

# The Isaiah Berlin Virtual Library

## **The Russian Preoccupation with Historicism (Sussex 1967)**

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# The Russian Preoccupation with Historicism

Isaiah Berlin spoke on this subject on numerous occasions, four of which have yielded a text. On 17 December 1962 the Russian Research Center at Harvard hosted a talk and discussion on ‘The Addiction of Russian Intellectuals to Historicism’, transcribed [here](#). The text below is an edited transcript of a lecture given and recorded at the University of Sussex in 1967. The recording, the original of which is held by the University of Sussex Library, and which includes preliminary administrative remarks not transcribed below, may be heard [here](#). Next, Berlin delivered the second Dal Grauer Memorial Lecture, ‘The Russians’ Obsession with History and Historicism’, at Totem Park, University of British Columbia, on 2 March 1971, and again a [recording](#) is available. Finally, there was a BBC talk recorded on 14 December 1973, ‘The Russian Preoccupation with History’, transmitted on Radio 3 on 24 July 1973 (and repeated on 17 March 1975), and on 29 October 1975 by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation as ‘The Russian Obsession with History’: a transcript is [here](#), and a recording may be heard [here](#). None of these versions was published by Berlin, though a very short extract from the BBC talk appeared under the subheading ‘History’ in ‘Out of the Year’, *Listener*, 19 and 26 December 1974, 830.<sup>1</sup>

THE SUBJECT on which I wish to speak, ‘The Russian Pre-occupation with Historicism’, was deliberately chosen: the Russian preoccupation not with history, but with historicism – that is to say, with theories of history, with the philosophy of history, with the laws of history, with the patterns of history. It seems to me that this is one of the motifs which runs through

<sup>1</sup> ‘Sir Isaiah Berlin spoke of the concern for “History” manifested by nineteenth-century and twentieth-century Russians – and, comparably, by developing nations in Asia and Africa: “There obviously is some deep connection between being technologically inferior and looking to history to see what one can do. In some way, history offers a prop. It offers some kind of encouragement to proceed in a certain direction, which successful societies don’t feel because they can simply ask themselves what is the rational thing to do, without particularly bothering about alleged patterns to which they look as some kind of salvation.”’

## THE RUSSIAN PREOCCUPATION WITH HISTORICISM

Russian history, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (about which I intend to talk), and is therefore relevant to the atmosphere in which the ideas out of which the Revolution sprang were bred. To this extent it is not altogether irrelevant to the general subject of these lectures. But I have to admit to you that, even if it were irrelevant, I should still be talking about this subject.

I should like to begin with a paradox which I have stated before, and if anyone thinks that it is false or exaggerated I should be grateful if somebody will take this up with me during the question period. The proposition is this: it appears to me that in the region of social and political ideas, and in general outside the range of natural sciences or exact ideas, the Russian people have generated no original ideas at all of any kind. This is a startling statement, but I know of no exception to it. You might say, perhaps, that the idea of the *mir* or the village commune has a certain originality, but the Poles claim even that. Some might think that non-resistance to evil as preached by Tolstoy had a certain originality, but this after all was a Christian idea to which Tolstoy gave new force and life, and which he would not have claimed to have originated.

What is typical of the Russians is that, at any rate in the period of which I speak, which is the early nineteenth century, when ideas do come to them from other sources, let us say from the West, they genuinely look upon them with fresh eyes, undisturbed by any intermediate media. They see these things face to face and not through spectacles of tradition or convention. They see them very freshly, and if they think them true, they believe in them, and since they believe in them, they act them out, they take them seriously, which is a very rare phenomenon. An idea which is taken seriously is transformed, and in their history the Russians transform ideas which come from the West – I don't say out of recognition, but they give them flesh and a concreteness which makes them dynamic and

new, and in this form they ricochet again to the West in a renewed and altered form.

This is the cultural function of the Russians in the nineteenth century and the early twentieth. If you ask yourself why this is, well, there are many explanations. And I can advance some of the more familiar of these; and if they are truisms, I apologise.

You must remember that there is no scholastic tradition – or very little – in Russian culture, by contrast with the West. The Byzantine Church, which drew the great curtain of the religious schism that divided Russia and the Balkans from Western Europe, did not contain a scholastic or intellectual tradition at all like that of the West. Consequently there is in the Russian Church no tradition of logic, no tradition of learning, no tradition of elaborate scholarship, no tradition of intellectual exertion. There is holiness; there is sanctity; there is dedication; there is mysticism; there is a great deal of holy living, but very little intellectual effort, with the result that there is no Reformation, no Renaissance to speak of. And because these things didn't occur, there is an absence of the kind of glaxis or incline that you will find in Europe, particularly after the Reformation, when you see a sort of graduated scale: at the top the most educated, the sharp intellects, the most distinguished intellectual forces, and then by gradual descent you come down to the ignorant and the uninterested; but intermediately there are all kinds of persons in various stages of literacy.

This was not the case with the Russians. At all periods there never was more than a small elite at the top and a vast mass of ignorance, poverty and lack of interest below. And in this respect Russia does differ from the West for various social and historical causes which I am not competent to go into. That is one thing. There is no intellectual tradition and therefore there is no general climate of ideas.

Secondly – these facts are very familiar and I apologise for even mentioning them – the great breach which Peter the Great made took the form, as you know, of sending young men into Europe. This was the biggest and most successful attempt at

violent modernisation made in modern history before Lenin, or perhaps before the Japanese. The young men went to France, to England, to Denmark, to Holland, to Germany and to other countries of the West in order to acquire Western arts and sciences and come back and apply them in their vast and barbarous land. The very fact that they learnt the languages of these countries, and by a rapid process of forcing injected into themselves the various arts and crafts of the West with which they were not familiar in Russia, divided them from the great mass of Russian people, and they became an educated elite cut off by the knowledge of foreign languages, by the new habits which they had acquired, by their very education from the vast weltering mass of peasants over which they were set and which they were told to organise and to govern.

And so, already in the eighteenth century, there is this curious phenomenon of alienation or cut-off-ness whereby a small group of persons inspired by Western ideals is cut off from the peasants almost to the degree to which their British governors were cut off from the Indian masses in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They hardly even spoke the common language of the governed. This vast gap between the small governing group and the huge mass of persons governed by them creates a very peculiar situation. Russia is a barbarous land with no real tradition: first, as Chaadaev was afterwards to say, wandering Slavic tribes; then acceptance of the heritage of an already ossified, decaying Byzantium; then the fearful disaster of the Tatar invasion, which shuts the Russians off for two centuries at least; then the gradual climb back into a normal political existence with none of the advantages of the slow and comparatively healthy organic development of Western countries. And in addition the schism cuts them off culturally too.

The group of persons trying to govern this vast nation tries to push them through various stages in a very rapid and sometimes very brutal fashion, which Peter initiates. This process bogs down to some extent in the middle of the eighteenth century and loses its tempo. Educated persons who read French, German and

other European languages, who imbibe the progressive ideas of the West, and who read Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, meditate applying all this to Russian conditions, but realise that these conditions are recalcitrant, that it is impossible to put these ideas into practice in a country which is so unmanageable – a vast mass of peasants for whom the ideas were not created and to whom they cannot be simply applied.

There is a double result: in the first place a disillusioned cynicism on the part of people who know where the truth resides, are enlightened in their ideas, know that the typical principles according to which their country is governed are reactionary and probably inefficient, accept the heritage of the West but are disenchanted, unable to apply it to their own country, and fall into a curious kind of cynical detachment. There is this peculiar phenomenon in the eighteenth century of the educated Russian nobleman who on the one hand reads Voltaire and Montesquieu and Helvétius and Holbach and believes them, but on the other hand whips his serfs and lives a thoroughly brutal feudal life. These two things conflict. Alternatively there are the few idealists who try to alter matters and are punished for it. Where the parents are cynical and disillusioned, the sons are filled with guilt. This an invariable phenomenon. Where the parents are insincere or broken, the sons do not grow up in a straightforward fashion. This is on the whole true of the younger generation of the more enlightened and morally more sensitive persons who are born in the 1770s and grow to manhood in the 1790s and a little after.

You then have the great phenomenon of the Napoleonic wars, which suddenly thrust Russia into Europe. This vast giant suddenly appears, at once despised and feared by Europe, regarded as barbarous and dangerous, but at the same time bowed to, at the same time vast and powerful, with the biggest army at that time in the world – a curious combination of a feared, despised nation filled with a huge inferiority complex towards the West, and at the same time with a kind of wounded pride in the face of Western slurs and snubs, and the obvious

contempt and distrust which the West feels for it. This is a very complex condition to be in.

The Russian officers make their famous promenade to Paris in 1814/15. They come back imbued with comparatively civilised and liberal ideas. The very conditions of army life bring them into closer contact with their peasant brothers, to whom perhaps most of them had not given any thought before. This creates at once a sense of solidarity with the Russian people, as a part of the general patriotic afflatus of a defensive war and the actual physical proximity with these peasants, from whom they were earlier kept apart by social conditions, and also a fearful guilt about the vast gap which obviously exists – socially, personally, morally – between them and the unfortunate, ignorant, suffering, squalid masses over whom they are set. These are the seeds of that famous guilt of the repentant nobleman about whom Russian novelists write in the nineteenth century.

This is a brief introduction to the general moral and intellectual condition of the educated Russian classes at the outset of the nineteenth century. In civilised countries, in France – in Paris – there are a great many theories competing with one another at the same time. There are socialist ideas, conservative ideas, liberal ideas, clerical ideas, anticlerical ideas, various explanations of the failure of the French Revolution, various ideas in favour of and against the French Revolution – all kinds of theories, doctrines and doctrinaires meet in the salons of Paris and to a lesser extent of Germany. These ideas knock up against each other and therefore create what is called a climate of opinion. None of these ideas becomes dominant. Everyone who hears or reads about any of these ideas is at the same time assailed by other ideas which to some extent offset and neutralise them. Russia is a huge vacuum, a great fresh nation, unexhausted, powerful, conscious of its inferiority, eager to learn, with virtually no culture of its own to fall back upon, with a wounded pride, attempting to show that perhaps its history is not quite as gloomy as some people might suppose it to be, or not so empty. At the same time there was natural respect for these Western values, and

a reaction against the Western contempt for Russians – Western grandeur and disdain. Russia had very few ideas to compare with other ideas, so that if any idea wafts across, if somebody brings a book through the censorship, if somebody expounds something which he has heard in some salon or cafe in Paris, this encounters no resistance. So these ideas grow and grow to a far greater height, they become much more dominant and obsessive, than in their countries of birth.

This is what makes the Russians peculiarly susceptible to the influence of ideas, sometimes very fourth- and fifth-rate ideas, which, in the total absence of other ideas in this kind of vacuum, grow and become an enormous factor in their intellectual development. People read Saint-Simon, Fourier, Proudhon, other French writers – mainly French socialist writers, who are the most exciting writers at the time, but also German idealists and the like – and then proceed to try to live them. Nobody ever tried to live the ideas of Fourier in France, but in Russia they did, with the result that some of them were condemned to death.

This is unusual. Fourier would have been astonished to hear that people in Russia were prepared to face death rather than give up Fourierist ideas. No doubt he would have been delighted, but also surprised; he certainly did not expect it, and although he was a monomaniac and believed in his ideas, perhaps, with a greater fury and a greater intensity than almost any other thinker who ever lived, this was more than anybody in France could have hoped for. The same is true of Saint-Simon and the other French thinkers. Dostoevsky was condemned to death for this (though he didn't suffer this penalty). The other members of the Petrashevsky circle were exiled for reading and preaching Saint-Simon, and not merely Saint-Simon, but all kinds of minor fourth-rate thinkers. Who ever read Pierre Leroux or D ezamy or Cabet with the attention that the Russians gave them? Any little book which appeared to them to contain the truth was fallen upon with absolute passion.

Herzen has some very interesting ironical pages – partly ironical, partly affectionate – describing this phenomenon. These



books used to arrive secretly in the double bottoms of smuggled trunks, and they used to be almost torn from hand to hand. The pages used to drop out of all kinds of nineteenth-rate German metaphysicians, all kinds of thirteenth-rate French socialists, who were believed in, suffered for, adored, and who altered people's lives. This is a somewhat exaggerated version of a phenomenon which nevertheless undoubtedly occurred at that time.

There is one more thing I must mention here, and that is the impact of the Romantic movement upon the Russians in this period. I must apologise to you: I can't compress the contents of the Romantic movement into two or three minutes, as I now propose to do. The only point I wish to extract from this vast welter of ideas is this. Towards the end of the eighteenth century there arose in Germany a general movement of ideas according to which the members of each nation, of each group or association of human beings, were bound to each other not merely by ties of utility or self-interest, but by some so-called 'organic' connection in virtue of which they belonged to each other, and were called one nation or one culture or one Church. Some stress links of language, some of soil, some of a common heritage or common tradition, but the general idea, so familiar to us now, of belonging to a group was largely invented by German thinkers, particularly Johann Gottfried Herder, towards the end of the eighteenth century.

Whenever a nation or a group of human beings finds itself in some inferior condition in relation to some other group of human beings – perhaps 'whenever' is too strong a generalisation, but at any rate frequently when this occurs – there is a tendency on the part of the group which feels inferior, less happy, which hasn't got the resources or the success or the reputation or the hopes and prospects of the superior group, to ask itself what its prospects are: whether perhaps it hasn't got something to offer with which it can oppose the claims of the dominant group. The French are obviously the great dominant culture of the European continent of the eighteenth century, and the humiliated Germans therefore have to invent something of their own in order to

preserve any degree of pride or dignity at all. So the notion arises that the French are superficial: they may have all the success in the world, they may dominate politically, financially, culturally, they may be the lawgivers of literature and of the arts, but they are simply a cold, superficial, atomised society, the last relics of a collapsing Roman culture on the way out. We Germans may not have all these advantages: we may not be rich, our poetry may be inferior, our literature may not be as famous or as important, it may be obvious that our financial and political arrangements are far inferior to the great centralised state of the French, but we possess certain merits which these people do not. We possess inner life, depth, seriousness, a religious outlook; we understand what life is about; we live closer to God; we are altogether more human than these dried-out mummies in the French salons, these abbés with their epigrams, these dancing-masters with their polished but hollow phrases.

This is Gallophobia, which you will find in a great many German authors in the 1770s. The same phenomenon occurs among the Russians too. The Germans pride themselves on the fact that, whatever may have happened, they at least did not have a destructive French Revolution, because they possessed more profound natures and understood what human nature and human life were, better than these hollow Jacobins who believed that political reform and a few ringing phrases borrowed from the works of Rousseau and other revolutionary authors were sufficient to transform mankind. The Russians argued that, if the Germans could say that they were superior in avoiding the Revolution, the Russians had an even greater claim to such superiority. There was no doubt that, whatever tremors might have shaken the German framework during the period of the French Revolution, nothing occurred in Russia at all. It slept a profound sleep, and therefore, if that was a guarantee of a deeper nature or of a more solid altitude to life, the Russians could take pride in that. This is a very sublime form of sour grapes, whereby you say: What they have we don't want; we possess something of our own which is far superior to all these vaunted advantages of

the others. This is a very natural reaction on the part of persons at some disadvantage. All emergent nations tend to believe this sooner or later. This is a phenomenon with which we are very familiar in the twentieth century. Perhaps people were not quite so familiar with it around 1780 or 1820. That is why the first emergent nations began to be observed as such when they began to see themselves as being in this frame of mind. And the Russians were tremendous candidates for this position.

The problem that arises for people of that sort is: What can we do? In a world dominated by others, is there room for us? Is there something we stand for? We know what *they* stand for, because they have made it very plain, and other people accept their hegemony in that respect. What do *we* stand for? The first Russian author to raise these points in a sharp, acute and disagreeable form is the famous Chaadaev, with whom I expect you will all be familiar, who was an army officer, contemporary and semi-involved with the Decembrist conspiracy. He was a contemporary and friend of Pushkin. He was a very elegant, extremely handsome man of very good breeding and education with inclinations towards religious mysticism, about whom Pozzo di Borgo, the famous French diplomat of that period, said he was ‘un russe parfaitement comme il faut’.<sup>2</sup> Chaadaev could enter any drawing room in Europe and be taken for one of our own. There

<sup>2</sup> Mikhail Ivanovich Zhikharev, ‘**Dokladnaya zapiska potomstvu o Petre Yakovleviche Chaadaeve**’ (written in 1864–5), in *Russkoe obshchestvo 30-let godov XIX v.: lyudi i idei* (Moscow, 1989), 48–119, at 57. This memoir was first published as M. Zhikharev, ‘Petr Yakovlevich Chaadaev: iz vospominanii sovremennika’ in *Vestnik evropy* **71 no. 7 (July 1871)**, 172–208, and **no. 9 (September 1871)**, 9–54, but without the passage about Pozzo di Borgo (see no. 7, 183), which was paraphrased from the manuscript by Mikhail Osipovich Gershenzon in his *P. Ya. Chaadaev: zhizn' i myshlenie* (St Petersburg, 1908), 117 (where this quotation is included), and published in full by Vasily Evgrafovich Chesikhin-Vetrinsky (as ‘Ch. Vetrinsky’) in ‘Melochi o P. Ya. Chaadaev’ (where S. P. Zhikharev is wrongly credited as the author), *Vestnik evropy* **51 no. 2 (February 1916)**, 396–401, at 398.

was nothing barbarous, nothing Muscovite, nothing exotic about him – he was a perfect gentleman in every possible sense.

In 1829 Chaadaev wrote the famous, shocking first *Philosophical Letter* (published in 1836), in which he tried to examine the problem of what the purpose of Russia was – Why do we exist? – and he said: We pretend that we are a great kingdom, a tremendous empire, with all kinds of magnificent and enviable attributes. But our history is nothing but these wandering Slavic tribes: Byzantium, Tatars, Poles, foreigners, crushing tyranny, nothing but ignorance, misery and the knout. That is our history. We haven't even a language in which to express ourselves properly. Everything that we have is borrowed. Why do we exist? What is our purpose? If what the Romantics say is true (this is roughly the argument), if every human association is created for some purpose, has some kind of mission, has some inner structure which directs it towards fulfilling itself in a manner which belongs to it, and it alone, what is *our* purpose, what is our *das Aufgegebene*, what is our mission in life? On the assumption that God creates nothing without a purpose, and that every human nation, every human race, every human association is an ingredient or element in some general harmony, what do we contribute to this harmony? He says: It is difficult to say; we are like the blank page between the Old and New Testaments; nothing is written upon us; perhaps we were created as a caution to show nations how not to exist, to show how development was not to occur. He goes on from there to talk about the great disaster, the schism: if only Russia had been part of the general Western development conducted first in the Roman empire and then by the Roman Church, she would have done better, but unfortunately she was relegated by the schism into a period of complete non-development, and that is why she was crushed, miserable, had nothing to live for.

These are very violent words, and he goes on like this. Chaadaev begins the great tradition of breast-beating on the part of all Russian writers. There are three elements in Chaadaev which afterwards go resounding through the nineteenth and parts

of the twentieth century. The first element is this breast-beating. We are miserable. What is our purpose? Perhaps there is none. Should we exist? Would it not be better if we had never been? It is difficult to discover our purpose. Perhaps we are nothing. Perhaps we are detestable. Perhaps they are right to hate us. Perhaps there is something wrong with us – and so on.

The second element, which is closely allied with the first, is a kind of narcissism in which the main preoccupation of Russian writing is Russia. What are we for? Why are we here? What is our character? What is our destiny? This becomes an absolutely obsessive element among, for example, the great Russian novelists. If you read the novels even of so Western a writer as Turgenev, if you read the novels of Dostoevsky or of almost anyone else writing in the Russia of the nineteenth century – both poets and prose writers, but particularly the prose writers – you will find that the obsessive question is always the destinies of Russia, the famous ‘accursed questions’.<sup>3</sup> Should we or shouldn’t we? Should one join the West or should one on the contrary delve into our own inner resources and follow some unique line of Slav development which is vastly superior to the rotten West? Should life be lived in the manorial houses of the squirearchy on the backs of the suffering peasants, or should something be done? Should some kind of reform be instituted, or even a revolution, which makes men equal? Should personal relations be preferred to dedication to public life, or should personal relations

<sup>3</sup> ‘Proklyatye voprosy’. Although ‘voprosy’ was widely used by the 1830s to refer to the social questions that preoccupied the Russian intelligentsia, it seems that the specific phrase ‘proklyatye voprosy’ was coined in 1858 by Mikhail L. Mikhailov when he used it to render ‘die verdammten Fragen’ in his translation of Heine’s poem ‘**Zum Lazarus**’ (1853/4) no. 1: see ‘Stikhotvoreniya Geine’, *Sovremennik* 1858 no 3 (March), 125; and *Heinrich Heines Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Oskar Walzel (Leipzig, 1911–29), iii 225. Alternatively, Mikhailov may have been capitalising on the fact that an existing Russian expression fitted Heine’s words like a glove, but I have not yet seen an earlier published use of it.

be pushed aside so long as hideous public problems – poverty, squalor, injustice, iniquity of every kind – face us? And so on. the Russian novels – even, as I say, the most apparently Western Turgenev-like novels – are absolutely chock-a-block with contemporary Russian problems. The only subject in which the Russians take a true interest in the nineteenth century is Russia, and the fate of Russia. Sometimes, when there are men of universal genius such as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, this has vast implications for humanity at large, and therefore readers don't altogether notice; but if you read carefully you will see that self-preoccupation is an absolutely obsessive element in Russian writing, to a far greater degree than in literature elsewhere in the world, both for better and for worse.

Chaadaev posed these questions. The breast-beating and self-preoccupation begin there, and also, of course, the attempt to give an answer, because it is after this famous tirade was published, denouncing the Russian past and present and predicting no kind of future, that Chaadaev was declared by the government officially mad. Count Benckendorff, who was the head of the secret police in that period, produced the official line, which is: Our past was splendid, our present is magnificent, and our future transcends all possible belief. This was the official line of the government, and not compatible with the theses of Chaadaev. A doctor was invited to visit him once a week, to take his pulse and otherwise satisfy himself about his mental and physical condition. He was put under what was more or less semi-house-arrest, and was much visited by eminent foreign tourists.

Chaadaev had a very fascinating life in many ways. He said a number of other interesting things, though they are not to the point here. But in this rather low condition, condemned by public opinion and regarded as a madman and a traitor, he produced a second work in which he said: Perhaps our barbarism has something to be said for it after all; perhaps, if one has nothing, one will gain everything; perhaps (this goes back again to the idea that the Russians haven't had a French Revolution) the West has

given everything, but they are exhausted; there is something to be said for us after all – we are fresh, we are barbarian, we are strong, we have enormous appetite. Let them produce, and we shall consume; they will produce culture, but we shall adopt it, adapt it, and develop it; let them have all the sufferings, we shall reap the fruits. This notion that backwardness itself has something to be said for it has certain advantages. That is, you needn't go through all the agonising stages of building things up through various kinds of historical vicissitudes, through the Industrial Revolutions and all the horrors, but can inherit the fruits of that process without undergoing the original pain which led to it.

This, then, becomes a permanent motif in Russian thought. It is behind the idea that one can avoid industrialism and perhaps make something of the village commune. It is behind the thought produced by Chernyshevsky, by Herzen, and latterly by the late Isaac Deutscher, that there is a certain advantage in backwardness, because one can pluck the ripe fruits of other people's endeavours, and start from there, instead of being tied to one's own past by the obsolete machinery and plant which one cannot altogether get rid of if one is an old, developed country like England, Germany or France. That begins with Chaadaev. The idea is this: We are the inheritors of the world; we must have a part to play; we have no past, we have no present, but perhaps we have a future because we are unexhausted, we are barbarous, we are young, we are fresh, we have magnificent powers, and we shall overwhelm the world yet. The kind of atmosphere or mood of which Chaadaev was fairly characteristic was one in which people ask themselves: What is our proper fate? Where should we march?

As I say, this is symptomatic of backward or emergent human societies. It is not the kind of thing which is very likely to be asked by others. Every Russian writer asks it in some form or another. You don't hear this question among the successful. You don't read Dickens saying: Whither England? You don't find the question posed in the writings of Stendhal: What are the

historical destinies of France? It is not even to be found in the writings of Balzac. You don't find Jane Austen asking: What is to be the role of the great British people? What historical stage have we reached, and what follows next? Which way must this great community face? Should we go to the right? Should we go to the left? What fate does destiny have in store for us? This is because these people are perfectly confident that what they believe to be good is good, and what they think successful is successful. They set the tone. It is the others, who imitate, who try to pull themselves along, who are naturally faced by the question: Shall we imitate? Shall we not? Shall we be as Chaadaev portrayed us, miserable apes imitating fourth-rate French literature and producing ninth-rate Russian imitations of it, or should we on the contrary try to generate something original of our own? And how are we to do this, and what have we to go back to, and what is there in our history to help us? And so on.

This is the question which obsesses everyone, and the kind of answers which the Russians give are intimately tied to the view that there must be some framework, some theodicy, some design or pattern in history in terms of which the great country of Russia, my country, the country in which I, Herzen, or I, Chernyshevsky, or I, Belinsky, speak must be intelligible. We must have some part to play, because the proposition that we have no part to play, that perhaps we are, as Hegel supposed, an unhistorical nation – Slavs destined to make no contribution to the great human treasury – is unfaceable. It is too grim, too disagreeable to contemplate this. So there is an attempt, in a country in which religion has decayed, and never had an intellectual tradition in any case, and in which the Church was culturally a somewhat despised institution, whatever part it may have played politically – in a country of this sort there is a desperate effort to create an ersatz metaphysics or ersatz religion or ersatz theodicy in which some guarantee or promise can be found that, if we behave in this and this fashion, we too shall make our word heard, we too shall be great, we too shall fulfill



our nature in some splendid and satisfying fashion. This becomes the prevalent note throughout the nineteenth century.

When, for example, Herzen begins to write his essays on the social conditions of Russia, on what we ought to do and what we ought not to do; when his conscience begins to speak and he begins to denounce the fearful iniquitous, squalid and despotic world in which he lives, the tendency is always to ask historical questions, always to say: Has history a libretto? Perhaps it has no libretto. If history has no libretto, what are we to do? Do we invent our own values, or do we find them laid down in history? Is there some pattern to which we can attach ourselves, or, on the contrary, is there no pattern? Upon this a great deal depends, because if we think there is a pattern, then it makes sense to stimulate a revolutionary movement, and to try to sacrifice one's life to it; but if you can satisfy yourself metaphysically that there is no pattern, that everything which happens, happens as a result of arbitrary human will, then perhaps some other course of action follows.

Belinsky, who is an extremely characteristic example of a tormented Russian proto-intellectual in the 1830s and 1840s, really does attempt to live through the doctrines of the Germans, which he reads first. He lives through Fichte; then he lives through Hegel; then he rejects Hegel because Hegel's theodicy is too brutal and too disagreeable, because it justifies too much shedding of blood, too much torture inflicted by one set of human beings on another. He thinks it is too immoral a picture. If this is what the pattern of history is, then we needn't follow history. Then he becomes reconciled to it – not to the Hegelian picture, but to some other picture – and says: Yes, perhaps there *is* a pattern in history; perhaps industrialism is the thing; perhaps we ought to become bourgeois; perhaps we ought to adjust ourselves to Western conditions; perhaps we ought to reject our present path; perhaps we ought not to listen to what the Slavophiles say. The Slavophiles, on the other hand, produce another pattern, which goes back to Byzantium, Russian roots, Slav Christianity, which condemns Europe for being divided into,

on the one hand, the decaying forms of frightful Catholic hierarchy, the dead hand of Rome, a fearful pyramid of authority which no longer has any meaning, and, on the other hand, the atomised, disintegrating, utilitarian, dry, completely spiritless Protestantism of the other part of Europe. Only in Russia has primitive Christianity been preserved, which crushes people neither with the huge weight of the legal and political despotism of the Roman hierarchy, nor with the disintegrating and atomising laissez-faire individualism of the sadly spiritually dry Protestant countries; and so on

But all these people are not talking in the void. This is not idle discussion in the salons. This is not just empty theorising. These people really tried to live their theories; their lives were governed by them, and their political action, the causes to which they sacrificed their lives, the risks which they took politically, the prisons to which they went, the parties which they tried to form, the defiance which they hurled at the government were literally founded upon a perception of a historical pattern, because they wanted something to prop them up. If it is only I and my conscience, if it is only something which I have thought of myself, this is too dubious, it is not firm enough. They needed some guarantee that there really was an order in the external world in terms of which it was possible to say that, if you behave in this or that fashion, 'there will be a holiday in our street yet', as Chernyshevsky said.<sup>4</sup>

In Belinsky's case it is extremely evident. Chernyshevsky too always argues historically. Chernyshevsky adopts Chaadaev's view that perhaps the Russians could profit by the industrial achievements of the West without going through the torments. Perhaps there is some route round the horrors of the Industrial Revolution towards socialism which the Russians alone can

<sup>4</sup> Towards the end of **'Kritika filosofskikh predybezhdanii protiv obshchinnogo vladeniya'**, first published in *Sovremennik* 1858 no. 12 (December).

adopt. We must learn from the lessons of 1848. We must understand that liberalism is not the way. We must understand that parliamentarism is not the method. We must understand that the real pattern of history is not this, but something else. Then he draws up a pattern of history which he thinks true, and to which he is prepared to sacrifice his life; for which he is prepared to send people to their deaths; for which he is ultimately exiled to Siberia; and to which he loses his life. These people are genuine martyrs and heroes to their historical perception of what the universe is like.

An extremely vivid case of this is furnished by the kind of arguments which they had. I have already mentioned the Petrashevsky Group, who believed in Fourier, and this was not a particularly historical belief. But a little later than that, for example, you will find, not only in the arguments between the Slavophiles and the Westerners – and these arguments are not arguments of an ordinary Western type, namely: What is it best to do? Is it better to industrialise, or is it better to remain rural? Is it more healthy to do one, or more healthy to do the other? – you will find that the argument always acquires a historical form. What are we descended from? What is our nature? To which path of history do we belong? What will develop us along the natural grooves of our historical formation in the most frictionless manner?

When Western statesmen ask themselves questions, they don't do so in this form. If John Stuart Mill asked himself a question about what it was best to do, he simply put the question in an ordinary moral fashion: What will make people happier, or what will be more just, or what will be more efficient? When Bismarck asks questions, when Guizot asks questions, when Thierry asks questions, when English statesmen ask questions, they don't have to pose their questions in terms of some rigid historical framework, so that you can demonstrate the validity of your answer from the fact that a stage in some inevitable development guarantees that it will be a success, and will develop your nature in its proper fashion, if only you can screw yourself into the right

historical framework, and not into the wrong historical framework. For the Slavophiles, if you follow the West you are simply perverting your Russian nature. For the Westerners, if you follow the Slavophiles you are also perverting your nature, you are trying to go back to the past, which is impossible; you are trying to adapt yourself to some imaginary past which these people thought existed before Ivan the Terrible, which is all moonshine. For Khomyakov, on the other hand, if you try to follow Western patterns you are following a path which has already led the Western nations to their doom, and which history has already condemned. So the notion that history stands there encouraging and deterring, condemning and pushing forwards, is already an extremely fixed idea in public Russian thought, in the discussions and the debates both from the right wing and the left wing, the individualists and the collectivists, and everybody else there is, by 1850 or 1860.

Let me give you another fairly vivid example of this. In the 1870s there was a great debate, as you probably know, between two sections of the Russian populist movement, between, on the one hand, the Jacobins, led by people like Tkachev, who believed in elites of professional revolutionaries, and, on the other hand, Lavrov and his followers, who believed in a slower process of evolution and education. This is a well-known debate of which you will find an extremely useful summary both in Venturi's book on Russian populism and in Dan's book on the origins of socialism.<sup>5</sup> These are very good accounts of this interesting debate, whose results were fateful for Russian history.

The argument takes historical forms. Tkachev says: Conditions are intolerable; no country is more enslaved, oppressed and disgusting in every possible way than our great homeland; this

<sup>5</sup> Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution* (London, 1960; New York, 1960), to which IB contributed an introduction; F. I. Dan (pseudonym of Fedor Ivanovich Gurvich), *Proiskhozhdenie bol'shevizma: k istorii demokraticheskikh i sotsialisticheskikh idei v Rossii posle osvobodheniya krest'yan* (New York, 1946).

can be remedied only by a small group of dedicated professional revolutionaries who do things *for* the people, not *with* the people; the peasants are stupid, reactionary and malevolent, and anybody who ties himself to the peasants goes to his doom. We wish to save the peasants, but of course always against their will. If you listen to what Lavrov says, you will collapse. No body of men is more degraded or ignorant or stupid than the vast body of peasants whom we are intending to save. You mustn't listen to what they want; you mustn't listen to what they say; what you must do is save them, if need be against their will, if need be by violence.

This is the so-called neo-Jacobin doctrine of Tkachev, who is a disciple of Blanqui, and before him of Buonarotti and Babeuf. And therefore the programme is: Form a small revolutionary elite, arm them, and create a coup d'état; if need be, slaughter; if need be, crush and destroy; if need be, create a dictatorship which will repel all efforts to overthrow it – if need be, for a long time. Against this Lavrov argues that this isn't right, that if this is done the peasants won't like it – which both sides recognised – and since they won't like it, they will attempt to resist it. In the attempt to break their will, even for their own benefit, you will obviously create instruments of repression. These instruments of repression will brutalise you and militarise you – you, the revolutionary elite – and by brutalising and militarising you they will change your ideas; and instead of becoming liberators you will in fact become oppressors, and in the effort to liberate the people you will fix a yoke upon their necks which will perhaps be even harsher than the one you have just struck off. Fateful words.

To which Tkachev replies: You must look at history. There is no other way. All successful revolutions are made by small bodies of desperate professionals and not by huge popular movements, which never quite occur. Lavrov replies: Yes, this is true. There are the Puritans in the seventeenth century, the Jacobins in the eighteenth, but then what happened? These movements were followed by all kinds of fearful collapses, and in the case of France by the *Directoire*, degeneration, the bourgeois republic –

everything we hate. To which Tkachev in turn says: Yes, but if you wait, if you try to educate, if you try to make the people democratic, if you try to make the masses of workers capable of understanding what liberation it is that they need, and which we bring to them in a semi-Marxist fashion (which Lavrov preached), then you will find that the state, as so often in the past – the analogies are always historical – will simply buy off your revolutionary intelligentsia. Where do we get our best cadre from? We get them from engineers, doctors, agrarian experts, students, the frustrated intelligentsia of the towns. If the Russian monarchy has the least degree of wisdom, they will simply offer the doctors practices, they will offer the scientists laboratories, they will offer the agricultural experts land to develop, they will make conditions perfectly peaceful for them, and in this way they will drain off their revolutionary zeal. These people will be bought off by the state, and you will lose the only revolutionaries who could help upset the system. This is what the French have done; this is what has led to the detestable French Republic. Observe what happened in the eighteenth century; observe what happened in the nineteenth; and you will see this is not the path. And so the argument proceeded.

In fact Tkachev needn't have worried. The tsarist regime didn't display even that minimum of intelligence of which he was afraid. And therefore exactly what he hoped for in fact happened. But the point is that the argument always takes a historical form, and they always ask themselves: What stage have we reached? Are we now like the Puritans in the seventeenth century? Is this 1789? Is this 1793? Is this Thermidor? Is this 1815? Is this 1848? Where are we? It is as if there really is some kind of calendar, some kind of objective order of development, and the great thing is to discover on what step of this ladder you are, in order to take the next step, and not make some awful mistake, which could lead you to fall off the ladder altogether – this can happen – or could at any rate retard your progress.

That is why, if you conceive of the Russians as constantly obsessed by historical analogies, which to them are a kind of

theodicy or metaphysical framework which guarantees the next step, so that if you learn where you are on the map, then and only then can you take the next step – and the map is a rationally intelligible map, a symmetrical map which not merely indicates how the past has gone but provides a certain principle for the future too – if you see that, then you will see upon what very fertile soil Marxism fell when it finally came to Russia. It was the country of all countries, paradoxically enough, which was readiest to receive this doctrine, and the intellectuals who received it did so with colossal enthusiasm. And once again there is this phenomenon of argument in terms, always, of some historical framework. Plekhanov, who is the most influential of all Russian Marxists, always begins by considering the question: What stage have we reached? Given that Marx is right, and that there is a certain order of events – first we have feudalism, then we have the collapse of feudalism; we have the early development of capitalism, then we have the later development of capitalism; we have a generation of the proletariat, and so on – where are we? Have we reached late seventeenth-century England? Have we reached early eighteenth-century France? Or are we somewhere behind or in front of these? And the argument proceeds exactly on those lines. The populists are wrong because they don't understand that in the historical development of Russia this inevitable stage must be passed. We must generate a proletariat, otherwise we cannot have a modern revolution, we cannot have socialism, because Marx understands that these are the unbreakable laws of history.

You will see how vivid this is when you consider, for example, the famous letter which Vera Zasulich, one of the Russian populists, addressed to Marx in 1881,<sup>6</sup> in which she asks Marx

<sup>6</sup> **Her letter** was written on 16 February, and **Marx replied** on 8 March. See Teodor Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road: Marx and the 'Peripheries of Capitalism'* (New York, 1983), 98–9, and Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works* (London, New York and Moscow, 1975–2004), xlvii 71–2.

whether perhaps it is possible, in his opinion, for the Russians to avoid the horrors of industrialism and a huge exploited proletariat; whether there might not be a direct path from the village commune into socialism, avoiding the awful corridor of industrialisation and exploitation of the Western type. To which Marx, naturally enough, answers, rather impatiently at first: What are you asking for? You are asking me to exempt you from the laws of history. I'm very sorry, I can't do that. Like a schoolboy he says: I can't. You can't leap over these stages. This can't be arranged. In effect, what he is implying is that either his theory of history is serious, or it's not; and if it is, then he can't arrange special exceptions to inexorable historical laws.

Nevertheless, you must understand that in that period Europe was not in a condition of any kind of revolutionary upheaval. There was not much revolutionary activity going on in the late 1870s in Europe. After the Commune and so on, everything subsided. The only persons who were doing anything at all were Russian terrorists, who were actually killing governors, and meditating killing an emperor, which they finally succeeded in doing. And Marx was always predisposed towards effective men of action. Although they weren't exactly Marxists, they were heroic, they were dedicated, and they adored Marx. In the end the old man somewhat softened, and he wrote them a letter in which he said: What I wrote in *Capital* about these matters is meant to apply to the West. I wasn't thinking of Eastern Europe at all. But if the revolution in Russia coincides with a general revolution in the world, and particularly in the West; if your revolution touches off a larger revolution, or anyhow if a larger revolution bears you upon its shoulders; then perhaps there isn't any necessity for you to go pedantically through all the stages of European development for the purpose of making your own revolution; you will be borne aloft by the general wave, which you might even stimulate, or of which you would at any rate form a part. Therefore, on condition that there is a general revolution, you might skip this stage, but not otherwise.



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This letter was incompatible with what Plekhanov was preaching at that time: that the Russians must accustom themselves to taking history seriously; that it was no good trying to leap over stages; it was no good running about with bombs, or killing governors, or attempting deeds of isolated assassination before conditions were ripe for a proper advance of the proletariat. Either we shall make a revolution with the workers, or we shall not make it at all. Therefore the proper task was not to indulge in individual terrorism, or William-Morris-like agrarian dreams about some happier rural Russia which will avoid the horrors of industrialism. That was a mere piece of reactionary utopianism, however worthy. What we must do is actually almost to help the capitalists in their task of modernising or transforming Russia. That is to say, the proletarian stage must be gone through, and the faster the better, and therefore we must drive the capitalists faster against the reactionary state into the proper route, which is towards greater and greater industrialisation.

When this letter was received from Marx and held out a ray of hope that this might not be necessary – that if the revolution broke out, let's say, in France or in England, or somewhere in the West, there might be no need for all these horrors – Plekhanov was deeply upset, and he decided to defend Marxism against Marx. In short, what he did was to suppress the letter, which was published for the first time in 1924, when it was no longer of very great contemporary importance. My point is not whether Plekhanov was right or wrong to suppress this letter – many people cannot forgive him for it, and he is regarded as having committed a great breach of revolutionary integrity and so on by doing so. That is not the point. The point is that no other socialist would have had to suppress a letter of this sort. If a letter of this kind, upsetting preconceived ideas, had been sent to M. Jules Guesde, who was a French Marxist, or to Karl Kautsky, or to Eduard Bernstein, who was a German Marxist of that period, or to Marxists in Belgium or Holland, or even in England or Italy, it wouldn't need to be suppressed, but in Russia it had to be suppressed.

Plekhanov was perfectly right, because these people believed faithfully, deeply, first of all in the existence of patterns of history, and secondly in the existence of experts who knew what the patterns were. Some people thought Saint-Simon was such an expert, some that Buckle was, some that Darwin was, some that Marx was. The Russian writings of the nineteenth century teem with statements which begin 'Spencer says', 'Buckle says', 'John Stuart Mill says'. You might want to refute such a statement, but you will always begin with some great Western authority for whom you have the profoundest respect. They know: we don't know. They are the experts; they are the people who know; they have studied the patterns of history; these patterns exist, and there are certain specialists who know what they are.

Therefore, if this letter had been allowed to leak out, the Russian Social Democratic party might have been profoundly demoralised, and might then have ceased from organising itself in the fashion in which it had to organise itself, and young men would have gone on sacrificing their lives in vain efforts to perform terroristic acts, and needless blood would have been shed by people who were far better employed, as Plekhanov thought, in reading the works of Marx, and quietly creating the conditions of a mass party among the workers. I bring forward this example only because I wish to explain how literal-minded the Russians were, and how much importance they attached to *ipse dixit* of this sort, and to documentary evidence for the existence of a framework which alone justified a specific piece of political action. Nowhere else, except perhaps now in the twentieth century – I can't tell you: perhaps in Asia and Africa it may also be so; I wouldn't know – but at that period nowhere else was there this literal faith in dogmatic pronouncements about the unalterable shape and order and progression of historical steps.

The same thing can be said even about Lenin. The great arguments which went on in the 1890s always took this form. Marx said that we can't make a revolution until certain conditions are fulfilled: for example, until we have in the population a

majority of industrial workers who understand their historical position. In 1890 this didn't look very real in Russia, and yet Lenin was an impatient man, and wished to make a revolution soon rather than late, and therefore had to devise extraordinary stratagems in order to prove that, as a matter of fact – and he tried to prove it to himself in the middle of the 1890s – Russia was already in a condition to make a revolution. All Marx said was that you needed capitalist development of a certain kind. Now, peasants were capitalists. Eighty per cent of the Russians were peasants; therefore eighty per cent of Russia was capitalist already. Conditions were ripe. He didn't insist on this so very much after 1902 – he receded in his position – but the mere fact that he had to produce this highly eccentric hypothesis, and apparently believed in it profoundly, is evidence of the fact that there were these continual arguments about the calendar, about the timetable: Where have we got to?

In 1905 there was an endless argument between Plekhanov and Lenin about the timetable. Are we in 1848, or are we later? Should we make a revolution now, or shouldn't we? What is the condition of the proletariat? Have we reached stage three or stage seventeen? You were allowed to make a revolution according to the book only when you'd reached such and such a stage. The question is: Have we or have we not? If you make the revolution at the wrong moment, Engels said; if you get into power at historically the wrong moment – and there is an absolutely rigid progression of these moments – then woe betide those who do this, because they will find themselves in a place very different from where they intended to be.

The situation in 1917 was exactly that. When the Mensheviks argued against the Bolsheviks about what kind of revolution they wanted to make in 1917, this is the hub and nub of the argument, as it always is. Are we or are we not ripe? The whole notion of ripeness, all these phenomena which are now called imperatives of modernisation or industrialisation, or take-off points, and so forth, begin then. There is an objective order, and one must know exactly what point one has reached. Where do we take

flight? Where do we leave the ground? We must judge the moment absolutely precisely, and you can discover it by a huge intellectual operation, by observing history, discovering its laws, and identifying your place upon the great historical ladder. That is what I mean by the Russian obsession with history or historiography, which is, as I say, a kind of theodicy, a kind of ersatz religion, equally powerful, equally influential, equally important in the thought of all these thinkers.

One thing I might add before I stop is that it's fair to say that not all Russian thinkers were equally obsessed in this way. I have given the impression, perhaps, that most Russian intellectuals in the nineteenth century thought like this, and of course a great many did, but some didn't. For example, Bakunin never did. Bakunin was an anarchist who thought you could make a revolution anywhere, at any time, and with equal success. All you needed were men desperate enough to upset the given regime; all you needed was a group of desperadoes with no stake in existing society, prepared to go to all lengths. Bakunin was perhaps in some ways a frivolous man – this could be said without injustice – an imaginative, interesting, somewhat frivolous man who didn't take himself all that seriously, certainly not as seriously as his followers took him. But the doctrines of anarchism which he initiated in a big way in Western Europe never did take root in Russia, partly for this reason. The anarchist movement in Russia was always feeble. It existed, but there were never very many anarchists. They flew a black flag, and in the end Trotsky exterminated them all, but as a movement they were small, they were inconsiderable, they were idealistic, and they were essentially non-Russian in inspiration. They looked to various Western thinkers quite consciously.

You could say that Tolstoy was anti-historical, and this would be just. The interesting thing about Tolstoy is not so much that he didn't believe that historians understood history – and he didn't. As you know, the most famous remark which Tolstoy made about history was that history always tells us things we

don't want to know. He says history 'is like a deaf man answering questions which nobody puts to him'.<sup>7</sup> Historians give us answers to all kinds of trivial questions, whereas the great questions of human existence they carefully leave aside. But, apart from this, he was an eighteenth-century thinker who thought that all men were ultimately made of the same substance. There were certain great permanent moral and intellectual questions which could be answered by anyone if they simply ignored the sophistication by which they were surrounded, asked the questions in a simple and sincere fashion, and made a great effort to arrive at the truthful answers. The point about Tolstoy is not that his views were directed against the idea of a historical pattern: the point is that he had to come to terms with it. No other great novelist needs to add to his novel, whether historical or otherwise, a huge excursus making quite plain what his attitude is towards history, sociology, metaphysics, determinism, freedom of the will and so on.

In 1890, to give you another example, the early Russian Marxist Peter Struve, who was at that period Lenin's friend and a great inspirer of Russian Marxism, was terribly worried about the problem of free will. Now, free will is of course a problem which has worried thinkers from the days of Epicurus onwards, perhaps, or preoccupied the thoughts of many philosophers and many common men. But in the case of Struve the problem arose: If history is determined, why need I sacrifice my life and take the risk of being shot, hanged or taken to Siberia? If everything is going to be inevitably all right anyway – if history is moving in my direction, perhaps it will take a little longer – why should heroic young men have to suffer the most terrible risks and face the most appalling dangers? And if the party is going to believe in determinism, perhaps their hands will falter and they will no longer be as energetic and as heroic as necessary. And so Struve says in all solemnity: Maybe the populists have something in what

<sup>7</sup> *War and Peace*, epilogue, part 2, chapter 1: L. N. Tolstoy, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow/Leningrad, 1928–64) xii 300.

they say, because the populists are always arguing that everything is determined. Why be heroic, why take risks, why not just wait for history to take its course, if everything is going to produce a happy ending at some time or other? He says: Let us say that ninety per cent is determined, but ten is free.

This isn't the kind of discussion which used to go on between Sidney Webb and Graham Wallas. This isn't the kind of thing which M. Jules Guesde was talking about to Jaurès. This is not the way in which these people spoke. Why they didn't speak so is another question, but it was of crucial life-and-death importance to the Russian Social Democratic party whether the doctrine of determinism, or on the contrary the doctrine of limited free will, was true, and this had to be argued out night after night in heated discussions by these intellectuals, who were not merely intellectuals, but in the end responsible for the Russian Revolution: that is the point which I wish to impress upon you. And that is why Tolstoy, who was anti-historical, had to make his bow before this, had to come to some understanding of history, had to explain that he was against it, had to make some kind of statement, come to terms with it and not simply ignore it. Flaubert didn't have to write about history, Dickens didn't have to write about history, Maupassant and Zola didn't have to write about history; nobody else did; but Tolstoy felt a certain inner necessity, and Dostoevsky did also.

The only other class of persons of whom it can be said firmly that they were not obsessed by history were the historians. On this note I should perhaps almost like to end. Those who were pursuing empirical research into history were least liable to be infected by the thought that there was some short cut, there was some huge pattern which one had to find before one could set to work. In the elder Solovev's work you still find certain Hegelian notes. The historian Chicherin is some kind of Hegelian too. But these are not the most eminent Russian historians. The great Klyuchevsky, historians like Platonov and Kareev and all the non-Marxist historians of the twentieth century, are exactly like their Western brothers, they simply write history as they find it,

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with whatever categories, whatever concepts appear to them to be the most useful in describing and accounting for events. They are the class of persons least affected by this metaphysical obsession. But politically and socially those upon whom the destinies of Russia turned out to rest, that is to say the socialists of the right and the socialists of the left, the socialist revolutionaries and the Kadets, all argued in terms of this framework to a degree, with an intensity, with a fanaticism, with a devotion which makes the arguments totally different, it seems to me, from any similar discussions in the West.

Something of the sort happened in Germany in the 1840s, 1850s, but nothing like this, nothing as profound as this. You don't find even in Ranke, you don't find even in Treitschke, you don't find even in the historical jurists, even in Savigny and persons of that sort, this kind of literal belief that, if only we can discover what the pattern is, then we shall be saved, and if we don't discover what the pattern is, then we shall be doomed. This seems to me to be a persistent note in Russian history from the beginning to the end, and this is the main reason why Marxism found such marvellously fertile soil in that country, and why these ideas, which were born in the West, became transformed out of all recognition once they came to Russia, and became the movement, and led to the consequences, which we all know.

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