hegel “made everyone’s head spin”¹³ and that the Russians greeted German philosophy as “some kind of newly-discovered America in the depths of human reason.”¹⁴

Hegel’s influence in Russia made itself felt in many fields of intellectual inquiry, not the least in the study and understanding of history. Hegel’s “Lectures on the Philosophy of History” transformed the way in which Russians looked upon history in general and their own history in particular. His was a powerful vision of the fate of nations, an understanding of the past as destiny, and the Russians joined many Europeans in converting to Hegelianism.

For many of Hegel’s students and readers the “Lectures on the Philosophy of History” had an intoxicating, prophetic quality.¹⁵ Within the first few lectures

¹² A. I. Herzen, Sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh (30 vols.; Moscow, 1956), IX, 18.
¹⁴ Chizhevskii, Hegel’, 36, 50.
¹⁵ In a large literature see Karl Löwith, Meaning in History (Chicago, 1949) and From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought (New York, 1964); Hans Küng, The Incarnation of God: An Introduction to Hegel’s Theological Thought as Prolegomena to a Future Christology, trans. J. R. Stephenson (Edinburgh, 1987); Timothy Bahti, Allegories of History: Literary Historiography after Hegel (Baltimore, 1992); G. B. Shaimukhambetova, Hegel’ i vostok: Printsipy podkhoda (Moscow, 1995); and Du-Yul Song, Aufklärung und Emanzipation: Die Bedeutung der asiatischen Welt bei Hegel, Marx, und Max Weber (Berlin, 1987).
Hegel boldly proclaimed to his students that “Reason rules the world” and that the course of history was therefore rational. God, the source of Reason in the universe, was bringing the world to knowledge and full realization of Himself. And since man had access to Reason, a careful and rational study of world history would reveal God’s plan for mankind. In essence Hegel declared that through history one could become acquainted with the plan of Providence, the mind of God. Telling his students that, through his lectures, they would come to “a knowledge of God,” “he explained that this knowledge was commanded by God himself, who wanted “no petty souls or empty heads for his children.”

Hegel conceded that the cursory study of history would yield only a catalogue of human crimes and suffering. He famously described history as a “slaughter-bench,” at which human happiness had been sacrificed. But he reassured his listeners that he would provide them with a higher synthesis, a total history, which would incorporate and render comprehensible this chaotic misery and show why all suffering was not in vain. In the end he would prove that world history was “the rational, necessary course of the World-Spirit.” Through human actions this Spirit was unfolding, realizing its true self. And in the end, the full self-realization of the Spirit would result in the growth of human freedom, consciousness of human dignity and worth, and the realization of the Kingdom of God on earth.

For Hegel, the full incarnation of the Spirit would be achieved in the secular state. Within his philosophical system the state was not merely a superior form of government, it was the set of institutions that fully expressed God’s rationality, the ultimate purpose of human striving, “the divine Idea as it exists on Earth.” The state would ultimately replace the Church as the expression of the Spirit. For these reasons Hegel believed that individuals could find true self-realization only within the confines of the state, since the state was the “manifestation of human will and its freedom.” The path to achieving this state was strewn with casualties. Providence often chose strange events and odd people to fulfill its ends, and these could not be judged according to ordinary moral standards: individual ethics could not be applied to the purposes of the Spirit. The end, however, would fully justify the means.

For his Russian audience Hegel’s most troubling proclamation was that by no means would all people be blessed with the benefits of the state. Unfortunately, only some “historical nations” were chosen to further the progress of the Spirit. The others were condemned to mere existence, to stagnation, to a lack of real history. In this manner Hegel divided the nations between the saved and the

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17 Ibid., 22, 25-27.
18 Ibid., 22, 35.
19 Ibid., 57, 66.
20 Ibid., 90-91.
damned—those predestined to take part in history and those left out of God’s plan.  

Roughly speaking, Hegel’s division between the historical and unhistorical nations corresponded to the geographical division between East and West (he explicitly excluded Africa from consideration). For Hegel the light of human knowledge rose in the East, like the sun, but the divine Spirit journeyed from there into the West, leaving Eastern nations to the realm of the eternally prehistorical. Even China and India, the complicated and great civilizations of Asia, were doomed to remain in “the childhood stage” of history. Only Persia could claim to make the first steps into history, since it belonged to the “Caucasian, meaning European race.”

In Hegel’s scheme unhistorical nations were known by their fruits. The proof of Asian backwardness was found in the undifferentiated unity of Asian society and culture, which allowed no room for individual judgment or individual action. In China, for example, religion, politics, and the family were indistinguishable: the Emperor was worshiped as a God, the patriarchal family exerted its full power over passive individuals, and most people lived in a condition of “slavery.” Freedom belonged only to one individual—the ruler, who exercised his arbitrary authority over his subjects. “The East ... to the present day knows only that One is free,” Hegel explained, and thus Asians were condemned to live under the most primitive form of government—despotism.

Despotism, in turn, left Asian culture at the lowest stage of self-consciousness. Morality existed only as external law and custom, forbidding individuals to exercise independent moral judgment. Hegel went so far as to call Chinese and Indian society immoral, imprisoning people in a state of “depravity.” He had particular contempt for the Hindu culture:

Cunning and craftiness are the fundamental characteristics of the Hindoo. Cheating, stealing, robbing, murdering are within his ethics. Humbly crouching and abased before a victor and lord, he is completely ruthless to the vanquished and subordinate.

Even the Persian culture eventually sank into “effeminacy,” and its men became “the slaves of a weak sensuality.”

The Western world, according to Hegel, was born in ancient Greece. There, Hegel told his students, “we feel immediately at home, for we are in the realm of the Spirit.” In Greece racial and cultural diversity made its first appearance,
leading to lively cultural interaction. Blind obedience, whether to moral laws, to despots, or to the natural world, was nonexistent in Greece. Instead, the Greeks became the source of human progress because of their pursuit of “subjectivity, morality, individual reflection.” This in turn led to a democratic government where the freedom of at least some was respected (despite the persistence of slavery). And when this diversity and individualism in Greece tended to the extreme, leading to the dissolution of Greek society, the West was saved by the advent of the Roman Empire, which united nations by force. Hegel lamented the severity of the Roman state and its harsh application of a unified code of law upon all of its citizens. He declared Rome to be the “prose” of the Spirit. Nonetheless, this dry, rigorous brutality was a necessary phase in human history. It unified people in preparation for the advent of the invigorating Spirit in the shape of Christianity.

According to Hegel, the Christian religion effected the fundamental transformation of human history. Christianity was the first religion to proclaim the unequivocal worth of every individual, to proclaim that “all are free.” Christ called men to be perfect, and men responded not only by transforming themselves from within but also by transforming the world according to Christian dictates. In this manner, men began to permeate the secular world with the spiritual—they began to construct God’s Kingdom on earth, “guided by the requirements of the Absolute Spirit.” This new kingdom took the shape of the state—“a temple of human freedom in the knowledge and will of reality, whose content may itself be called divine.” The East, unfortunately, could not be saved by the spread of Christian teaching—the Byzantine Church exhibited all of the negative characteristics of the East in general: corruption, dissolution, and stagnation.

The first Western state took an ecclesiastical form—the Catholic Church—which ruled in the Middle Ages. With time, however, the Spirit began to depart from Catholicism, and the church degenerated into mere form and legalism. Faith became a matter of “external legislation,” resulting in “compulsion and the stake.” Providence next chose the German barbarians tribes to accomplish the succeeding phase of human history. After their conversion to Christianity, they infused fresh blood into Christian institutions. Martin Luther, the representative of the “fully preserved depth of the German people,” returned Christianity to its true, inward, and individual spirit. The Christian church, as a separate institution, faded away, replaced by the true Christian institution: the secular state. “States and laws are nothing other than the manifestation of religion within

26 Ibid., 275, 323.
27 Ibid., 339, 386.
28 Ibid., 405
29 Ibid., 405.
30 Ibid., 454-55.
worldly relations,” Hegel proclaimed. Thus, through the workings of the Spirit in human history man became free, and the Spirit itself was incarnated in human relations and institutions.  

In this way Hegel brought his listeners to the modern era, and declared to his German students that they themselves were working to develop this Christian state—that they were the witnesses of the triumphant construction of the Kingdom of God. German philosophy in particular could contemplate reality with “its need for Spirit internally satisfied and its conscience at peace.”  

Hegel spoke very little about Russia in his historical lectures, and what he said left the question of Russia’s place in history entirely ambiguous. At one point in his lectures he claimed that the Slavic people “perpetuate the connection with Asia.”  

At another point he was more equivocal:  

[At] times, as an advanced guard or an intermediate party, they have taken part in the struggle between Christian Europe and unchristian Asia..., and some of the Slavs have been conquered by Western reason. Yet this entire mass of people remains excluded from our consideration, because hitherto they have not played a role in the series of forms that reason has passed through in the world. Whether they will do so hereafter is a question that does not concern us here, because in history we deal with the past.  

However, in a letter to one of his earliest students, the Estonian nobleman Baron Von Yxkull, Hegel was much more hopeful for Russia’s fate:  

It seems that other modern states have already more or less achieved the goals of their development; possibly they have left the culminating point of their development behind them and they now remain in a condition of stasis. Russia, on the other hand, possibly ... carries within its depths enormous possibilities for the development of its intensive nature.  

Those Russians who were enthralled by the prophetic quality of Hegel’s history were consequently deeply troubled by his ambiguous statements on Russia. Would Russia be embraced by Providence, or would it be cast off with other unhistorical nations? To answer this question they first had to make the most important determination: was Russia part of Europe, or condemned to languish with Asia? Was Russia essentially part of the West, of the heritage of the Greeks

31 Ibid., 494, 497.  
32 Ibid., 526.  
33 Ibid., 133.  
34 Ibid., 422.  
and Romans, or part of the East, a contrast to the West, something entirely different?

In the early nineteenth century the debate over Russia’s geographic and historical destiny was embedded within the larger, well-known controversy over Russian national character known as the Slavophile-Westernizer controversy. The dispute originated within a tiny, highly educated circle of Russian intellectuals who had read and discussed various works of European philosophy and literature, including Schelling, Herder, and Hegel. The Slavophiles (as their enemies called them), following the tradition of the German Romantics, became enamored of Russian folk-traditions and medieval history. They asserted that Russia would develop a unique, non-European national culture.36 “Westernizers,” opposed to the Slavophile fascination with the past and eager to import European democratic principles into Russia, proclaimed that Russia’s true place was in Europe. Intellectuals on both sides went through phases of fascination with Hegel’s philosophy. His historical thought permeated their debates and it deeply affected how each side viewed historical development, geography, and the role of culture in society. Both Slavophiles and Westernizers were troubled by the fact that Russia seemed poised on Hegel’s border between East and West, waiting to make the fateful choice.

The Proponents of a European Russia

Russian Westernizers had little trouble accepting the Hegelian view of historical progress. Most adopted Hegel’s division of history into successive Asian, Greek and Roman, Medieval, and Modern Christian stages; and most agreed that western Europe had achieved the pinnacle of human civilization. They shared Hegel’s revulsion for the repression of the individual under Asian despotism, and they longed for a Russian state that would guarantee the full freedom and dignity of its citizens. Having accepted Hegel’s vision of the path of Providence, and his characterization of nations saved and damned, the Westernizers were often tormented by doubts that Russia would ever be part of the course of the Spirit. When they minutely analyzed Russian history, they found in Russia traces of both Asian despotism and European diversity, both servility and a desire for true freedom. They anxiously sought signs that would confirm Europe’s triumph over Asia on Russian soil.

Hegel’s work caused perhaps the most severe intellectual crisis in Vissarion Belinskii, the leading Russian literary critic of the first half of the nineteenth century. Sometime in the fall of 1837 Belinskii decided that Hegel’s statement “What is rational is real, and what is real is rational” meant that individuals had

36 See Walicki, The Slavophile Controversy; Nicholas Riasanovsky, Russia and the West in the Teaching of the Slavophiles (Cambridge, Mass., 1952).
to accept their society and culture, no matter how reactionary or backward, as a rational and necessary phase in the progress of history. Until 1840 Belinskii persistently advocated a “reconciliation with reality,” which in his case meant an acceptance of even the most draconian aspects of Russian serfdom and Tsar Nicholas I’s autocratic regime.37

In the 1840s Belinskii abandoned his project of “reconciliation” in favor of open advocacy of resistance to oppression. Moreover, he began to read more of the German Left-Hegelians and French social critics. But Belinskii still remained a Hegelian in his historical world view. He persisted in his belief that history followed “strict internal necessity,” guided by the hand of God. He also began to develop a stronger faith in historical progress, convinced that this faith was sufficient to assure a benevolent outcome. “Historical fatalism is blasphemy,” he wrote, “living belief in progress and—its consequence—the consciousness of one’s own human worth—these are the fruits of understanding history.”38

Belinskii saw that his fellow Russians anguished about Russian history, hoping to gain clues about its destiny. “In fact,” he wrote,

never has the study of Russian history had such a serious character as it has lately. We question and interrogate the past so that it will explain our present and give us hints about our future. We are as if frightened for our lives, for our significance, for our past and future, and quickly wish to solve the great question: “to be or not to be.”39

According to Belinskii, Russia was in the geographic “middle” between Europe and Asia, but it simply could not remain in that position. Gone was the eighteenth-century belief that Russia was a combination of Eastern and Western, European and Asian elements. Belinskii argued that it was impossible to have such a mixture; it was “hard to imagine the middle between light and dark, between enlightenment and ignorance, between humanity and barbarism.”40 Belinskii accepted, and even exaggerated, Hegel’s characterizations of the difference between Europe and Asia, at times arguing that all Asians remained at the intellectual level of children. Asian culture was “immobile,” “one-sided,” having little conception of the worth of the individual, of reason. The Asian state

38 V. G. Belinskii, review of Rukovostvo k poznaniiu novoi istorii dlia srednikh uchebnykh zavedenii, in Polnoe sobranie sochinenii (13 vols.; Moscow, 1953), VIII, 284.
was nothing more than an “enormous family.” For these reasons, Asians were
condemned to suffer “unlimited despotism and unconditional slavery.” Europe,
on the other hand, was the pinnacle of civilization, and Belinskii marveled that
such a geographically small territory could so decisively triumph over the rest of
the world. Belinskii summed this up in his declaration: “Everything human is
European and everything European is human.” Belinskii even began to label as
“Chinese” everything he considered primitive and backward.

After having studied aspects of Russian history, Belinskii admitted that be-
fore the reign of Peter the Great, Russia was not part of Europe, but he refused
to admit that Russia was essentially Asian. Russian culture simply did not con-
tain Asian “sensuality,” “laziness,” and “mysticism.” In the thirteenth and four-
teenth centuries the Tatar occupation of Russia had brought Asian elements into
what was essentially a European nation. During the reign of Peter the Great,
however, Russia thrust off its “Chinese-Byzantine monarchism,” and took its
first steps into the European world. All that remained was for Russia to em-
brace its European destiny and continue on the path of reform and progress.
“The question,” he wrote, “is not whether Peter made us half-Europeans and
half-Russians: The question is whether we will always remain in this character-
less situation...” The answer was no, since the Russian people were already
becoming “European Russians and Russian Europeans.”

Belinskii rested his faith on Russia’s Europeanization on his faith in the
power of Russian Christianity. Though he was not a believer and though he had
great contempt for the Russian Orthodox Church, Belinskii agreed with Hegel’s
contention that the advent of Christianity was responsible for all that was noble
and good in the European character. Respect for the individual, Belinskii ar-
gued, “came from the New Testament, from the idea of the equality of all before
God’s judgement, from the idea of equal rights to the Father’s love and God’s
mercy.” Christianity gave Europe the power to triumph over the rest of the world.
Russia was immune to the Asian influence, despite geographical proximity, be-
cause of its Christian faith. In the end Christianity would assure Russia’s entry
into Europe.

Sergei Solov’ev, the best known Russian historian of the first half of the
nineteenth century, had a similar faith in Russian progress, and sought to prove
it through his detailed consideration of the Russian past. He had an ambivalent
relationship with Hegel’s thought in general and even declared that he never

41 Ibid., 99-105.
42 Ibid., 105; Letter to Botkin, 11 Dec. 1840, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, XI, 576;
Chizevskii, Gegel, 129.
43 “Rossiia do Petra Velikogo,” 144-45.
44 “Gore ot uma ...” Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, III, 426.
45 “Rossiia do Petra Velikogo,” 105.
understood all the excitement that surrounded it. Nonetheless, he fully agreed with Hegel regarding the superiority of the West over the East, and he believed the march of progress traveled from East to West.

For Solov’ev the stagnant, undeveloped, and amoral Asian culture was a stark contrast to the active and powerful culture of the Europeans. Like Belinskii, Solov’ev believed there could be no middle ground between the two. Unfortunately, Russia’s complicated and difficult history took place on the border between what he termed “European quality,” and “Asian quantity.” The consequences of living on this border were grave. Not only did Russia have to battle the Asian tribes on its frontiers, but it had to conquer the remnants of Asian culture within. Solov’ev’s historical work presented a detailed narrative of the struggle between East and West in Russia. Building upon Hegel’s notion that Asian culture was dominated by a single principle, Solov’ev argued that this single principle was the division of society into “clans.” In clan-based societies the extended family came before all else and was the primary unit of allegiance for all individuals. Moreover, these clans welcomed the appearance of a single ruler, who, like the patriarch of the clan, subordinated all of society to his personal will, creating a “centralized and all-powerful” government. Asian societies surrendered all of their freedom to the clans and their ruler and demanded only to be left in peace, to live a life of utter passivity and indolence.

If one looked at ancient Russian history, Solov’ev explained, one found incontrovertible evidence of Asian culture. Even before the Russian state appeared, Slavic tribes had lived in clans. Hence the early period of Russian history was marked by stagnation, as Russia was held back by the immobility of clan life. Luckily for the Russians, however, they could not entirely escape European influence. Salvation came in the form of the early Germanic (Varangian) tribes, whom the Slavs had invited to rule over them. These Germans brought with them the very essence of European diversity and respect for the individual in the form of the “militia” (druzhina). A militia, according to Solov’ev, could only exist when active men, dissatisfied with the quiet life of the clan, banded together to form a self-sustaining and independent armed company. Within a militia, there were no hierarchical relations, simply a common set of interests and a


49 Ibid., 63.
50 Ibid., 48, 101-2.
51 “Nachala russkoi zemli,” Sochinenia, XVII, 705-35, 711
52 Ibid., 713
sense of “comradeship.” Ultimately, when a militia settled down and began to govern a territory, they easily transformed themselves into a legitimate state in which despotism was unknown, and respect for the individual reigned. With the arrival of the Germanic tribes in Russia, the Russians were saved from a life of Asian despotism and backwardness.

This was not the end of Russia’s battle, however, since the clan and militia principles continued to battle one another throughout Russian history. This struggle between the remnants of Asian culture and the emerging European culture led to the rise of terrible contradictions within Russian society, often leading to discord and civil strife. Nonetheless, Russia eventually acquired the rudiments of a European society and was well on the way to achieving a Western state.

The key factor in Russia’s triumph over its Asian character, despite the odds, was Christianity. Like Belinskii, Solov’ev believed that the Christian religion was the engine behind European progress, encouraging individuals and societies continually to perfect themselves. In Solov’ev’s words, Christianity held up to man “a being that was perfect and demanded moral perfection.” Christians continually sought to perfect their society, and their faith never allowed them to slip into passivity or contentment. Eternal progress was the Christian destiny. Within Russia, Solov’ev envisioned the struggle between East and West as bitter, causing “illness in the young [Russian] organism.” Poor, tattered, on the outskirts of Europe, Russia looked uncivilized. Yet, Russia was destined to progress, for, in Solov’ev’s words, “Civilization had thrown its net upon the Russian people.”

Belinskii’s and Solov’ev’s triumphant proclamation of the victory of Europe in Russia was not shared by all the Europe-oriented Russian intellectuals. Aleksandr Herzen, Russia’s leading nineteenth-century social critic, was not so sanguine about the inevitability of Russian Europeanization. He firmly believed in the superiority of Europe over Asia, in the eventual triumph of the West over the East—but where would Russia end up? Hegel’s prophetic declarations had troubled Herzen’s heart.

53 “Nabliudenie,” 49.
54 Ibid., 47, 102.
56 Ibid., 15-16.
57 “Nabliudenie,” 115.
58 “Drevniaia Rossia,” Sochineniia, XVI, 264, 266.
59 Istoriia Rossii, VII, 135.
Herzen’s concern for Russia was a kind that could not have been found in previous centuries. In the introduction to his essay “On the Development of the Revolutionary Ideas in Russia” he put forward the anguished questions about Russia’s history troubling Russian society: “Do those nations that are almost unnoticeable in the past and unknown in the present have any right to a future?” He might agree that Russians had “capabilities” and a good “instinctual desire,” but their essential nature remained unclear.

Herzen often criticized Hegelian idealism, and he found great solace in the works of Left Hegelians such as Feuerbach. Nonetheless, his historical views remained under the influence of Hegel. Hegel had convinced Herzen that nothing good could come from the East, from Asia. Herzen described Asia as a vast, unified mass of people incapable of reflective thought or self-determination. “Monotonous repetition” in Asia was only broken by “terrible revolutions.” For the most part, the Eastern world was enveloped in “dead silence.” Borrowing Hegelian phrases, Herzen wrote that the Asian man was “always either a slave wallowing in the dust or an unrestrained despot.”

Civilization, for Herzen, began in ancient Greece. Almost directly quoting Hegel, Herzen declared that only in ancient Greece did he feel at home: “Entering into the Greek world, we feel that we are breathing our native air—this is the West, this is Europe.” Subjection, whether to a ruler or to nature, was unknown in Greece—the Greeks encourage free, rational thought and personal control of one’s destiny. Greek culture, in his words, sought to “transform fate itself into freedom, to conquer everything through reason.”

Herzen, like Belinskii, was not a Christian, and yet he, too, believed in the importance of Christianity for European progress. Christianity, as an “antithesis” to the “thesis” of the ancient world, gave weight and meaning to what he called the “superficiality” of ancient philosophy. Herzen was even ready to accept the fact that the German nation, after its conversion to Christianity, became the source of history’s final stage. “Nothing could be more opposite not only to the eastern slave ... but also to the Roman citizen ... than the Christian German.” Christian Germans developed the concept of “knighthood,” and knighthood brought into Europe the idea of the respect for the individual, for human dignity.

62 “Pis’ma ob izuchenii prirody,” Sobranie sochinenii, III, 142.
63 “Neskol’ko zamechanii ob istoriicheskoi razvitii chesti,” Sobranie sochinenii, II, 155-56.
64 “Pis’ma,” 143.
65 Ibid., 146, acknowledging that the quotations from the Greek philosophers in his text were taken from Hegel’s Lectures on the History of Philosophy.
66 “Pis’ma,” 220-21.
68 Ibid., 163.
Russians were not so fortunate, for there was something eternally Asiatic in the Russian soul—“something feminine.” This aspect of the Russian national character meant they lacked the essential “energy and initiative” found in other European countries. It was as if the Russians needed outside help in order to develop into a European nation. Herzen placed his hope on those fundamentally European elements he found within Russian culture, including the fact that the Slavic language was “Indo-European,” not Asian, and that the German Varangians had conquered Russia at an early stage, encouraging Russia to strive to become “an independent, strong state.” Europe had taken root within Russia, but it had yet to be seen whether the Asian passivity in Russia could be conquered.

Herzen could not share Solov’ev’s or Belinskii’s full confidence that Russia would become a part of Europe. In essence Herzen lacked confidence in the fundamental, saving factor of Christianity. Although Herzen agreed that Christianity was basically a Western religion, helping Russia to put some distance between itself and Asia, Russian Christianity had taken the Byzantine, Eastern form. Like Hegel, Herzen had only contempt for Eastern Christianity, calling it “old age, fatigue, passive submission to the throes of death.” The Orthodox Church had always sought to turn Russia into a Byzantine state, a state “obedient to blind faith, deprived of the light of knowledge,” in which the Tsar was deified in a manner very much recalling Hegel’s God-Emperor of the East. And it had nearly succeeded, leaving Russians “devastated, humiliated, with no energy to stand up on their own two feet....”

The Tsar Peter the Great had valiantly fought this Byzantine influence, refusing to become, in Herzen’s words “the Christian Dalai-Lama....” In this sense Peter was a Hegelian “world-historical” man—he had single-handedly lifted Russia out of its “embryonic” state and placed it within the civilized, Western world. There were, however, few Peters in Russia, and only time would tell whether the Petrine reforms would bear fruit or suffocate under the weight of Asian stagnation and despotism.

It was perhaps this frustration and anxiety that led Herzen and to some extent Belinskii later to seek refuge in Left-Hegelian philosophy, and ultimately, socialism. Evidence suggests that both men felt the all-encompassing vision of Hegelian history to be too rigid, allowing little room for individual action. Each began to grow impatient with a philosophy that dictated dispassionate analysis of the course of events, and began to search for a more concrete program of

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70 Ibid., 154-55.
71 Ibid., 162-63.
72 Ibid., 162.
73 Ibid., 170.
74 Ibid., 168-69.
action that could allow them to participate in altering fate. They no longer wished to wait and see whether Russia was to progress or stagnate—they desired to contribute their individual effort to its transformation. Belinskii embraced the Left-Hegelian attempts to create a philosophy fit for practical use. Herzen increasingly placed all his hopes on revolution, and toward the end of his life supported the growth of the European socialist movement.75

The Turn to the East

The Russian Slavophiles, who so vehemently protested against what they saw as the continual Westernization and Europeanization of Russia since the time of Peter the Great, had their own Hegelian crises. Whereas the Westernizers hoped that Hegel’s prophecy for Europe would come true in Russia, the Slavophiles feared the same would occur. For the latter Hegel’s philosophy embodied everything that was wrong with the West—its excessive insistence on rationality, on the formal character of politics and the state, and on its privileging of the individual over the community and the state over society. In essence theirs was initially an Orthodox Christian protest against what they saw as Hegel’s subjection of human history to the tyranny of reason and against the belief that all was permissible in the path to creating the perfect state. Later their anti-Hegelianism became more firmly rooted in Russian nationalism, in the argument that Russian national character should remain unique and undefiled by the encroachments of Western progress.

Nonetheless, the Slavophiles ultimately could not shake the influence of Hegel’s thought, and even when they criticized him, they borrowed many of his basic concepts. In essence they attempted to stand Hegel’s historical vision on its head: where he praised diversity they praised wholeness or unity, where he praised the individual they praised the community, where he claimed Rome had surpassed Greece they claimed that Greece remained superior to Rome, and most importantly where he praised the West they praised the East. It should be added that they did not necessarily see Russia as an “Asian” nation (with the partial exception of Aleksei Khomiakov, discussed below). Their definition of the East was based on a vision of Eastern Christendom, and their alternative philosophy was built on the teachings of the Greek Church fathers and the theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Nonetheless, just as Hegel had condemned Eastern Christianity as foreign to Western progress, so the Slavophiles defined Eastern Christian culture in opposition to the Catholic and Protestant West.

Ivan Kireevskii, the Russian intellectual considered the first of the Russian Slavophiles, was present for Hegel’s lectures in Berlin in the winter of 1830. His initial reaction was that of deep admiration: after dining at Hegel’s house, he wrote home, “I am surrounded by the first-class minds of Europe.” Soon, how-

75 See Walicki, Slavophile Controversy, 369-93, 580-601.
ever, he became convinced that Hegelianism was the culmination of the wrong path taken by European thought. He believed his task was to replace Hegel’s “negative” philosophy with a new, “positive” Russian philosophy.\textsuperscript{76}

For Kireevskii the most egregious aspect of Hegelianism was its separation and elevation of the principle of reason from all the other human cognitive faculties. In this sense Hegelianism was the ultimate expression of the greatest sin of the West—its “rationalism.” According to Kireevskii, this rationalism was responsible for the growth of atheism in Europe, for “industrialization,... philanthropy based on calculated selfishness,... the ideal of spiritless calculation, and the primacy of materialism....” Hegel was thus deeply wrong to praise so highly this “one-sided, deceptive, seductive, and treacherous principle.”\textsuperscript{77}

Moreover, Hegel was wrong to put such emphasis on the importance of the individual and individual freedom. Individualism in Western history had led to the isolation of people and the fragmentation of society, making all relationships between human beings that of “interest.” To protect the individual the West had to invent such safeguards as private property, external laws regulating relationships, and formal rights that protected the individual from the encroachments by the state.\textsuperscript{78}

Kireevskii fully believed Hegel’s assertion that Western European history was the history of the progress of reason and the increasing freedom of the individual. Yet it was precisely this history that caused western Europeans to take the wrong course. Kireevskii could agree that everything positive had been invented by the Greeks, but after the Greeks the paths between the West and the East diverged. It is interesting that Kireevskii borrowed Hegel’s critique of Roman culture and society to turn it against Hegel himself. In Rome, he wrote, “superficial rationality took priority over the internal essence of things.” The external structure of Roman law in particular “was brought to such extraordinary logical perfection, and was marked by an equally extraordinary absence of internal justice.” Moreover, the Roman culture so highly valued the individual and “personal logical conviction” that the only unity one could experience in Rome was that of “general interest.” Relationships were as formal, superficial, and lifeless as the rest of the culture. Thus the Roman state achieved the height of dry perfection, a kind of terrible logical perfection that killed all sense of wholeness and spirituality.\textsuperscript{79}


\textsuperscript{78} “V otvet,” 192-93.

Kireevskii concurred with Hegel that Christianity had broken through this superficial Roman rationalism, acting to restore the “internal wholeness of existence.” But just as Hegel believed that Byzantine Christianity had been unable to incorporate the essence of Christianity because of its Eastern character, so Kireevskii accused the Roman Catholic Church of being unable to shake off its Roman heritage, of twisting Christianity into nothing more than “logical conviction.” Catholic rationalism reached its height in scholastic theology, where faith, in his words, was reduced to a set of “syllogisms.” After this the path of Europe was set. In their rebellion against the Catholic Church both the Reformation and Enlightenment had continued to express and develop human reason, rejecting only the controlling authority of the Church. In addition, both the Reformation and the Enlightenment had encouraged atomization into individualism, encouraging a “negative, logical reason” accessible to each individual.

The idea of “unity,” which Hegel criticized as “Eastern” and condemned for hindering the progress of the Spirit, Kireevskii praised and considered the foundations of Russian difference. Kireevskii emphasized that the influence of the early Greek theologians in Russia prevented Russia from being permeated by creeping Western rationalism. These theologians had bequeathed to the Russians the understanding that reason alone was not sufficient for comprehending the totality of the world; they understood that it was necessary to supplement rational thought with “higher truths” and “living visions.” According to Kireevskii, a true philosophy had to include consciousness of a superior “unity” of faith and reason. In the East, he wrote, philosophers and theologians understood that knowledge did not consist of mere superficial conceptions between concepts. “Eastern thinkers,” he argued, “in order to achieve the fullness of truth, seek the internal wholeness of reason ... where the separate activities of the soul merge into one living and higher unity.”

For Kireevskii the Russian state and society were firmly rooted in this Eastern heritage of unity and harmony, so distinct from the discord found in Western diversity and individualism. Unlike Hegel, Kireevskii thought it positive that, in Russia, the family incorporated and protected the individual, the community protected and unified families, and the Tsar and Church unified society under their authority. All of this, he argued, gave the Russians a real “freedom” different from Western selfishness and willfulness. In Russia “the princes and boyars and clergy and people ... all classes and types of people were permeated with one spirit, one conviction, the same understanding, the same need for the common

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80 Ibid., 244.
81 “V otvet,” 193.
82 “O neobkhodimosti i vozmozhnosti novykh nachal dlia filosofii,” Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, II, 289.
84 “O kharaktere,” 234, 258.
85 “V otvet,” 195.
Reversing Hegel, Kireevskii insisted that unity was the ultimate aim of societies, not the fragmentation into individual liberty.

The Slavophile Konstantin Aksakov also found Hegel fascinating when he first read him. He was initially compelled by Hegel’s claim that he could understand “God’s Reason.” He agreed that what at first might seem as the chaos of human history was in fact the relentless course of “thought,” which slowly completed its work in the world. Nonetheless, he rebelled against the supposition that Russia would follow the Western, European path to progress. He began proudly to proclaim that Russia was content to be an “unhistorical” nation in Hegelian terms.

Aksakov sought evidence against Russian Europeanism within Russian history, challenging the views of historians such as Sergei Solov’ev. In the first place he refused to believe that ancient Russia contained any elements of European culture. Just as many of the Westernizers had argued that Asian culture was imported into Russia by the Tatars, so Aksakov declared that European culture was entirely imported by Peter the Great. It was in Peter’s time that Russia abandoned her true path and began slavishly to imitate the West. This wrenching step, taken in the eighteenth century, gave Russia its superficial, European characteristics and deluded people into thinking that Russia would become another European state.

Despite his certainty of Russia’s essential distinctness, however, Aksakov shared the anguish of his pro-European contemporaries regarding Russia’s future. He asked questions diametrically opposed to Herzen’s but in the same troubled fashion: had the progress of rationalization and Westernization already gone too far for Russia to turn back? “Has Russia preserved her holy principles?” Aksakov asked, “Is she now what she was before?” Just as Solov’ev and Herzen feared that remnants of Russia’s Asiatic character would prevent the nation from progressing and becoming European, so Aksakov feared that newly introduced Western principles would corrupt the old, true, Eastern, Russian characteristics. Aksakov was afraid that Europe had gone so far in possessing Russia, “The West has entered Russia, lives in her ... distorting the Russian people....”

Aksakov particularly feared that Russia would follow Europe in its Hegelian striving to create a perfect “state.” Aksakov explicitly criticized Hegel’s claim...
that the state was the highest principle toward which humanity should strive. It was extraordinary, he argued, that historians and philosophers should worship the state, which was a “human creation, the kingdom on earth, consequently not God’s kingdom.” Hegel had criticized the Asian nations for equating morality with law, but Aksakov countered that it was precisely the Western state that perpetuated the confusion of external law and inner morality. By pursuing the development of the state, the West sought to replace “conscience and moral freedom, national and social bonds, and faith itself with law and political rights.”

It certainly was much easier when “freedom” was simply understood as “a constitution, institution,” but this was the “beginning of slavery, the principle which kills life and freedom.”

Aksakov firmly disagreed with Solov’ev regarding the eventual development of a strong and mighty Russian state. Aksakov was proud to proclaim that Russians were, in the Hegelian sense, a “stateless people.”

To refute the Westernizer’s arguments regarding Russia’s inevitable Europeanization Aksakov attacked Solov’ev’s history. He specifically sought to demolish Solov’ev’s assertion of the basic role of the “militia” in Russian history. The Russian militias, he argued, were of little historical importance. Far more fundamental in Russia was the principle of the “community” (obshchina). Within the Russian community selfish individualism was nonexistent, and an external, rational code of law was unnecessary, since people lived as part of a harmonious, unified whole. Morality was organically integrated into community life, and each individual was free to express his true, inner nature. In his words the obshchina was the “path of internal justice, conscience and freedom ... the path of truth, a path fully worthy of man.” Aksakov, like Kireevskii, believed that cultural “unity” was not a negative cultural characteristic, but rather one toward which every nation should strive. The unified obshchina was not the source of stagnation and immobility but rather the “highest stage of human perfection,” which the rest of the world would eventually achieve.

Russia never did develop into a Western state, Aksakov argued. Instead, another form of government grew within Russia, embodied in the concept of “all the Land” (vsia Zemlia). The Russian “land” was not an administrative or legal concept but a concept based on moral and spiritual agreement. Russia had no need for parliaments or assemblies, since the Russian Tsar would never rule without the consent of “all the land.” If Russia could remain true to its basic principles and refused to be corrupted by European rationalism, it would preserve its basic and beneficial “wholeness.”

91 “Neskol’ko slov o Russkoi istorii, vozbuszdemykh istorieiu g. Solov’eva,” Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, I, 52-53.
92 “Po povodu VII toma Istorii Rossii g. Solov’eva,” Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, I, 249n.
93 Ibid., 249n.
94 Ibid., 250n; also Walicki, Slavophile Controversy, 257.
95 “Po povodu VI toma Istorii Rossii g. Solov’eva,” Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, I, 150-51.
The most consistent and radical opponent of Hegelianism and Westernization was Aleksei Khomiakov, a prominent Russian Slavophile and Russia’s leading nineteenth-century lay theologian. He was one of the first of the Russian intellectuals to declare his deep respect for the cultures of China and India, and he was proud to trace Russia’s roots back to Asia.96 Khomiakov had tremendous admiration for Hegel as a philosopher, claiming that no other Western thinker would be able to follow in his footsteps. Nonetheless, Hegelianism, as the culmination of Western philosophy, was built upon a “spiritual chasm.”97 Like the other Slavophiles, Khomiakov criticized Hegel from an Orthodox Christian perspective, arguing that through his philosophy one could see “neither the personality of God, nor His transcendental quality.”98 Hegel’s history had ignored everything “real” and “living,” until it had become nothing more than a “dead, logical law.”99

Khomiakov was the only Russian Slavophile who attempted to formulate a detailed philosophy of world history. His “Notes on World History” inverted many of the Hegelian premises and conclusions and replaced them with a historical account that turned out far more favorably for the Eastern world in general and for Russia in particular.100 His narrative remained in the form of a series of sketches, which often contained inconsistencies and gaps. Nonetheless, his was quite clearly a non-teleological vision of history, where races and tribes retained their essential character throughout time and where certain geographical regions could be characterized by the culture of the tribe that predominated within them.

Khomiakov disagreed with Hegel’s argument that human history was the history of continual progress. Especially in the sphere of religion there was simply no proof that early belief was primitive. Indeed, in the early history of Asia, one found “a high and pure understanding of the deity,” especially in ancient India, China, Persia, and Israel. With the growth of Greek civilization one found actually a decline in religious culture, the “degradation, coarsening of concepts, and the barbarianization of life.”101 He similarly scorned the idea that India, with its rich literature, could be considered “less developed than the savages of the German forests.”102

Khomiakov divided the world into two cultural types, based on two types of religious expression. Certain cultures were, in his words, “polytheistic” and “idola-

96 See Peter K. Christoph, An Introduction to Nineteenth Century Russian Slavophilism: A Study in Ideas, I: A.S. Xomjakov (The Hague, 1961)
97 Chizhevskii, Gegel’, 186.
98 Ibid., 187.
100 Walicki, Slavophile Controversy, 208-30.
trous,” characterized by a love of the superficial and external aspects of religion and utterly lacking a sense of inner spirit. Such were the religious cultures of “necessity,” which required the individual to submit solely to outward rules and norms. He often called this type of culture “Kushite” because he believed that its purest form was found in the Hindu Kush. Other cultures were essentially “monotheistic,” encouraging people to look for a higher spirituality “free from earthly chance.” These were the religious cultures of “freedom,” prompting believers to free themselves from excessive dependence on the superficial and allowing them to explore their inner selves. The purest form of this culture had developed in Iran, and he therefore called this religious type “Iranian” (sometimes also defining it as “Aryan” or “Indo-European”). Both the Asian and European nations could be divided along Iranian and Kushite lines. He often classified Buddhist China, Southern India, Rome, Germany, and even pre-Byzantine Greece as Kushite cultures, whereas he considered ancient China, Israel, the Celtic tribes, and Russia to be Iranian cultures. Khomiakov believed the Iranian principle to be the superior in all respects, since it sought the true freedom and self-expression of individuals as well as social harmony. The Kushite principle often degenerated into fetishism, obsession with external rules and regulations, and rationalism, or, when taken to its extreme, a nihilistic striving for the obliteration of the individual.

Khomiakov went further than other Slavophiles in rejecting even Greece as a center of human enlightenment. In his view Greece and Rome produced philosophical thought of the most primitive kind—“scholarly theses, alien to life.” The most lasting achievements of Greek philosophy could only be explained by the influence of the Asian East, which taught philosophers such as Socrates to seek “higher spirituality.” “For a long time,” he wrote, “the light of Eastern teaching battled with the darkness of the Greek soul....” On the other hand, Rome Khomiakov considered comparable to Buddhist China, as both cultures were characterized by their primary worship of the state. China, he argued, had to be considered superior, since at least the Chinese saw the state as an expression of higher religious principles, whereas the Roman state was merely the corrupt rule of the higher classes and therefore had the “imprint of their coarse immorality.”

Christianity itself was basically an Iranian religion, but Khomiakov believed that there was a distinct split between Eastern and Western Christianity. Contradicting Hegel, Khomiakov wrote that by no means could Europe be understood as the truest embodiment of Christian teaching. “The founders of the Church

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103 “Zapiski o vsemirnoi istorii,” Sochineniia, V, 158, 223-24
104 Ibid., 235-36.
105 Ibid., 224.
106 Ibid., 330-31.
107 “Zapiski o vsemirnoi istorii,” Sochineniia, VI, 252, 256.
108 Ibid., 337.
would be shocked at their creation,” he declared, “if they were held responsible for all European history.” Unfortunately, the Roman Catholic Church was corrupted by the legacy of the Kushite culture of pagan Rome.\(^\text{109}\) Indeed the greatest error of the Roman Catholic Church was its transformation of Christianity from a “living community governed by the free consent of her members” into a “state.”\(^\text{110}\)

In essence Khomiakov was criticizing European culture on the same terms as his fellow Slavophiles, branding it as rationalistic, individualistic, and obsessed with externalities. He then took this criticism a step further: by ascribing these negative characteristics to the influence of Eastern “Kushitism,” he also sought to undermine the European pride in their “Western” heritage. In his historical scheme Europe turned out to be a product of the worst in the Chinese and Southern Indian civilizations. Indeed, in one place Khomiakov labeled Hegel’s own philosophy as an expression of Kushitism and Buddhism, since it sought “freedom in self-annihilation” within the totality of the state.\(^\text{111}\)

The Slavs and Byzantine Greeks, on the other hand, preserved “the unity of the Eastern spirit.” Byzantium and its Russian heirs had managed to preserve the Iranian respect for the true worth of the individual and “the wholeness of religion, free from purely logical syllogisms.” From thence came the Russian “high ideal of human perfection” and “triumphant song of human personality.”\(^\text{112}\)

In the nineteenth century world this meant that the Russians were practically the only people who still guarded the true principles of human civilization. For this reason Khomiakov argued that the “Russian question is undoubtedly the only universal question of our time.” The Slavic world, in his view, “preserves for humanity ... the possibility of renewal.”\(^\text{113}\)

Conclusion

By the late nineteenth century Russian interest in Hegelian philosophy had faded. Hegel’s historical world view, however, remained influential, and Russian intellectuals continued to view Russia as poised on the border between two worlds, fated to choose one and to leave the other entirely behind. In the end the proponents of an “Eastern” Russia were always in the vocal minority, though they included in their ranks such important figures as Fyodor Dostoevsky, Nikolai Danilevskii, and the later Eurasianists. Over time the intellectual impulses of the Westernizers fueled ideological movements such as socialism, positivism, and Marxism. Their debates over Russia’s true path and essential nature continued to be vehement and polemical.

\(^{109}\) Ibid., 413.

\(^{110}\) “Zapiski o vsemirnoi istorii,” Sochineniia, VII, 448.

\(^{111}\) “Zapiski o vsemirnoi istorii,” Sochineniia, VI, 175-76.

\(^{112}\) Ibid., 499.

\(^{113}\) “Vmesto vvedeniia,” in Sochineniia, III, 139.
Revealing the Hegelian origins of the East-West debate in Russia may help to dispel a common misunderstanding of Russia as eternally divided between East and West, forever seeking its essential character in the terms of that vexing dualism. Nicolas Berdiaev perpetuated this misunderstanding in his famous book, *The Origin of Russian Communism*. In it he argued that Russian Communism could not be understood by reading the works of Karl Marx. Instead, Berdiaev contended that the origins of Russian Communism were found in the East, developing out of Russia’s uniquely Eastern character. “The Russian people in their spiritual make-up are an Eastern people,” he wrote, “Russia is the Christian East....”\(^{114}\) In this way Berdiaev restated some tenets of the old Slavophile conception of Russia as an Eastern land, forever struggling with Western elements within.

Berdiaev’s insistence on Russia’s Eastern character led him to assert the existence of a uniquely Russian “messianic consciousness,” born out of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. This messianism led to the Russian “search for a kingdom founded on justice,” and it culminated in the Bolshevik embrace of Marxist doctrine.\(^{115}\) But it is possible to see another Russian messianism, one born from a intense engagement with the work of Hegel. Hegel had declared that the West would build the Kingdom of God, and he entranced the Russians with this powerful prophecy. Those Russians who believed him sought salvation in Western thought and culture. Those who opposed him continued to seek a unique Russian national path in the East.

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\(^{114}\) Berdiaev, *Origin of Russian Communism*, 7.

\(^{115}\) Ibid., 10, 12.