



Russian Thought and the Slavophil Controversy

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Russian Thought and the Slavophil Controversy

Review of Andrzej Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought (From the Enlightenment to Marxism)*, trans. Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka (Stanford, 1979: Stanford University Press), and *The Slavophile Controversy*, trans. Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka (Oxford, 1975: Oxford University Press), *Slavonic and East European Review* 59 no. 4 (October 1981), 572–86



Andrzej Walicki (1930–2020)

photo: Krzysztof Zuczkowski

IT IS DIFFICULT to overestimate the influence, direct and indirect, of Russian social and political ideas, especially those which rose during the hundred years that followed the Decembrist revolution, upon the way we live and think today. It would scarcely be denied that the impact of the Russian Revolution and its aftermath has been no less universally transforming than that of the French Revolution. It would take a very fanatical materialist – hard-boiled beyond the bounds of realism – to deny that ideas have played a

dominant role both in these developments as direct causes of both thought and action, and not merely as rationalisations or disguises for deeper, at times more occult, factors, social, psychological, environmental and the like. Yet, in comparison with the vast literature devoted to the ideas of the French Enlightenment and the reactions to it, how much serious critical study – in any language – has been devoted to the ideas of the forerunners of the Russian Revolution and their opponents? There are monographs on the thought of individual theorists, or ideological groups, or periods, both in Russian and in Western languages, some of them of first-rate quality. But how many serious comprehensive historical accounts do we possess of this social and intellectual development from, let us say, the late eighteenth century to 1917? There are valuable studies of portions of this period by Koyré, Scheibert, Raeff, Venturi, Malia, Schapiro, Karpovich, Riasanovsky, Lampert, Kindersley, Radkey, Hepner and, perhaps, half-a-dozen others; there is the celebrated, still useful, but by now somewhat antiquated book by Tomáš Masaryk; but so far as I know, no work of serious scholarship which spans the whole.

Professor Andrzej Walicki has now performed this task. His volume on the history of Russian ideas in the nineteenth century is clearly written, comprehensive, beautifully organised and a work of impeccable learning. Like his earlier books on the Slavophiles, and on the controversy about capitalism, it is authoritative and supersedes earlier work in this field. He is in complete control of his material, writes in a clear and firm style, with admirably balanced judgement, fair-mindedness (rare in so controversial a field) and a wholly convincing perception of the relationship of the trees to the wood. Moreover, even in translation, it is highly readable. It deserves to be, and will surely remain for many years, the standard work on the subject.

Professor Walicki's earlier work on the Slavophil controversy is an even more interesting and original study, and for that reason I propose [573] to devote more attention to it than to the later work. Since to a large degree the subject matter of these books is bound to overlap, and the treatment of it in both books is naturally not dissimilar, I shall do my best not to repeat myself when these books, as they inevitably must, echo each other, but shall confine myself to giving a general impression of the scope, method and quality of each.

One of the principal (and rare) merits of both works is that the author does not omit to mention and discuss the Western sources of Russian ideas. It has long seemed to me that there are virtually no Russian social or political doctrines, at any rate during the last two centuries, which did not originate in the West. I realise how perilous this sweeping generalisation is. It expresses a view not always well received by students of the subject either in the Soviet Union or outside it; nor does Professor Walicki advocate it. Indeed, he might well disagree with it and disavow it; yet his books, if only as a consequence of the author's scholarly integrity, seem to me to provide ample evidence of this thesis.

My thesis is simple enough: almost all social and political ideas held by Russian thinkers had their origins in the West; it may have been the relative scarcity of competing and conflicting doctrines in the heavily censored nineteenth-century world of Russian social thought (as contrasted with the sheer variety and proliferation of such doctrines in Paris alone) that caused them to be taken far more seriously than they were in the West. Such political and historical forbidden fruit was passionately devoured in Moscow and Petersburg and their intellectual dependencies in the provinces; these ideas entered into the very lifeblood of those who accepted them. Nothing, perhaps, alters ideas so much as total dedication to them, and the attempts (which spring from this state of mind and feeling) to achieve a unity of theory and practice. In due course these ideas, thus transformed, have returned to the West; simpler, more striking, more intense, they made a more powerful impact upon both thought and action in our own time than they ever did in the places and times of their birth.

For this (what I should like to call 'boomerang') theory of ideological relations between the West and Russia (it does not necessarily extend beyond the social-political sphere), Professor Walicki's books appear to me to provide exceedingly rich evidence. Can it really be seriously maintained that, for example, Slavophil ideas, however original, could have arisen without Herder and the German historicists, or the French Catholic counter-Revolutionary publicists, or Schelling, Hegel, Baader? Or 'Westernising' liberal thought without Adam Smith, J. B. Say, John Stuart Mill, Buckle, Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer or, for that matter, their *Encyclopédiste* predecessors? Or socialism (and anarchism) without Saint-Simon, Fourier, Feuerbach, Stirner, Leroux and, oddly

enough, Carlyle, not to speak of Proudhon, Marx or the neo-Jacobins? Yet so illuminating a book as Venturi's classical study of Russian populism (deeply native though this movement was) lacks this dimension: Russian populist ideas, discussed by him so fully and brilliantly, seem to arise almost out of nothing, as if Herder or Fichte or Novalis had not lived; and this is equally true of a good many Soviet [574] studies in this field. I do not wish to speculate about the reasons for this curious assumption of ideological parthenogenesis, only to maintain that Walicki's books put the conception of such insulated development in Russia out of court. Russian intellectual history, whatever its differences and idiosyncrasies, is part and parcel of a general European movement. To have established this at last on firm foundations is one of the author's major (and in the teeth of official chauvinism in this matter, truly courageous) achievements.

Another merit of these books is the conscious contribution they make to the understanding of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russian literature. Surely no serious student of Russian writing, at any rate of the major Russian writers from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, could plausibly maintain that they were not profoundly affected by the philosophical, indeed metaphysical, ideas that entered the political and social ideology of the time. One does not need to know much about philosophical doctrines to understand Zhukovsky or Pushkin, Baratynsky or Lermontov (whatever the role assigned to the influence of German Romanticism or Byron), or, for that matter, Gogol, or Aksakov *père*, or even Griboedov, and the Decembrist poets. But would anyone be rash enough to deny that Belinsky's influence on Turgenev, Herzen or Dostoevsky (on the last by way of sharp reaction) was of no importance? Or that Belinsky could have written as he did without the plays of Schiller or such knowledge as he picked up from others of Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Feuerbach, Louis Blanc, and, some say, the early Marx, or that Turgenev was not deeply influenced by Schopenhauer (a topic on which professor Walicki is exceptionally illuminating)?

Of course, there are writers in the West of whom this is equally true: Schiller was influenced by Kant, Coleridge by Schelling, Diderot by Locke and Spinoza, George Eliot by Feuerbach and Strauss, Thomas Mann by Nietzsche, Sartre and Iris Murdoch by Plato or Marx, Freud or Heidegger or Wittgenstein. But these are

relatively isolated instances. In Russia, the influence of philosophy and ideology on the main stream of literature was far more persuasive and continuous, if not on such writers as, let us say, Fet or Ostrovsky, yet on the three great novelists, on Tyutchev, Nekrasov, Apollon Grigor'ev, and after these on the Symbolist poets (with their irrationalist or anthroposophical sources), responsive as they were to the controversies, in the early years of our century, between Nietzscheans, Marxists, religious thinkers and their opponents.

Without some knowledge of these currents of thought, too much must remain uncomprehended. The study of literary sources, forms, methods, influences; linguistic, psychological or aesthetic analysis; insight into the uses of imaginative power – these are much but they are not everything. Literary history and criticism – in the large sense in which they were conceived by writers like the Schlegels, Coleridge, Sainte-Beuve, Arnold, Leavis, Edmund Wilson – take account of social circumstances, ideological and metaphysical doctrines; unless this is done, too much that is of central importance is necessarily left out – there will, to some extent, be a failure of interpretation. Teachers of Russian in Western lands tend [575] to be uneasily aware of this: some, untrained though they may be in abstract disciplines, set themselves to study the relevant ideologies; others evade this task, and tend to concentrate upon the purely literary aspects of their subjects, and what they teach, even when it is, within its limits, illuminating, is inevitably incomplete. To understand even Pasternak, something needs to be known about neo-Kantianism in Marburg: what Western novelist would remark of a doctor (in this case Zhivago) that he was accused of being a Schellingian, and expect his readers to know what is meant?

One of the causes for this intrusion of ideology may be that professional philosophy never developed fruitfully in Russia. There have been no philosophers of significance in that vast land: Leont'ev, Solov'ev, Berdyaev were no more philosophers in the ordinary Western academic sense of the word than thinkers like Teilhard de Chardin or Unamuno or Léon Bloy; potential philosophical thought tended to pour into literature, and thereby, perhaps, became all the more influential. There is little need to be acquainted with the ideological ferment of their time to understand Dickens or Thackeray or Maupassant, Daudet or Meredith. They are not preoccupied with ideas or the condition or future of their milieu,

class, country, culture. The Russians (and to a lesser degree Germans and Americans), by and large, are. Even ‘pure’ writers like Leskov or Pisemsky (or Tyutchev and Grigor’ev) cannot be fully understood without taking account of their reaction against the radical ideas of their time; this responsiveness to ideological currents is partly true even of Chekhov, let alone Tolstoy or Blok or Bely or Gorky, perhaps particularly true of societies with an oppressive ruling class on one side and a dissident intelligentsia on the other. At any rate, the doctrine that ‘The poet’s personality in itself is none of the reader’s concern’, that he has ‘a right only to the completed work, severed like a fruit from its tree’ (Saint-John Perse),¹ or, in T. S. Eliot’s view, that a work of art must shine by its own radiance² and that the author’s biography is not relevant to it – a doctrine held by formalists, new critics, structuralists, Proust, and many reviewers of literature today – seems wilful when applied to the main body of Russian writing. I should like to go further, and add that any doctrine which leads to neglect of the genesis, social as well as psychological and aesthetic, of works of art must tend to ignore their function as a form of communication between human beings in a concrete historical environment; and that this distorts vision. However this may be, Professor Walicki’s works are a powerful antidote against this approach – it is, indeed, one of their cardinal virtues.

A further advantage of his essentially historical approach is that it enables him to perceive clearly that ideas are seldom, if ever, refuted by argument, however cogent, but persist so long as the conditions that give them birth are operative, and fade when these conditions disappear. The death of the Slavophil ideology, for example, as Walicki convincingly shows, was not due to the superior arguments of liberals or socialists or positivists or imperialists and the like, but to a change in the economic conditions (as a result of the advance in social development) which had [576] originally made it relevant. The author applies this rule to the study of social and political thought in general. Indeed, there is an exposition of this in his long methodological account (in the book on the Slavophil

¹ Letter of 26 March 1948 to Adrienne Monnier, St.-John Perse, *Letters*, trans. and ed. Arthur J. Knodel (Princeton, 1979), 547.

² Eliot spoke of the self-sufficiency of ‘the radiance shed’ by ‘poems themselves’ in *The Frontiers of Criticism* (Minneapolis, 1956), 13; repr. in his *On Poetry and Poets* (London and Boston, 1957), 112.

controversy), in which he explains that his principal purpose is to show the Slavophil movement as concerned with a cluster of problems in the nineteenth-century Russian context in which alone it can be understood – that is, as a conflict between social formations, between the old Russia and the new, Russia and the West, the old Europe and the new – which made it a battleground of revolutionary ideas, for example of conservative romanticism versus capitalism, refracted in Russia as the battle between Slavophil nostalgia and Peter the Great and modernisation.

Professor Walicki begins his account with three types of conservative historians – Shcherbatov, an aristocratic paternalist, hostile to what he regards as Peter's democratic, opportunist tradition, a stern, puritanical conservative who denounces the pursuit of luxury, of sheer variety for variety's sake and the selfish individualism of his day, in the name of merrie Russia, the union of tsar and people, bitterly opposed to the soulless modern state. Shcherbatov's views are contrasted with Karamzin's theory of state supremacy and monarchist autocracy, and his rejection of metaphysics and, in particular, the doctrine of natural law, whether Catholic or liberal. He follows this with an admirable description of Pogodin, a conservative of a different stripe, the ur-Slavophil, the defender of the notion of Russian uniqueness, equally hostile to Shcherbatov's advocacy of class rule and to Karamzin's anti-populism. Pogodin is the author of the celebrated doctrine that Western states originate in military conquest, and, consequently, are doomed to class rule by the victors, whereas the Russian state resulted from a peaceful invitation to the Varangians by a people conceived as being passive, plastic human material, destined, to its own advantage, to be moulded by politically active agents, the Normans, or Peter the Great. Walicki emphasises more clearly than any other writer I have read the important differences between these types of conservative thought (sometimes falsely assimilated), and, in particular, between this brand of *étatisme* and Petr Kireevsky's 'organic' populism. We are given no biographical details about these three historians, nor about the milieux from which they sprang – this seems to me a genuine defect, even if a minor one, in the vivid sketch of these thinkers and their ideas.

The account which follows, of the philosophical romanticism of the Lyubomudry – V. F. Odoevsky and the other 'young archivists' – founded as it clearly is on Sakulin's well-known monograph, is a

good deal more realistic and sensitive to fine differences, as well as more objective, than the oversimplification in the accounts of the more, if differently, committed Koyré and Setchkarev. The contrast between the mysticism of Moscow and the rationalism and empiricism of Petersburg (one of George Kennan's favourite theses) is beautifully drawn, but perhaps some reference could have been made to the remarkable essay by Victor Zhirmunsky, full of rich detail not available elsewhere: V. M. Zhirmunsky, *Nemetskii romantizm i sovremennaya mistika* (St Petersburg, [577] 1914). Some allusion, too, might have been made to the parallel conflict in England between, for example, Burke, Coleridge and Carlyle on one side, and, on the other, the detested Benthamites, Philosophical Radicals and reformers – ‘sophisters, economists and calculators’³ – in France as well as England. There are some excellent pages on the kind and degree of Pogodin's influence on Konstantin Aksakov, Samarin and Shevryev, and a fine discrimination is made between the aristocratic Romanticism of the Schellingian Odoevsky and the Slavophil brothers Kireevsky – much the best account in English known to me of this phase of early Russian nationalism. Something might have been added about Odoevsky's curious essays in science fiction, and about some of his half-forgotten short stories, with their deep and generous ethnic feeling, and their charming sketches of pre-Petrine life in Moscow; none of this enters into Walicki's portrait, but one cannot ask for everything.

The truly outstanding chapters of this book are those which deal with the brothers Kireevsky and with Khomyakov. The account of the early influence of Chaadaev on Ivan Kireevsky, of the ‘conversion’ of the latter from classicism to the full Slavophil doctrine – the full flowering in his writings of the image of Russia as an ‘organic’ society, characterised by ‘inwardness’ and love, in contrast with the mechanical, atomised, coldly competitive, individualist West; the paeans to the *mir* and *obshchina*, which stem from Novalis rather than Herder; the sharp opposition of this to crude democratic populism (since *prostonarodnost'* is not identical with true *narodnost'*); the faith in the godly, traditional peasants

³ ‘But the age of chivalry is gone. – That of sophisters, oeconomists, and calculators, has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished for ever.’ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790): *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, ed. Paul Langford (Oxford, 1981–2015), viii, *The French Revolution*, ed. L. G. Mitchell, 127.

menaced by dehumanising capitalism; the celebration of human 'wholeness', 'integralism' (*tselostnost'*), which stems from Jacobi, Friedrich Schlegel and Baader; the brilliant analogy drawn between the reactions of the Slavophiles to such rulers as Peter the Great and Nicholas I, and the attitudes of such German 'pre-Romantics' as Herder and Hamann to Frederick the Great (perhaps in both cases not influenced by Rousseau); the parallels between distinctions drawn by Kireevsky, and the famous contrasts drawn by Ferdinand Tönnies between community and society (*Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*) and by Max Weber between patrimonialism and feudalism – all these analyses and comparisons and oppositions and contrasts are remarkable fruitful, and open new windows.

The fact that Professor Walicki is too apt at such moments to quote platitudes by Karl Mannheim (for whom he entertains a somewhat puzzling regard), and at times to refer to Mannheim when he should mean Marx, is surprising in so intelligent an author. He is amazingly sympathetic to some of Khomyakov's more eccentric views, and manages to avoid the extremes both of Berdyaev and of Gershenzon in discussing his conception of collective voluntarism. He writes acutely about Khomyakov's opposition to Hegel (not, as Berdyaev holds, to Maistre) but seems to me to attribute Khomyakov's irrationalism altogether too easily to resistance on the part of this generous but traditionalist landowner (and serf-owner) to the capitalist rationalisation of production: surely it has deeper – personal or theological – roots? He is more entertaining on Khomyakov's intricate etymological fantasies than anyone else since [578] Professor Riasanovsky.

It is a notable achievement on the part of both these learned men to have perused Khomyakov's unreadable world history, and in particular its notorious division of cultures into Cushite versus Iranian, with such devoted care. Far more important are the fine but firm distinctions traced by the author between Ivan Kireevsky's Slavophilism and that of his brother; between Konstantin Aksakov's vision of the Russian people as a spiritual brotherhood bound by love, and Khomyakov's far more realistic political analyses; the relationship of the Slavophil exaltation of the common folk and hostility to the very idea of progress, and Hegel's metaphysical idealisation of the state; and, in particular, the account of Samarin's agonised struggle between Hegel and Russian Orthodoxy and his 'rescue' by Khomyakov. All these essays in sympathetic insight

combined with exact scholarship constitute a decisive refutation of Dmitry Chizhevsky's opposite thesis, in his well-known treatise on Russian Hegelianism, which has held the ground for so long.

To continue with this theme: Professor Walicki's examination of Hegelian political theory, of its similarities to, and profound differences from, Russian conservatism's very different conception of the spiritual odyssey of mankind, is an absolutely first-rate piece of research and exposition, to be found, so far as I know, nowhere else. Admittedly he throws little new light on Hegel's concepts of 'reason' and 'necessity' – concepts which seem even more mysterious than the Slavophiles' 'internal' and 'organic' spiritual attributes, or the stream of the true tradition as it was revealed to Coleridge, or Irving Babbitt, or T. S. Eliot, or F. R. Leavis – but then, no one else has done any better in clarifying those portentous but not wholly intelligible pages by the master.

The chapters on the Slavophiles seem to me to be Professor Walicki's major achievement, far fuller and with more substance than the treatment of Chaadaev, of whom a paler and more routine account is provided. Chaadaev's views are accurately enough reported, but something is lacking. It seems to me that insufficient stress is placed on the cardinal fact that Chaadaev was the first to put the notorious accursed questions, to put them openly and very sharply; thereby he began the tradition of almost narcissistic self-questioning, of agonised speculation about the political and spiritual conditions of Russia, its future, the choices before it, and the relations of its destinies to the personal and spiritual problems and aims of individual Russians. This unceasing preoccupation with what Russians have been, are, ought to be, will be, this alternation of collective breast-beating with pride and self-assertiveness, of envy of and contempt for the West, and most often a combination of both – this type of national self-preoccupation has not been paralleled, at any rate with similar intensity, anywhere else in Europe. Perhaps there is something resembling it, in our own day, and for similar reasons, in colonial and ex-colonial countries. This obsessed self-questioning, which enters Russian imaginative literature from Turgenev onwards, never to leave it, seems to me to be insufficiently noted by the author. It is the Hamletism of the 'Westerners' – Turgenev, Belinsky – that he emphasises, the fact that political action [579] is aborted when, under despotism, social tensions become internalised, and take the form of ineffective theorising.

Tocqueville's celebrated account in connection with France in the eighteenth century, of political frustration issuing in words and only words, is a far more vivid and acute discussion of this topic than that of Professor Barbu, which Walicki prefers to quote. But he compensates for this by a splendid quotation of some very mordant words by the late Father Florovsky on the Slavophiles, as 'men repelled by reality' who escaped into historical fantasies – not, as was claimed, the voice of thinkers 'close to the people'.⁴

The pages devoted to Belinsky depart from Plekhanov's Marxist interpretation of the notorious 'reconciliation with reality'⁵ as a progressive position, only to replace it with the hypothesis that Belinsky, painfully conscious of being personally 'alienated', adopted this view out of a longing for 'reintegration with historical and social reality'.⁶ In the course of this, to me implausible, interpretation, Walicki plays down Belinsky's violent denunciation of Hegelian objectivism and historicism, and although he quotes the famous letter to Botkin,⁷ he seems to me to turn Belinsky into a species of left-wing Hegelian. This has some affinity with the efforts by Russian Marxists to canonise Belinsky as a forerunner of the true believers; yet Belinsky at his most radical – as when he says that he is beginning to love mankind *à la* Marat – does not seem to me to talk like a Hegelian of any kind.

Herzen, too, is treated in accordance with the plan of the book, as a theorist; his temperament, his personality, are largely left out, just as little is said about Belinsky's agonised swerves from one orthodoxy to another, of which he himself wrote so poignant an account. Professor Walicki's determination to confine himself to the exposition of doctrines, to avoid value judgements and the intrusion of subjective factors, has a stern dignity of its own, but this cannot clarify the role, for example, of universal reason and materialist individualism in the thought of either Belinsky or Herzen, because these conceptions were not too clear to themselves: Belinsky's social criticism as it is expressed in his literary reviews and letters, and

⁴ *The Slavophile Controversy* (hereinafter SC), 357, where the phrases in quotation marks do not appear.

⁵ SC 371 etc.; RT 192–3; SR2 361.

⁶ SC 374; again the exact words placed in quotation marks are not in Walicki's text.

⁷ 1 March 1841: V. G. Belinsky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow, 1953–9) xii 22–3. SC 375; RT2 194.

Herzen's letters and his political activities in London or Geneva, seem to me to constitute evidence of their *Weltanschauung* of at least equal weight with their theoretical essays. Professor Walicki makes no more use of Herzen's novels than he does of Belinsky's onslaughts on Hegel's 'world spirit', so monstrously indifferent to the claims of basic human morality: no one, surely, would have been more furious than Herzen or his friend Belinsky with Trotsky's notion of 'the dustbin of history'⁸ in which those who do not choose to move along the great autobahns of world progress necessarily find themselves. As always, the author supports his own interpretation of these thinkers with impressive evidence. Nevertheless, I cannot help believing that their more personal and less formal writings throw more light on the ideas and feelings of these unacademic thinkers than attempts to assess their views in the light of what Hegel or Feuerbach actually said. This said, the author is excellent on Belinsky's detestation of the idealisation of 'the folk',⁹ and he refutes once and for all the idea that *sotsial'nost'* in Belinsky is populism and not social commitment;¹⁰ [580] and he offers a most gallant defence of some of Belinsky's sillier judgements.

The Slavophile Controversy follows a chronological order. The accounts of Samarin's bureaucratism, of Koshelev's liberalism, of the precise evolution of the ideas of the second pan-Slav generation – Ivan Aksakov, Danilevsky, Leont'ev – are altogether admirable: full, exact and vivid, they convey the full flavour of Leont'ev's violent opposition to the rotting West by quoting the famous passage in which Leont'ev says that the sight of the bourgeois scurrying along the streets of Paris makes one ask whether it was for this that great Alexander in his plumed helmet rode down the hosts of Persia.¹¹

Professor Walicki is remarkably skilful in distinguishing – I do not know where this has been better done – between the successive opinions of Dostoevsky. He draws a parallel between Dostoevsky's and Marx's attacks on Western capitalism (one thinks, in this connection, of his contemporaries Wagner and Carlyle, with whose anti-modernism, anti-individualism, and especially anti-Semitism

⁸ See AC2 287/2.

⁹ SC 417.

¹⁰ SC 432.

¹¹ SC 518.

Dostoevsky had so much in common); and a still more fascinating one with Apollon Grigor'ev's outlook, which was much influenced by Schelling. To have included Grigor'ev at all in a survey of this sort is a service to the reader not often performed. The close similarity of Grigor'ev's views to those of Herder is seldom remarked upon, but it is brought out by the author; and so is Herder's influence on the Slavophiles in general.

The author returns to Herzen again and again: he is seen principally as a bridge between Slavophil, populist and Western ideas, but this political position is not, perhaps, sufficiently traced. For there is a line of descent from Herzen through Mikhailovsky and the Socialist Revolutionaries that is not a fashionable topic anywhere at present, but which nevertheless deserves notice. Thus, for Walicki, Herzen's famous reflections on the 1848 Revolution, *From the Other Shore*, are no more than a piece of anti-teleological pessimism; and so they must be for Hegelians, or Christians, or Marxists. But they are something far more positive for those who, like Herzen himself, or Mikhailovsky and his anti-determinist allies, are natural pluralists, not tempted by the visions of inescapable historical and metaphysical patterns. The notion that history does not pursue a fixed path does not induce pessimism in those who believe in the possibility of some degree of individual freedom in a world which allows creative improvisation. There are some excellent pages on the development of Herzen's ideas, the tension in him between liberal individualism and the socialist potentialities of the peasant commune, but the author curiously omits to mention Turgenev's memorable criticism of what he called Herzen's worship of the peasant's sheepskin. Mikhailovsky's attempts, unsuccessful but not absurd, to solve this dilemma are given short shrift.

The central thesis of the author is that both Westernism and Slavophilism are idealised utopian visions: Westernism undermined by the collapse of the 1848 revolutions, Slavophilism by the agrarian reforms of 1861 – that is, in both cases by contact with reality. Yet the question remains, did Westernism in Russia really collapse? Did all those liberal [581] professors and physicians and schoolmasters and agricultural experts lose their faith in science and progress and parliamentary democracy and civil liberties? After all, Herzen, for all the bitter disillusionment and irony and scepticism of his years in London or Geneva, did not abandon civilised Western values to the end of his days: neither the collapse of his periodical as a result of

the chauvinism created in Russia by the Polish revolt, and the drift to conservative or reactionary nationalism by his former friends, Kavelin, Botkin, Katkov (Chicherin was never a friend), nor the increased polarisation between reactionary and progressive liberalism, did anything to alter his fundamental views or his moral and political values. Nor did the blasting of liberal hopes later destroy the Western orientation of the wide spectrum of Russian parties, from the Kadets and their forerunners to the various socialist groups which became known collectively as the Liberation Movement (*Osvoboditel'noe dvizhenie*). This (whether or not I have described it correctly) is, perhaps, not sufficiently discussed. But this does not alter the fact that Professor Walicki's survey of the controversy between the Westerners and the Slavophiles is easily the best to be found anywhere today.

The Slavophile Controversy is, without doubt, a major work of scholarship and exposition which cannot but affect all future study of a crucial turning point in the history of Russian thought and the evolution of Russian society. It is a major contribution to learning, comparable in importance to the pioneering surveys of Russian nineteenth-century intellectual history which made an epoch in their day, by Thomas Masaryk, Ivanov-Razumnik and Florovsky; it, too, is of that noble company.

Professor Walicki's later book – *A History of Russian Thought* – is a systematic survey of an even wider field, from the end of the reign of Catherine the Great to the early works of Lenin. There is no need to comment on each individual section, since the approach, where there is an overlap with the earlier book, is basically identical. The author holds firm ideas about the views of his authors, their rise and fall, and their relationships to one another. The architecture of the work, despite its wider span, is similar to that of the earlier book. Despite its more modest aim (it was originally conceived as a handbook), it is the latest and best account in one volume of the history of Russian thought in the nineteenth century in any language. It is a good deal more of a textbook, and inevitably more condensed than its predecessor, but no less accurate, scholarly, lucid and firm in its carefully balanced judgements, with rather more on the social and political background than on the influence and roots of the ideas of which it treats. Like its grander predecessor, it has the rare virtue of genuine objectivity: it is neither subservient to, nor biased against, Soviet interpretations; whenever a Marxist method of approach is

adopted, it remains critical, intelligent and detached, and takes full and just account of Western views and scholarship. The author's laudable distaste for amateur psychologising saves him from relating the personality of his thinkers too directly to their doctrines. This sometimes results in a certain degree of dehumanisation, for one [582] pays a price if one divorces their ideas from the personalities of such men as Chaadaev, Bakunin, Herzen and even Tkachev and Plekhanov, but it is the vice of a virtue: it derives very obviously from the author's anxiety not to say more than the evidence will fully support, and not to be led into subjective byways for which the verifiable facts give no warrant; it is an honourable form of self-imposed austerity, but sometimes (in contrast with the earlier work) it drains the text of life and colour.

Professor Walicki, in this volume, deals not only with Shcherbatov (he emerges once again, more briefly but still sharply, characterised as a kind of disciplined, anti-despotic, authoritarian Sarastro), but also with Novikov, Desnitsky, Schwarz, the Panins and Fonvizin, and is particularly interesting on the critical voices stifled under Catherine, whose words were later published by Herzen in the West. The chapter on Radishchev is sensible and fair, and, unlike Venturi, the author also deals with the Western sources and roots of his ideas. This is equally true of the chapters on Karamzin and the Decembrists (there is, oddly, nothing on Shishkov). What is often referred to as the 'totalitarian' aspect of Pestel' is neither affirmed nor denied; Pokrovsky's theories on the causes of the Decembrist rising are discussed only to be (rightly) dismissed; Lunin and Bestuzhev (a quotation from whose subversive poems sometimes appears as an epigraph to Pushkin's *The Queen of Spades*) are passed over in favour of Labzin, whose theosophy is treated at some length. There is an ironical, entertaining and illuminating memoir by the elder Aksakov about a retired army officer, an addict of pseudo-mystical, semi-Martinist doctrines, typical of the Russian Bible societies in the early years of the nineteenth century. This light-hearted sketch throws more light on the kind of beliefs such illuminists held, and the kind of persons whom such mysteries attracted, than formal expositions of Labzin's or Galitzin's or Mme von Krüdener's visionary doctrines. Evidence of this kind, however revealing, is, perhaps, entitled to no more than a footnote in histories of the ideas of individual thinkers; but it does deserve that, and obtains it too seldom.. As might be expected, a

careful and accurate account of Chaadaev's opinions is provided, but, as in the earlier book, the 'shot in the night', the devastating effect of the celebrated 'philosophical letter' by this boldly original *frondeur*, is not strongly stressed. *The Apology of a Madman* is taken at face value, rather than as an attempt to placate the authorities. The light thrown on Chaadaev's beliefs by his ambivalent letters in 1848 to Tsar Nicholas and Herzen, and the apparent double-facedness in his reply to his nephew when reproached for this – 'Mon cher, il faut tenir à sa peau'¹² – is not considered.

The book springs to life with the Slavophiles. Once again, there is an original and interesting account of the views themselves, and a most useful analysis of their Western sources. The opinions of Belinsky or Bakunin are excellently conveyed, less so the tone and the central importance of the former as the father of the idea of total commitment, which later affected ideas in the West deeply if indirectly. Nor is Belinsky's enthusiasm towards the end of his life (perhaps under Botkin's influence) about industrial progress in general, and railway construction in particular, [583] commented on. So, too, the question of whether 'the men of the sixties' were truer heirs of Belinsky than Turgenev and Herzen is left undiscussed – on this Walicki's view would have been very valuable. Belinsky was claimed by everyone, of course: determinists and libertarians. Chernyshevsky and Herzen, Vengerov and Plekhanov, Mikhailovsky and Lenin – all wished to appropriate him, but of this there is little here. Yet the protean personality eludes conventional categorisation. To his adversaries, both ancient and modern, he is the absurd, intellectually unstable, erratic, vulgarly ideological journalist; to his admirers he remains the humane, incorruptibly honest critic, infinitely sensitive to the moral and social direction of literature and art, who pursued the truth unswervingly wherever the search might lead him, and put the voice of inner conviction above consistency or party loyalty. The very ambivalence – the still unsettled status of Belinsky, the conflicting judgements about him and his significance – is itself a central issue in Russian intellectual history.

To compensate for this, we are given a first-rate, fresh and convincing account of the origins of Russian socialism, especially in the writings of Herzen: particularly of the combination in him of

¹² 'My dear, you have to hold on to your skin.'

Slavophil worship of spontaneity and peasant communalism with the Western style of individualism imposed by Peter the Great and embodied in the *révolté* bourgeois intelligentsia – a peculiar but fascinating amalgam of East and West. There is also careful and much needed attention to Herzen's early philosophical works, but not (for me, at least) enough about the Herzen who survives; Herzen's early metaphysical views were, after all, mostly derivative and without much influence, whereas his political journalism possessed a degree of genius which inspired two generations of Russian radicals. We are given a deeply perceptive and, indeed, original account of the unresolved antinomies in Herzen, between his acceptance of historical necessity and his belief in freedom, between his view of the Russian peasants as longing for nothing so much as to be capitalists themselves and the idealised proto-socialists of his agrarian dreams. Herzen's antipathy to Marxism and Marx (generously reciprocated by the latter), and its roots, which give occasional trouble to orthodox Soviet writers, get little attention here.

The *History* naturally goes beyond the territory so thoroughly explored by *The Slavophile Controversy* and, after a brief but excellent account of the Petrashevtsy, which demonstrates convincingly that they were the first real revolutionary socialists in Russia (as against some pre-1917 studies, which sought to minimise their significance), gives a useful exposition of Chernyshevsky (of which the most original part is an analysis of his rejection, not often mentioned, of historical necessity), but does not appear to me to assign sufficient importance to Dobrolyubov, accurate as the summary is, so far as it goes. Yet did not Hugh Seton-Watson observe – rightly, I believe – that 'Dobrolyubov's long articles on Turgenev's *On the Eve* and Goncharov's *Oblomov* are important documents in the history of Russian political thought, rather than literary essays?'¹³ – a statement true of much of the literary criticism of the 1860s, whatever its ostensible subject.

There follows, with a clear rise in feeling, a most sympathetic and [584] interesting account of Pisarev (uncommon in our day, in or out of the Soviet Union). There are a few patronising words about the unfortunate Strakhov, who, despite a recent American mono-

¹³ Hugh Seton-Watson, *The Decline of Imperial Russia, 1855–1914* (London, 1952), 364.

graph, is nowadays read only because he was friend of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. The populists are seen largely through Lenin's eyes. Ishutin, 'Hell', the neo-Jacobins remain out of account. The text revives again with the controversy between Lavrov and Tkachov: self-development versus egalitarianism – the argument that limited resources must be adjusted to the needs of the masses, not of an educated elite, however enlightened or even revolutionary. We find ourselves transported to burning issues of the present: the deep cleavage between the 'subjective' voluntarists and the 'objective' sociological determinists, between those who wish to march in step with history, versus Fascists, anarchists, terrorists and believers in violent methods, both of the right and left, who think they can either alter or accelerate its course, brings us to our own century; indeed, to the most troubling questions of today.

After this, with a sudden start, we are taken back to the shallows of a hundred years ago, with a painstaking account of the Russian followers of Comte, the positivists Vyrubov, Lesevich, Vvedensky, Troitsky, Grot, de Roberty. Why are they here? They should surely have been left where they always were, out of sight, justly forgotten, third- and fourth-rate thinkers, to be relegated to the unread pages of the larger encyclopedias. (To this, I suspect, Professor Walicki will say that his declared and entirely proper purpose is to be comprehensive, that these men and their ideas counted for something in their own time, and will rightly dismiss such trivial complaints.) But amid this knock-kneed regiment we find Maxim Kovalevsky, who was not third-rate at all; and even Kareev surely deserves better, or at least ampler, treatment. The chapter on Tolstoy is a very different matter: in a sober but penetrating fashion, Walicki suns up the essence of Tolstoy's basic distinction between reality and appearance in human life, and particularly the powerful, not always sufficiently recognised, influence on his thought of Schopenhauer whom he greatly admired in his middle years.

We are inexorably approaching Vladimir Solov'ev. Both in his Slavophil volume and here, Professor Walicki takes great pains to expound Solov'ev's views. He may well be entirely right to treat him at such length. I confess that these are subjective judgements on my part: for I have no understanding of mystical theology; even the Polish Young-Hegelian Cieszkowski, about whose views and undoubted influence so much has been written lately, is opaque to me. Once again, a laudable desire for completeness overtakes the

author – Kozlov, Bobrov, Askol'dov, Lopatin make their (to me distinctly superfluous) appearance. We return to reality only with the more considerable personality of Boris Chicherin, historian and jurist in the conservative–liberal Hegelian tradition, in whom Herzen swiftly discerned an enemy to all that he stood for.

From these somewhat gloomy inland waters we set out at last for the open sea with Plekhanov, of whose political and historical views the author gives a truly superb analysis, the best that I have ever come [585] across. He describes Plekhanov's difficult path between the Scylla of trade union gradualism and the Charybdis of Blanquist putschism, both of which he abhorred and managed all his life to avoid. Walicki quotes Gramsci on the 'tragedy' of Plekhanov:¹⁴ what tragedy? The defeat of his views? The frustration of his efforts and hopes? But Gramsci's were frustrated too: few political theorists, in the course of human history, can claim to have escaped this fate entirely. Yet we do not speak of the tragedy of Plato or Hobbes or Rousseau; I am too cautious to add the name of Marx. Perhaps a little more attention could have been given to Plekhanov's aesthetic views: he is one of the few Marxist critics of his time who can still be read with genuine profit and pleasure. To take a single example, his attack on psychologism and impressionism in art and literature is both formidable and brilliant. Professor Walicki thinks it a grave inconsistency on Plekhanov's part to maintain both that what is must be, and that one can nevertheless detect in it what is progressive. Is this inconsistent? But perhaps I have not understood the argument.

After this peak there is a new (but in a work of this kind unavoidable) flat level: we meet the learned, sane, decent but historically no longer significant group known as 'Legal Marxists' – V.V. [V. P. Vorontsov], Danielson, Struve. Lenin completes the procession: he is represented as a semi-voluntarist, and his important differences with Plekhanov and Struve – in particular, his historic denial that the peasants are a mere reactionary mass – are well and vividly described; and that without the benefit of Marx's famous letters to the narodniks and to Vera Zasulich (then still hidden by the leaders of the orthodox Russian Marxism) to which he would surely have appealed. Professor Walicki offers a far more plausible defence of Lenin's views than that made for many years by

¹⁴ *History of Russian Thought*, 421–2.

the adherents of the oscillating party line, but at the price of representing him as a more heterodox Marxist than is the custom both among followers and opponents. The author is obliged by his self-imposed limits to deal with Lenin's views only before 1900, but during those few years he is treated as being virtually incapable of error; yet this impression may be due to the unavoidable brevity of the sketch of the young Lenin, which perforce ignores his major works, which the author – to judge by his general approach – would surely have treated somewhat more critically.

The only figures about whom not a word is said are the unfortunate liberals, victims of history and historians alike, the descendants of Granovsky and Turgenev, of Annenkov and Milyutin, equally ignored by radicals and their opponents, whom the late Professor Karpovich vainly attempted to rescue from an untimely grave; there is scarcely a trace of them in this, or any other, account of Russian social thought, save only, so far as I can tell, in that of Leonard Schapiro, to whom all honour is due for his gallant and historically justified effort to provide them with at least standing room in the corridor of the meandering train of Russian history.

Both volumes are clear, scrupulously fair, authoritative, and written with an astonishing detachment and freedom from bias. The light is dry, and all that is said is founded on solid evidence and springs from a deep, indeed unique, sympathetic insight into the most diverse ideas and [586] outlooks. This is true of Professor Walicki's entire *oeuvre*. Given the sensitive character of the subject, and the conditions under which the author writes, this constitutes a moral and intellectual achievement of the first order. These books are, quite simply, the best and most complete works in this field published in this century.¹⁵

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¹⁵ Both volumes teem with misprints and smaller errors: the (Oxford) *Slavophile Controversy* contains at least 57 misprints (I do not count mistranslations and other solecisms) in 609 pages, the (Stanford) *History* contains 46 in 456 pages. Consequently, the OUP may be said to win on points. In present circumstances both these scores are, I suppose, quite respectable.