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Nicolas Berdyaev: An Intellectual Journey

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NICOLAS BERDYAEV: AN INTELLECTUAL JOURNEY

by

Marianna Westbrook Byman

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Arts


History

Grand Forks, North Dakota

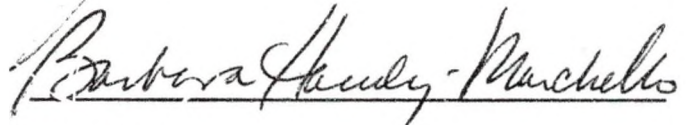
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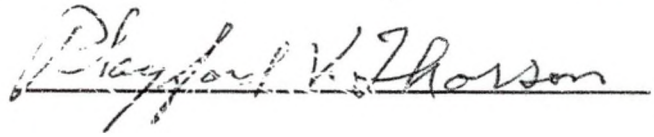
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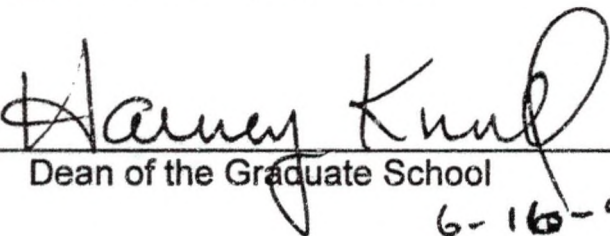


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ABSTRACT

Nicholas Aleksandrovich Berdyaev, 1874-1948, was part of the historic events that changed the course of Russian history. He lived through them and wrote about them for his entire adult life. Berdyaev not only pondered the agony of Russia's past, but he contemplated the possibilities of Russia's future.

Berdyaev was a deeply Russian thinker, and like Russia, he presented the world with a paradox. Outside of Russia he was perhaps the best known and the most widely read of Russian philosophers, but inside of Russia seldom read and little known. The paradox of Berdyaev extended to his life, his writings, and even his significance for intellectual study. He was at various times a political activist, literary expositor and religious philosopher. Although Berdyaev was born a privileged member of the landed gentry, he began his intellectual life as a Marxist. Due to his political activism during his days as a university student, he was imprisoned and exiled to Vologda by the Tsarist regime. In the early 1900's he moved away from revolutionary Marxism and became a leader in the intellectual circle that criticized the radicalism of the Bolsheviks. In 1923 he was exiled from Russia by the Soviet government. He never returned to Russia, but for the rest of his life he thought, wrote and dreamed about Russia.

There was one great passion in Berdyaev's life. He called it "the mystery" of individual freedom. Even though Berdyaev said that his thoughts had no consistency, there was a link holding all his ideas together. The link was the theory of "opposition and resistance." This theory holds that freedom creates, allows, even demands, a struggle between opposing forces. Freedom is a state of resistance to any form of determinism or autocracy. Thus Berdyaev could not abide any ideology for long. Throughout his life Berdyaev rebelled against all forms of authoritarianism, universal systems or utopian ideologies either from the "right" or the "left." He opposed any authority that was accorded primacy over the freedom of the spirit.

INTRODUCTION

At this critical moment in history Russia is engaged in a mortal struggle. Like Jacob in the Old Testament story, Russia wrestles with an angel that has power over its destiny. In order to understand the struggle in modern Russia it is necessary to return to the past for enlightenment. The description of Russia as a country living in the past while dreaming of the future has never been more true.¹ On the eve of a new century and a new millennium there are parallels that can be drawn to the advent of the twentieth century. In 1900 Russia faced strong currents of change that had been on the move for decades. The intellectuals of Russia's Silver Age were divided as to the best course of action. There were many opinions and options as to the path of Russia's future. Everything was possible and nothing was certain. And so it is today.

Nicholas Aleksandrovich Berdyaev was part of the historic events that changed the course of Russian history. He lived through them and wrote about them for his entire adult life. Berdyaev not only pondered the agony of Russia's past, but he contemplated the possibilities of Russia's future. He wrote of the Russia that was and of the Russia that might yet be. In his writings he spoke with passionate and personal understanding of what it means to be Russian. He both loved Russia and despaired over Russia.

Berdyaev was a deeply Russian thinker, and like Russia, he presented the world with a paradox. Outside of Russia he was perhaps the best known and the most widely

¹Nicolas Berdyaev, The Origin of Russian Communism, trans. R. M. French, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1962), 31. Also Nicolas Berdyaev, The Russian Idea, trans. by R. M. French, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), 12.

read of Russian philosophers, but inside of Russia seldom read and little known. The paradox of Berdyaev extended to his life, his writings, and even his significance for intellectual study. He was at various times a political activist, literary expositor and religious philosopher. Although Berdyaev was born a privileged member of the landed gentry he began his intellectual life as a Marxist. Due to his political activism during his days as a university student he was imprisoned and exiled to Vologda by the Tsarist regime. In the early 1900's he moved away from revolutionary Marxism and became a leader in the intellectual circle that criticized the radicalism of the Bolsheviks. In 1923 he was exiled from Russia by the Soviet government. He never returned to Russia, but for the rest of his life he thought, wrote and dreamed about Russia.

In the western cultures of Europe and the United States Berdyaev became famous as a great Christian philosopher and defender of religion but was considered a heretic by factions within Russian Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. His writings were banned in the Soviet Union but because he did not support efforts to overthrow the revolutionary government in the 1920's many Russian émigrés viewed him as a supporter of the Soviet regime. Berdyaev, an outspoken critic of the Nazi regime in the early 1930's, continued his opposition to the Nazis while living in occupied Paris throughout the war. Yet years after his death, when right-wing nationalist groups inside the Soviet Union revived his works, Berdyaev was accused of fascist leanings.

Even though many of Berdyaev's works contain harsh criticism of both liberal democracy and capitalism, he served for twenty-five years as editor-in-chief of the YMCA Press, was supported financially by the American YMCA, and had the largest following for his ideas and writings in England and the United States. Despite his differences with western political and economic systems the YMCA Press under his

leadership was the largest publisher of Russian language books and formed the front line of the intellectual attack against the Soviet regime.

While his writings show that he was a life-long foe of nationalism, particularly Russian nationalism, some of his works have been claimed by right wing nationalist groups and used in support their nationalistic programs. He has been called both a Slavophile and a Westernizer. He has come under renewed attack within the last year by scholars who view his works as supporting the ideas of reactionary forces within Russia.

There was one great passion in Berdyaev's life. He called it the "the mystery" of individual freedom. He wrote, "Some have called me the philosopher of freedom, and a reactionary Russian bishop once said of me that I was the 'captive of freedom'. I do indeed love freedom above all else"² Berdyaev named Boehme, Kirkegaard, Solov'ev, Ibsen, Nietzsche and Dostoevsky as the thinkers who best understood the mystery of freedom. Boehme was the most important because, as Berdyaev explained "he approached the mystery from the angle of evil."³

Even though Berdyaev said that his thoughts had no consistency, there was a link holding all his ideas together. The link was the theory of opposition and resistance. This theory holds that freedom creates, allows, even demands, a struggle between opposing forces. Freedom is a state of resistance to any form of determinism or autocracy. Thus Berdyaev could not abide any kind of orthodoxy or universal ideology for long.

At different periods in his life Berdyaev was interested in many diverse intellectual movements or theories. His ideas showed the influence of Kant, Hegel and Marx. Socialism, transcendental idealism, mysticism, religious orthodoxy and

²Nicolas Berdyaev, *Dream and Reality: An Essay in Autobiography*, trans. Katherine Lambert (London: G. Bles, 1949), 56.

³M.-M. Davy, *Nicolas Berdyaev: Man of the Eighth Day*, trans. Leonora Siepmann (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1967), 78.

existentialism were part of his intellectual history. He adapted each system to his own world view, took from it what he needed and moved on to something new. He synthesized disparate ideas and thereby created his free-thinking personal conception of the world.

Throughout his life Berdyaev rebelled against all forms of authoritarianism, universal systems or utopian ideologies either from the “right” or the “left.” He opposed any authority that was accorded primacy over the freedom of the spirit. His passionate declaration that “There is nothing more repellent than to apply a pantheistic line of thought to the state, society and nation, and then on the basis of that to regard them as taking supremacy over man” demonstrated the depth feelings concerning authority.⁴

Berdyaev’s search for truth led him on a lifelong odyssey that coincided with the violence of wars, revolutions, oppression and suffering under both Tsarist and Bolshevik rule in Russia. After his exile from Russia in 1923 Berdyaev’s dreams of Russia, as often is the case with the expatriate cut off from home, came into even sharper focus. His ‘homesickness’ for Russia echoed that of Dostoevsky.

The Russia envisioned by Berdyaev was dreamed of by many members of the pre-Revolutionary intelligentsia. His writings reflected the intellectual, artistic and spiritual atmosphere prevalent in both Russia and Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. There was a clear interconnection between the literature, art and philosophy of Russia’s Silver Age and the programs for reform, change and revolution that were talked about and acted upon during the early years of the twentieth century. Berdyaev’s thoughts on Russia, the Russian identity and the Russian mission represented a vibrant alternative to positivism and dialectical materialism.

⁴Nicolas Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, trans. R. M. French, (London: Geoffrey Bles: The Centenary Press, 1943), 141.

Berdyayev was a prolific writer with twenty seven published books, contributions in several anthologies, introductions and prefaces to works of other Russian writers, and many journal articles. He wrote in Russian, French and German but translations of his works appeared in English as well as many other languages. His writing style, typical of many Russian intellectuals of his period, was circulative. Not only do many of his books repeat earlier ones but there is also a great deal of repetition within each book. In many of his later works there is little evidence of any editing. At times his writing takes on the form of 'a stream of consciousness.'⁵

Berdyayev acknowledged imperfections in his works.

I am dissatisfied with all the books I have written. I cannot, for instance, bear reading or re-reading any of my previous writings, and I dislike seeing quotations from them. The only thing to which I attach value is the experience of creative inspiration from which these books sprang-the impulse rather than its outward result.⁶

In addition to the difficulties of style and lack of editing there are obvious problems with parts of the translations. But these problems notwithstanding, the works are creative, powerful and relevant for today.

This paper is an historical analysis of the works of Nicolas Berdyayev as well as an inquiry into Russian cultural and intellectual history. The idea of Russia, as well as the idea of Nicolas Berdyayev, is one of a powerful struggle between opposing forces. Berdyayev, like his times, is a study in contradictory and opposing forces. The theory of the resistance of opposing forces frames this exploration into his life and his work.

For intellectual historians the evolution of the ideas of Nicolas Berdyayev is important because it parallels the development of the ideas of a significant portion of the

⁵Seaver, 9.

⁶Berdyayev, Dream and Reality, 103.

Russian intelligentsia. During the two decades preceding the Russian Revolution Berdyaev was at the creative center of Russia's intellectual life. His writings are a measure of an important segment of the vibrant culture of Russia's Silver Age. Additionally, his life poignantly mirrors the haunted existence of the Russian in exile after the establishment of Soviet rule. Some of his most powerful insights into the idea of Russia are linked to his homesickness for his native land.

A study of the history of the ideas of Nicholas Berdyaev brings many facets of Russian history into sharper focus. His personal history follows the national history. His works chronicle the tumultuous period from the later nineteenth century to the beginning of the Cold War. The metaphor of the "wandering Russia" speaks to the dilemma of both Russia and Berdyaev.

The following analysis of the writings of Nicolas Berdyaev includes many aspects of division and struggle: ideological, national, political, social, cultural, intellectual, gender, theological, philosophical and personal. This paper begins with the dual heritage of Berdyaev's French and Russian background. The study progresses through the ideological conflicts of pre-Revolutionary Russia, then to Berdyaev's philosophical and literary ideas. The final portion of this analysis considers Berdyaev's ideas concerning the identity and destiny of Russia. It is a study of the history of ideas and the importance of ideas in Russia in the pre-Revolutionary Silver Age.

CHAPTER I

NICOLAS BERDYAEV: THE MAN

There is no calm to be found in the depths of the soul. Unity and quiet are not there but passionate agitation; polarity and antinomy is the radical characteristic of human nature; there is ceaseless motion.¹

Nicolas Berdyaev

I bore in me two worlds and the seeds of their possible conflict.²

Nicolas Berdyaev

Nicholas Aleksandrovich Berdyaev, 1874-1948, was an iconoclastic member of a generation of Russian iconoclasts. His personal history, like his intellectual and political history, was a saga that reads like a Russian fairy tale. His life was a microcosm of the history of a generation of Russian intellectuals.

Berdyaev was born on the family estate near Kiev on March 6 (18), 1874. His family belonged to the southern Russian landed gentry. His maternal ancestors came from a long line of French nobility while his paternal ancestors, including his father, were of the Russian landed gentry with distinguished service in the Russian military. His personal history was a blending of the eastern and western cultures of Russia. Berdyaev acknowledged the effect and the strength of this dual culture and history and frequently spoke of his forebears as having influenced his own character. He wrote, "A man's origin, the traditions which surround his childhood-all this is not the man's accidental

¹Nicolas Berdyaev, Dostoevsky An Interpretation, trans. by Donald Attwater, (London: Sheed & Ward, 1934), 57-58.

²Nicolas Berdyaev, Dream and Reality, 259.

shell...from which he may and should completely free himself...All these are profound connections which determine his destiny.”³ The undercurrents of origins, connections and traditions influenced what Berdyaev called destiny in strange and contradictory ways. His personal history demonstrates that an individual can strive mightily throughout life to be free of his beginnings, but there are always connections that can neither be severed nor ignored.

Even though Berdyaev claimed to have broken away completely from his aristocratic family connections in fact he never did. There were always strong influences of his heritage in his personal habits and preferences. He continued to keep up his contacts with the aristocracy until the end of his life. A member of his household reported that in his later years he was able to reduce his calls on member of the Russian aristocracy in exile “only to the socially permissible minimum.”⁴

At critical points in his life Berdyaev benefited from the privilege and connections of his family and his social class. This was in spite of his struggle to disassociate himself from these privileges by becoming a Marxist and an activist for social reform. His dilemma resembled that of his father who, as a liberal, opposed the old system yet was dependent on it for support. Berdyaev gave a graphic example of his benefiting from his aristocratic heritage. In 1900 Berdyaev was exiled by the Tsarist regime for his participation in student meetings and demonstrations. Along with other student activists he was sent to the northeastern province of Vologda under the charge of exhibiting “the desire to overthrow the government and church and with plotting the abolition of private property and the family.”⁵ Berdyaev recounted that during his exile “I struck a man, a local government official, because he pursued a young lady of my acquaintance on the

³Donald Lowrie, *Rebellious Prophet* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1966), 7.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., 49.

street.” After Berdyaev hit him “I threatened him with dismissal from his job.” Despite this attack Berdyaev was not punished by the authorities. Berdyaev notes that “ I could display my temper with impunity because I enjoyed a privileged position.”⁶

Berdyaev acknowledged that he never ceased to be fundamentally, though unconsciously, a nobleman. The incongruity of Berdyaev’s life was also evident in his account of visits to the estate of his relative Countess Branitskaya. He referred to the “impassable gulf” between his two opposing worlds. “Countess Branitskaya remained...always kind to me even when I became a Marxist and use to go to see her hot from discussions with Lunacharsky.⁷ I made a point, however, of being elegantly dressed.”⁸ Late in his life he reminisced, “When, as a Marxist, I sat in the Branitskys’ drawing-room, I did not foresee that Marxism would spell the destruction of this beautiful, and yet, in a sense, so unreal world.”⁹

This seemingly dual nature of Berdyaev, this blend of aristocracy and socialism drove him to a unique synthesis in his life. Berdyaev realized this duality in himself. “I did not, of course, escape the psychology of the ‘ruling class’, for all my forbears had belonged to it.”¹⁰ In him “the psychology of the ruling class is found with an intense revolutionary impulse which made me look for justice and compassion.”¹¹ Both socialism and aristocratic ideals influenced his philosophy, but he never accepted either worldview totally. He said, without apology, “I am conscious of being an aristocratic thinker who has come to acknowledge the truth of socialism. Some have said of me that I

⁶Berdyaev, Dream and Reality, 18-20.

⁷Anatol Lunacharsky, childhood friend of Berdyaev, fellow exile in Vologda, and the first commissar of education in the new Soviet state.

⁸Berdyaev, Dream and Reality, 23.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., 31.

¹¹Ibid., 30.

speak for the aristocratic meaning of socialism.”¹² This was an example of Berdyaev’s ability to synthesize what appears to be two opposing worldviews.

When, in 1924, Berdyaev went to France as an exile from the Soviet Communist regime he was returning to the birthplace of his maternal great-grandfather, Antoine-Louis-Octave, Comte de Choiseul-Gouffier. Like his French ancestor Berdyaev was “both child and victim of revolution. The French Revolution forced the grandfather to emigrate to Russia; the Russian revolution brought Berdyaev back to France an exile.”¹³

The story of the Choiseuls in Russia after the French Revolution was similar to that of many other families of the French nobility. Because Catherine the Great disliked and feared the new regime in France she, for a time, encouraged the exiled French aristocracy to emigrate to Russia. She awarded many of the French nobles important positions in state service. Marie-Gabriel-Florent-Auguste, father of Count Octave, was one of these favored French exiles. He was a member of the *Académie Française*, and the former French Ambassador to Constantinople. He was also an ardent monarchist. Upon his arrival in Russia, Choiseul was given the rank of Privy Counselor and a comfortable pension for life. After the assassination of Paul I, Choiseul returned to France.¹⁴

The elder Choiseul son, Octave, remained behind after his father’s return to France and founded the Russian branch of the Choiseul family. Count Octave was an officer in the French royal bodyguard and was taken at once into Russian military service. He was awarded the St. George Cross for “bravery against the Polish rebels”.¹⁵ In 1805 he married a Polish countess, Victoria Potocki. The Potacki family was loyally pro-

¹²Ibid., xi.

¹³Lowrie, 7.

¹⁴Ibid., 10.

¹⁵Ibid.

Russian. During the second partition of Poland Catherine's appeal to save Poland from the dangerous ideas of the French Revolution was answered by a group of aristocrats headed by count Felix-Stanislas Potocki. After the third partition of Poland Catherine accepted Count Felix into her army with the rank of general. It was his daughter who married Count Octave Choiseul and became Berdyaev's great grandmother.¹⁶

Upon his father's death Octave Choiseul, already a subject of the Tsar, inherited the title "Peer of France". He attempted to arrange double nationality for himself. Although unsuccessful in this attempt at dual citizenship, his family continued to think of themselves as members of the aristocracy of both countries. Octave's only daughter, Josephine-Mathilda married a Russian Orthodox. She met Prince Kudasheff in Paris at one of the court balls of Napoleon III. Their daughter became Berdyaev's mother.¹⁷

The Berdyaev family name was first listed among the Russian nobility at the end of the sixteenth century. Boris Godunoff granted the Berdyaev family large estates for services to the state. Subsequent ancestors had increased the family fortunes. Nicolas Berdyaev's father inherited an estate with 960 souls. Due to a combination of economic reversals the estate, Obuchovo, had to be sold. The father, Alexander Michailovitch grieved over the loss all his life. Berdyaev says that his father "always had a tendency toward ruination"¹⁸ There were other circumstances, however, that added to the financial problems of the family. The liberation of the serfs brought impoverishment to much of the gentry. Alexander Michailovitch, who strongly supported the abolition of serfdom, was never able to find another means of making a living. Berdyaev explains that

¹⁶Ibid., 10-11.

¹⁷Ibid., 11.

¹⁸Ibid., 14-15.

fortunately there was another estate in western Poland. Because it was entailed it could not be sold. "This saved us from complete ruin."¹⁹

At times in his writing Berdyaev acknowledges the importance of the memories, emotions, and actions of his childhood while at other times he tends to deny their importance. The one thing he can agree with himself on is a passion for independence that is evident from the earliest period of his life. Although Berdyaev admits that he "was egotistic", he says that he "was not egocentric"²⁰ His reminiscences, however, show an egocentric child; a child bent on independence.

According to Berdyaev, no one controlled him. Certainly his parents did not. Berdyaev wrote in his autobiography, "I was never conscious of 'belonging' to my parents."²¹ Although Berdyaev stated that he loved his mother and father, he described an interesting reversal of roles and says that the love he felt toward his parents "is rather of a father than of a son."²² The familial "relations of kindred, the ties of blood, the 'generic' evoked a strange aversion in me."²³ Specifically he said that "I was always repelled by family resemblances, as between parents and children, brothers and sister...I only held dear the distinctly individual, the particular in man."²⁴

It is understandable that Berdyaev exhibited some aversion to the idea of familial resemblances. The home that Berdyaev was born into was, by his own account, strange. He says that "my family was particularly prone to nervous disorders, and my mother used to say that, unlike the Kudashevs, the Berdyaevs were not quite normal"²⁵ His parents had been married sixteen years when he was born. The only other child, his brother

¹⁹Ibid., 15.

²⁰Ibid., 31.

²¹Ibid., 15.

²²Ibid., 16.

²³Ibid., 15.

²⁴Ibid., 15-16.

²⁵Ibid., 29.

Serge, was fifteen years older. There were constant tensions within the family and Berdyaev relates that he had to play the part of peacemaker. "My brother was distinctly neurotic, and some considered him quite abnormal. I suspect that this background must have affected my subconscious."²⁶ When Serge broke off relations with his parents after his marriage outside of the aristocratic circle, Nicolas Alexandrovich remained in contact with his brother. He tried for years to restore the broken bond between the parents and the alienated child. It is likely that his role as intermediary in his divided family contributed to Berdyaev's lifelong fascination with the idea of struggle between opposing forces.

The entire Berdyaev household manifested varying degrees of neurosis, mental disturbance and hypochondriases. Berdyaev wrote, "Our house was periodically visited by every kind of medical specialist who examined all the members of our family."²⁷ Of his mother he said that she "suffered for fourteen years from a serious liver complaint. She had frequent attacks at night...on every such occasion it was thought that she might die." His father was "perpetually undergoing cures of some kind, and I myself was constantly treated for one complaint or another. Some members of our family suffered from neuroses, and I have inherited a nervousness which expresses itself in spasmodic movements."²⁸

Berdyaev's father was "a man of considerable culture and learning" who had a fine library. He "owned books in half a dozen languages and he had read them all."²⁹ The child Berdyaev "from his earliest days grew up surrounded by books, chiefly philosophy and history."³⁰ At young age "he was making his own plans for his reading

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., 15.

³⁰Ibid., 12.

and thinking” and knew that he would devote his life to philosophy.³¹ By the age of fourteen he had read Hegel and “deeply breathed in” Schopenhauer; by the time of his final examinations at cadet school at seventeen he had “mastered John Stuart Mill’s Logic and Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason.”³² It is no accident that the adult Berdyaev immersed himself in the bookish world. He decided early in his life that he would become an intellectual. Berdyaev’s father as well as his grandfather exhibited a “liberal” general outlook. As a freethinker the father, Alexander Michailovitch, took pleasure in criticizing religion and the church. “At the table he would often read aloud portions of the Bible, adding his own sarcastic comments.”³³ Berdyaev also became a liberal and a critic of organized religion. Paradoxically, he also became a great philosopher of Christian existentialism. Berdyaev’s says that his liberal tendencies were “a direct inheritance from his father and grandfather”³⁴ Berdyaev’s father was a “very good and kind man” who was, however, “extremely impetuous” and “inclined to outbursts of anger.” He had many conflicts and quarrels in life on this account.”³⁵ This could also be said of Berdyaev. His relationships with friends and colleagues suffered from his outbursts of anger. His life was punctuated by fits of impetuosity and emotional reaction. He confesses that he “inherited a hot and irascible temper. As a small boy I used to strike out in anger. These characteristics bred willfulness in my behavior and attitude to life.”³⁶ As an adult Berdyaev admitted to fearful fits of anger: “sometimes, when alone in a room, I would conjure up my foe and become enflamed with anger.”³⁷

³¹Ibid., 28.

³²Ibid., 29.

³³Ibid., 16-17.

³⁴Ibid., 12.

³⁵Berdyaev, Dream and Reality. 19.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid., 39.

Berdyaev's mother might have determined his personality even more than his father, but Berdyaev fervently denied her influence in his life. In a statement that would warm the hearts of psychoanalysts, Berdyaev recollects: "My own mother was strikingly beautiful, but I was never able to discover the relevance of anything remotely approaching the Oedipus Complex."³⁸ This denial of a strong attachment to his mother was interesting in its boldness. Many of Berdyaev's western tendencies came about because of her influence. "She was half-French" he noted. Moreover, "at heart my mother was more French than Russian."³⁹

Berdyaev's mother received a French education, and in early youth spent a great deal of time in Paris. As an extreme westerner Madame Berdyaev "wrote letters exclusively in French and never learnt to write correct Russian." She was similar to the parodies of westernizing Russians in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. In the Berdyaev household, as was the fashion in many aristocratic Russian homes, French was spoken almost exclusively. This extreme westernizing, francophile attitude extended to Madame Berdyaev's religious faith. Despite the fact that "she was born in the Orthodox faith," she "felt herself to be more of a Roman Catholic, and always prayed from her mother's French prayer book."⁴⁰ It is no accident that Berdyaev chose later in life, after his exile in Russia, to live in Paris. He acknowledged that this was because of early memories associated with the times he spent with his mother in Paris.

Berdyaev's independence was very likely a direct result of the child rearing practices of his parents. Nicholas' father and mother adopted a *laissez faire* attitude towards their young son. Berdyaev recounted in later years that he was never constrained

³⁸Ibid., 16.

³⁹Ibid., 16-17.

⁴⁰Ibid.

or obliged to do anything in childhood. "I cannot recall that I was ever punished."⁴¹ This despite the fact that young Nicholas exhibited his "fits of temper" quite often. This lack of control by his parents bore fruit and resulted in his spirit of independence, but equally as important, it also resulted in a need for order in the growing child. The duality of a mania for independence and the necessity of order haunted his life. He openly discussed this paradox of his personality and was capable of piercing analysis of himself. He wrote, "I have always been almost pedantically regular in my habits. I liked the day to be ordered and arranged according to plan and I could not bear the least disturbance of things on my writing table."⁴² And looking deeply into his own nature he observed that "This is the reverse side of my inborn anarchism and suspicion of all authority, social or otherwise."⁴³

Berdyaev's search for order, an order determined by himself, dominated his childhood. His penchant for "arranging my own room" and keeping it "separate from the rest of the house" was a manifestation of this need for order. He wrote that "I could not bear anyone to encroach on my domain and the things pertaining to it."⁴⁴ This pattern persisted to the end of his life. All through his life, Berdyaev made certain that no one, not parents, not society, not ideologies, not even God, would encroach on his "domain" unless it was on his own terms.

The dynamics of family life created a need for personal autonomy and order. He translated that need into his personal world vision. In his self-analysis Berdyaev emerged as a creature in control rather than one controlled. "Above all other things I cherished my independence." His "whole feeling for life" was "born of an intense love of freedom."⁴⁵

⁴¹Ibid., 30.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid., 31.

⁴⁵Ibid.

While Berdyaev's denied being molded by his parents or family, both his words and deeds demonstrated the opposite. Both his parents and his brother influenced him enormously. Family lore and traditions were also powerful forces in Berdyaev's life. Because of the intensity of the family relationships he struggled mightily to preserve his individuality and be his own person.

Some family traditions manifested themselves in unusual ways in Berdyaev. His political and intellectual militancy was connected to his paternal family background. Berdyaev came from a military family but he hated the military. He recounts that "my forbears were generals and Knights of the Order of St. George. My grandfather was *ataman* of the Don Cossacks. My father was an officer in the Guards."⁴⁶ Berdyaev grew up on stories of family military victories and honors. He said, "my father was fond of telling the story of how my grandfather 'conquered' Napoleon at the battle of Kulmsk."⁴⁷

Berdyaev displaced the military tradition of his ancestors into political and intellectual combat. Although "repelled by everything associated with war," he constantly looked for battle. He admitted that he "is by nature militant" and tends "instinctively to react violently to my environment."⁴⁸ At times this militancy was enforced by traditional means. "I even carried a revolver around with me." Berdyaev noted that his displaced militancy "exhibits a similarity between myself and Tolstoy, who

⁴⁶Ibid., 16-17.

⁴⁷Ibid., 18. "My grandfather was in a part of the army where all the commanding officers, including the general, were killed. He was only a young lieutenant in the Guards at the time, but he had to take command of the whole brigade. He went on the offensive and fiercely attacked the French positions. The French thought that their opponents had received reinforcements. Napoleon's army was shaken and lost the battle of Kulmsk."

⁴⁸Ibid., 40.

was imbued with the same aversion to force combined with the same militant attitude to life.”⁴⁹

Rebellion and independence as well as a concomitant search for order were evident throughout Berdyaev’s youth. Although he attended the military academy in Kiev he “did not like the corps or the army” and disliked all things military.⁵⁰ His open rebellion against school regimentation added to his isolation and alienation. Not feeling at ease with his classmates the young Nicholas was isolated and lonely. He acknowledged that “I did not enjoy the company of the boys of my own age and avoided mixing in their society.” He condemned the usually “manly” talk in military school: “To this day I consider that there are few things more revolting than the kind of conversation which goes on among young boys.”

Berdyaev’s isolation and discomfort was heightened because the boys at school “laughed at the nervous tic from which I had suffered from childhood.”⁵¹ Since school caused discomfort, young Nicholas created a world of his own; a world where he could escape from the dangerous world around him. The outside world “never seemed to belong to me. I was acutely aware of being peculiar, unlike everyone else.”⁵²

In his own world, a world he created and ordered, Berdyaev could triumph. The world of ideas, the intellectual world comforted him. In this world boasted Berdyaev: “I am not at all shy. I have always spoken and acted openly and with confidence.”⁵³ He was the active master of his fate in the ethereal world where “there were no questions of practical, everyday life involved.” As an adult engaged in self-analysis Berdyaev saw his

⁴⁹Ibid., 40.

⁵⁰Ibid., 23.

⁵¹Ibid., 24.

⁵²Ibid., 31.

⁵³Ibid.

true condition: "I think that all this has something to do with the predominance of imagination and vision over the brute matter-of-factness of life."⁵⁴

As a university student Berdyaev's restlessness and rebellion found new outlets. Berdyaev entered The University at Kiev in 1894. He described his student generation as being "lifted by the mighty new wave of social thought."⁵⁵ It was during this time that Marxism penetrated deeply into the intellectual life of Russia and of Nicolas Berdyaev. With its 'scientific' answers to all the problems of mankind, this radical ideology was as appealing to Berdyaev, as it was to many young liberals. Berdyaev became a radical. He turned against the social class into which he had been born and "maintained only the minimum permissible contact with kinfolk, excepting his parents."⁵⁶

Those groups shunned by polite society were embraced by Berdyaev. He made friends with the "despised Jews from 'the Podol' of whom his parents disapproved."⁵⁷ Like many other students of the time he "engaged in subterranean political activity, both in and outside the university."⁵⁸ In 1897 Berdyaev was arrested during a demonstration against the government but, due to the influence of his father, was released with a stern warning. He continued to work for a clandestine revolutionary press and was arrested a second time. In 1900 Berdyaev and some of his "partners in crime were sentenced to three years exile in the northern province of Vologda."⁵⁹ Berdyaev acknowledged that because of his family connections he was allowed to live in relative luxury in the city during his exile. He "took the best room in the best hotel, and there with two summer

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Lowrie, 40.

⁵⁶Nicolas Berdyaev, Christian Existentialism: A Berdyaev Synthesis, selected and translated by Donald A. Lowrie, (New York: Harper Torchbooks), 16.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid., 16-17.

vacations at home to break the monotony of the term served out his sentence.”⁶⁰

Berdyayev told of an incident during this period that exemplifies the irony of his life as a privileged aristocrat trying to destroy the established order.

I enjoyed a favorable position in exile, since the governor of Vologda was a distant relative of mine and a great friend of my uncle. It seems that my uncle and godfather, Prince Lopoukhine-Demidov, had expressed his indignation to the Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich at the deportation of his darling nephew and godson to the province of Vologda, and requested my transfer to the south. The Grand Duke at once gave the necessary instructions to the Minister of the Interior and I received the offer that my uncle requested. I did not accept.⁶¹

There were many intellectual exiles living in Vologda during this period and “their life was interesting and exciting.”⁶² They formed the ‘Union of Exiles’ and spent their time engaged in debates, discussions, public meetings and lectures centered around the same topics that were of concern to Russian intellectuals throughout the empire. Later in his life Berdyayev wrote that during this time the Marxist, himself included, were certain that the future belonged to them.”⁶³ Russia was “astir with the social ferment that culminated in the abortive 1905 revolution.”⁶⁴ It was at this time that a movement toward idealism began to lure many intellectuals away from radical Marxism. Berdyayev was one the leaders in this movement. Idealism was the first serious challenge to Marxism among the Russian intellectuals.⁶⁵

⁶⁰Ibid., 16.

⁶¹Berdyayev, *Dream and Reality*, 132.

⁶²Berdyayev, *Christian Existentialism*, 17.

⁶³Lowrie, 40

⁶⁴Berdyayev, *Christian Existentialism*, 16, 44. Berdyayev sees the early form of Marxism as different from the later form that developed into Bolshevism.

⁶⁵Ibid., 17.

In 1904 Berdyaev moved to St. Petersburg and became a part of an intellectual movement that was “straining against the confines of the established order.”⁶⁶ This movement was drawing many members of Berdyaev’s circle of friends away from Bolshevism. The Bolshevik activists held beliefs that many of these young intellectuals criticized as “materialistic and utilitarian.”⁶⁷ Berdyaev, like other young Russian intellectuals, followed the lure of art but, unlike many of his associates, did not find the ultimate answers to the world’s problems in artistic expression. Instead Berdyaev moved into the unique inner world of his own creation. In Berdyaev’s life “many ideologies and philosophies crossed his path; each was tested, ruminated upon, and then transformed by his uniquely personal thinking into something his own.”⁶⁸ Later in life Berdyaev’s quest led him to the creation of his most radical insight, a unique vision of both God and mankind.

When Berdyaev began distancing himself from radical political activity there were intermittent periods of hesitancy and confusion. All along his political, philosophical and intellectual odyssey Berdyaev considered the positives and the negatives of many ideologies and his writings reflect his internal strife. The twists and turns of Berdyaev’s life were manifestations of what he called his personal search for truth and understanding. Indeed “his search for truth was open-ended” and it is important to view Berdyaev’s writings as an evolving work of self-discovery.⁶⁹ No part of his intellectual history can be considered static. His creativity was a product of constant mental movement. His ideas were in a constant state of change and evolution.

⁶⁶Nicolas Riasanovsky, A History of Russia. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 502.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Lowrie, 241.

⁶⁹David Rowley, Millenarian Bolshevism, 1900 to 1920, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987), 22.

For Berdyaev the facts of his revolutionary experiences, imprisonment, banishment and exile were far less real than his epic struggles of the spirit, encounters with mystics and prophets and primordial battles between good and evil. This in part explains why Berdyaev is one of the most widely read and least understood of Russian philosophers. Berdyaev's warning about Dostoevsky is also true about Berdyaev himself. "His books had better be left alone unless the reader is prepared to be immersed in a vast strange universe of ideas." His work is "a veritable feast of thought, and those who will not sit down to table because their skeptical minds deny the usefulness of all thought, are self-condemned to a diminution and dulling of their own spiritual experience."⁷⁰

Isaiah Berlin, intellectual historian and scholar of Russian history, classifies the world's great thinkers into two categories. The categories are based on a world vision—a vision of "the one" as opposed to a vision of "the many." Those who seek some unitary vision of the world are the hedgehogs, and those who observe the variety of the world are the foxes.⁷¹ The hedgehog is a dedicated prophet, a bearer of a single, universal message, a monist. The fox is a pluralist who "does not insist on relating what is not related."⁷² Dante, Plato, Lucretius, Pascal, Hegel, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Ibsen and Proust are, in varying degrees, hedgehogs; Shakespeare, Herodotus, Aristotle, Montaigne, Erasmus, Molière, Goethe, Pushkin, Balzac and Joyce are foxes. The focus of Berlin's study was Leo Tolstoy who, uniquely, "was by nature a fox, but believed in being a hedgehog."

⁷⁰Berdyaev, *Dostoevsky*, 12-13.

⁷¹Isaiah Berlin, *The Hedgehog and The Fox*. [New York: The New American Library, 1957], 7. This idea comes from a line found in the fragments of the Greek poet Archilochus.

⁷²Ibid.

Tolstoy could “neither reconcile, nor leave unreconciled, the conflict of what there is with what there ought to be.”⁷³

Although not among Berlin’s subjects for study, Nicolas Berdyaev fits into Berlin’s dichotomous classification. Like Tolstoy, Berdyaev was by nature one thing while wanting to be something else. He could not abide any kind of orthodoxy or universal ideology. He studied and investigated many theories and systems. He tried, tested and turned away from ideas that many intellectuals and activist of his generation embraced. He was an “uncompromising rebel against all forms of authoritarianism, political or religious, left or right.”⁷⁴ But even while rejecting all ideologies, all orthodoxy and all systems of authority, Berdyaev, by nature a fox, dreamed of being a hedgehog. The need for order drove him, unsuccessfully, in search of an ideology while the need for freedom led him to reject all ideologies. This contradiction was the source of the intense struggle between the hedgehog and the fox within Berdyaev.

Berdyaev had an instinctive distrust of all monist visions of the world. He saw utopian universal schemes for mankind as the supreme threat to personal freedom. His opposition to popular ideologies in defense of freedom lost him friends over and over during his lifetime. Berdyaev could not abide the certainty of demagogues whether in politics, philosophy or religion. His vacillations were understandable when viewed from his personal world vision. The dual search for freedom and order always formed the basis of Berdyaev’s political philosophy. He spent his entire political life alternately embracing and rejecting political world-views.

At various times in his life Berdyaev agreed with some Slavophile beliefs, some international communistic beliefs, and some localized democratic beliefs. But, at other

⁷³Ibid., 123.

⁷⁴Ibid., 73.

times Berdyaev attacked these same ideas. The result of this duality has led observers to place Berdyaev in various political camps.⁷⁵ He has been classified as a Slavophile and a Westerner, a communist and a democrat, an Orthodox Christian and a heretic. These rigid categories do not, however, hold the amorphous nature of Berdyaev's intellectual and political philosophy. His political ideology, as well as his personal life, is filled with contradictions.⁷⁶ Berdyaev himself was all too painfully aware of the divisions within his life. In his autobiography he revealed a series of contradictions within himself. As he contemplated his personal divisions and struggles he drew a parallel with the divisions and struggles of Russia. "I inherit the tradition of the Slavophiles and the Westernizers;

⁷⁵The apparent contradictions of Berdyaev's ideas are partially a result of his capacity for holding two opposing ideas without rejecting either. In this he is distinctly un-Russian. The statement of Leon Shestov, Berdyaev's best and only life-long male friend, explains the thinking of both Shestov and Berdyaev concerning their intellectual inconsistencies. Leon Shestov, Revelations of Death: Dostoievsky and Tolstoy, (Paris: [no publisher given], 1923) xii-xiii. Quotation and citation in M.-M. Davy, Nicolas Berdyaev: Man of the Eighth Day, trans. Leonora Siepmann (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1967), 53. "People are shocked when I gave two contradictory judgments simultaneously." Furthermore they "insist that I reject one of the two, or that out of respect for the conventions I don't give them at the same time." He adds that "While I am frank about my contradictions they prefer to hide theirs from themselves." Davy, who knew both Shestov and Berdyaev, says that Shestov's description accurately describes the thinking of both men.

⁷⁶Berdyaev, The Russian Idea, 1-2. Berdyaev draws a parallel between himself and Russia. Russia, like Berdyaev, is polarized and at war internally. Russia, like Berdyaev, is a conglomeration of contradictions. The unexpected is always to be expected from the Russians. Berdyaev says "The Russians have not been given to moderation and they have readily gone to extremes." He describes the source of Russia's unpredictability as being "the anarchic element in Russian history at war with that of absolutism and despotism of the State. One can be charmed by them, one can be disillusioned. They are as a people capable in the highest degree of inspiring both intense love and violent hatred." This could be a description of Berdyaev himself. With a need for both order and freedom driving him Berdyaev identifies with the dual nature of Russia.

Berdyaev explains the inconsistencies and complexity of Russia as being "due to the fact that in Russia two streams of world history-East and West-jostle and influence, one another." Just as Russia struggles to create a synthesis between two worlds and two worldviews so does Berdyaev. Whereas Russia is not purely either east or west, neither can it deny one or the other part. "Within the Russian soul two principles are always engaged in strife-the Eastern and the Western." He acknowledges that extremes are dangerous, both for Russia and for himself. They can lead ultimately to either chaos or oppression in both society and in the individual. Berdyaev does not despair for Russia, or himself, however. He can see the potential for creativity, as well as the potential for destruction, in conflicting opposites. He sees hope in the synthesizing of Russia's western and eastern tendencies. It is on this point that he most disagrees with the Slavophile national vision. Berdyaev believes that with the harmonizing of conflicting ideas, the national spirit will move toward both order and creativity.

the tradition of Herzen...Bakunin and Chernishevsky.” “Above all,” he said, “I am heir of the tradition of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy...I am a Russian”⁷⁷

Although Berdyaev could never stay with any movement or system of thought for very long he did have great intellectual passions. These passions were often directed toward the current intellectual trend. The one intellectual commitment to which he remained faithful to the end of his life was the idea that freedom of the spirit is essential for the dignity of mankind.⁷⁸

Although Berdyaev is called a ‘a dedicated prophet, a bearer of a single, universal message’ it is a message addressed to himself only. He is a prophet of personal freedom and preaches resistance to any universal system, either on heaven or earth. His vision is one of spiritual anarchy which is “not accommodating and harmonious with the world.”⁷⁹

To Berdyaev freedom was the most important thing in life and that freedom demanded resistance and opposition to all universal belief systems. The result of such resistance was division and separation. Berdyaev’s vision of freedom dominated his personal life, his political philosophy, and his intellectual ideology.

Some have called me the philosopher of freedom, and a reactionary. A Russian bishop once said of me that I was ‘the captive of freedom’. I do indeed love freedom above all else. Man came forth out of freedom and issues into freedom. Freedom is a primordial source and condition of existence, and characteristically, I have put Freedom, rather than Being, at the basis of my philosophy.⁸⁰

Berdyaev’s acknowledged that his obsession with freedom set up a paradox in his life. He sought order because of his internal chaos, yet he constantly resisted every

⁷⁷Ibid., xi.

⁷⁸Lowrie, 245.

⁷⁹Berdyaev, *Dream and Reality*, 46.

⁸⁰Berdyaev, *Dream and Reality*, 56.

manifestation of order including ideologies, orthodoxy and social conventions.⁸¹ He says “I love order just because in the depth of my being chaos moves darkly.”⁸² The need to order the dark chaos within himself was the reason that Berdyaev searched throughout his life for a unifying vision or system. The need for freedom was the reason that he failed.

Berdyaev realized that the contradiction of order and chaos set him apart from those around him. “There are two fundamentally different types of people. Those whose relationship with the world is accommodating and harmonious” are one type. The other type are “those who are continually at variance” with the world. He acknowledged that “I am of the second type.”⁸³ He said, “from the beginning I was in an alien realm.” This sense of disharmony, of alienation, of separation was part of a life at the edge of an abyss. Beginning with childhood and continuing throughout his life Berdyaev attempted to create his own order out of chaos. In his theory of God-manhood he made alienation and separation a requisite for creation.

Berdyaev’s personal history was rich in examples of inner conflict and struggle. Berdyaev knew Freudian theory and referred to it often. In his autobiography he engaged in a great deal of self-analysis. Berdyaev observed that “memory and oblivion alternate in human life; that things disappear from my consciousness and are yet preserved at a deeper level.”⁸⁴ The memories “preserved at a deeper level” were woven into the pattern of Berdyaev’s life. He remembered, “As a child I lived in this world of mine and never merged with the world around, for the latter never seemed to belong to me.”⁸⁵ Berdyaev was in the world but not of the world. Like Tolstoy, Berdyaev was a fox who wanted to

⁸¹This paradox is consistent with both the fourteenth century philosophical theory of *Ungrund* as well as with modern psychoanalytical theory.

⁸²Lowrie, 181.

⁸³Berdyaev, *Dream and Reality*, 46.

⁸⁴Lowrie, x.

⁸⁵Berdyaev, *Dream and Reality*, 31.

be a hedgehog, but unlike Tolstoy he failed. The conflict between his need for order and his passion for freedom resulted in a lifelong struggle that tormented him to the end of his life.

Berdyayev's life was the story of a divided soul. He struggled with this throughout his life. He mused, "I was always conscious of myself as living in many dimensions and on many levels."⁸⁶ But in every dimension and on every level Berdyayev clung to a vision that keeps him whole. That vision was his concept of personal freedom. He constantly attempted, as shown in his writings, to harmonize the disharmony within himself. His need to bring order out of chaos; his obsession with protecting his individualism; his struggles to harmonize and synthesize contradicting and opposing ideas; these answered the riddle of Nicholas Berdyayev. Berdyayev's entire life was a futile struggle of "harmonizing the discords of an increasingly disturbed world."⁸⁷

⁸⁶Ibid., 37.

⁸⁷James H. Billington, The Icon and the Axe, (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 46.

CHAPTER II
THE WORLD OF BERDYAEV: EVOLUTION OF HIS THOUGHT
IN THE SILVER AGE

I have never doubted the existence of God,
even, and perhaps least of all, when I denied
him.¹

Nicolas Berdyaev

The end of the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth century witnessed a magnificent literary and artistic revival in Russia. This renaissance, designated the Silver Age, occurred during the decades between the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 and the revolutions of 1917. It was one of the most fascinating periods in the cultural and intellectual history of Russia and it set the stage for the political events that erupted during both the 1905 Revolution and the Revolutions of 1917.

A primary characteristic of the Silver Age was a creative merging of philosophical thought, literature, art, and social reform in a unique and powerful way.² The development of Berdyaev's ideas during this period mirrored the pre-Revolutionary intellectual history of Russia.

The Silver Age touched every form of creative expression including prose and poetry, music, theater, ballet, painting and sculpture. The excitement and optimism of the period enveloped Russian political, philosophical and religious thought as well as

¹Berdyaev, *Dream and Reality*, 288.

²Billington, 480. At the height of the Silver Age Berdyaev and his fellow intellectuals were excited over the possibility of solving the social questions of the age through art. They sought answers that would be applicable for all mankind. The romantic idea that different art forms were all expressive of a common spiritual truth was not new. It had been a strong belief in the Russian Golden Age of Pushkin and Turgenev. In Russia's Silver Age the belief in the power of human creativity was revived and intensified

literature and art. Many Russian intellectuals came to believe in the possibility of blending artistic creativity with social thought in order to bring about political reform.³

In the early stages of the Silver Age intellectual political activists explored radicalism, dialectical materialism and utilitarianism. Ideologies as varied as Marxism and constitutional liberalism were introduced into Russia. The period included the prose of Dostoevsky, Chekhov and Gorky and the poetry of Alexander Blok. The music of Modest Musorgsky and the paintings of Michael Vrubel reflected the spirit of the Silver Age. There was a revival in philosophy led by Vladimir Solov'ev. Kant's theories as well as the mystical idealism of Jacob Boehme were popular. In political thought George Plekhanov popularized dialectical materialism while Paul Miliukov advocated constitutional liberalism. This pre-Revolutionary period was intellectually rich and diverse despite long periods of political oppression under Tsars Alexander III and Nicolas II.

Berdyayev's intellectual journey paralleled the intellectual developments of the Russian Silver Age. He shared the artistic, literary and political optimism of the period. His writings chronicled Russia's early encounters with the ideas of anti-Enlightenment romanticism, materialism and positivism and he became caught up in the debate between Slavophiles and Westernizers. He represented the evolution of many Russian intellectuals from an early interest in western ideologies and utopian systems to later disappointment and rejection. Indeed Berdyayev was the personification of Russia's Silver Age and his experiences and writings illuminated this important time in Russian intellectual and political history.

At the beginning of the twentieth century when the Russian intellectual and artistic renaissance was in full flower new visions and new values were clashing with the

³Riasanovsky, 483-4.

old ideas of the nineteenth century. These conflicts became a potent force in Russian politics. Many of the conflicts of the new century were revivals of the nineteenth century struggle between the ideas of the Age of Reason and the Romantic movement. The polarization of these opposing world views created an atmosphere charged with creative energy. Romanticism's reaction against rationalism and, conversely, rationalism's outright dismissal of romanticism, fueled intense debates in the realms of art, literature, religion, education, social reform programs and politics.

Many educated Russians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries admired and shared in the Enlightenment. Eighteenth-century liberalism or radicalism persisted well into the nineteenth century in Russia and was incorporated into groups as diverse as Alexander I's Unofficial Committee and the Decembrists.⁴ But during the 1830's and 1840's the intellectual scene changed. Romanticism and German idealistic philosophers replaced the Enlightenment and French philosophes as guides for European intellectual thought in general and Russian thought in particular. The force of two German philosophers, Schelling and Hegel, exercised a particularly strong influence on the Russians.⁵ In addition to German romanticism Russian intellectuals became enthralled with nationalist myths and the mythical glories of medieval Russia.

The general intellectual debates of Europe took on unique forms in Russia. The conflicting views of the Slavophiles and Westernizers were two important ideologies that

⁴Riasanovsky, 336. The Unofficial Committee was formed immediately upon the crowning of the twenty-three year old Alexander I in 1801. The new emperor decided to transform Russia with the help of four young, cultivated, intelligent, and liberal friends. The members of the committee reflected the enlightened opinion of the period, ranging from Anglophilism to Jacobin connections. *Ibid.*, 355. The Decembrists were liberals in the tradition of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution; They wanted to establish constitutionalism and basic freedoms in Russia, and to abolish serfdom. They were called "our lords who wanted to become shoemakers." In December 1825 they led an unsuccessful uprising against the rule of the new Tsar Nicolas I.

⁵*Ibid.*, 399.

competed for the favor of the educated public.⁶ Both the Slavophiles and the Westernizers began with the assumptions of the German idealistic philosophers, but their interpretations and conclusions were very different.⁷

Slavophilism became a major theme in Russian thought during the 1830's and continued as a topic of debate in Russian intellectual circles into the twentieth century.⁸ The Slavophiles were system builders with a worldview described as "a conservative utopia."⁹ They were a group of romantic intellectuals who crafted a comprehensive ideology centered on their belief in the superior nature and the supreme historical mission of Orthodoxy and of Russia. The Slavophiles dreamed of a future world based on "integration, peace, and harmony among men."¹⁰ They dreamed of a past world in which many of these conditions existed. Historically, they argued, a similar harmonious integration of individuals could be found in certain aspects of the social life of the Slavs, such as the peasant communes, and in the ancient Russian institution of the *zemskii sober*.¹¹

In opposition to the harmonious past stood the world of rationalism. The Age of Enlightenment was seen as an interruption in the natural historical progression of Russia. From the Slavophile perspective rationalism could be found at every level of life,

⁶Ibid., 401. The Slavophiles and the Westernizers developed independent, as opposed to government-sponsored, schools of thought. Official Nationality represented the point of view of the government and the Right.

⁷Ibid., 403.

⁸Ibid., 500. A virulent manifestation of the ideology of the Slavophiles develops as Pan-Slavism. The term Pan-Slavism was first used in 1826 by Jan Herkel. It was an expansionist messianism with overtones of racial superiority. (Carter, 19) Later in the nineteenth century Pan-Slavism had several prophets, including Dostoevsky.

⁹Stephen K. Carter, *Russian Nationalism*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 18.

¹⁰Riasanovsky, 401-402. On the religious plane Slavophilism produced the concept of *sobornost*, an association of believers bound together by the precepts of love, freedom and truth.

¹¹Ibid., 401-402, 209. The *zemskie sobory* were sporadic gatherings convened by the Tsar when he wanted to discuss and decide an important issue "with all the land." The assembly of 1471, called by Ivan II before his campaign against Novgorod, was a forerunner of the *zemskie sobory*. The first full-fledged *zemskie sobory* were called on several occasions from 1549-1580 by Ivan the Terrible.

religious, metaphysical, social and political. It was rampant in the Roman Catholic Church which had chosen rationalism and authority over inspiration and autonomy; it was intrinsic in Protestantism; it pervaded the entire civilization of the West; it was especially pervasive in the reforms of Peter the Great which had introduced the principles of rationalism, legalism and compulsion in Russia. The Slavophiles thought the West “too rational, too mechanistic, too atomized and too individualistic.”¹² Russia had to be “cured of the western disease” and return to its native principles. After being cured, Russia would take the message of salvation to the dying West.¹³ The idea of Russia as the moral force of the future became a messianic vision. The worse the conditions in Russia became the more important the vision.

Politically the Slavophiles preferred autocracy. They believed that only did autocracy have historical roots in ancient Russia but liberated society from the heavy and potentially corrupting burden of exercising power. Under autocracy the entire weight of authority was placed on a single individual.¹⁴ This attitude of the Slavophiles towards authority had precedent in Russian popular culture. An example of this idea in Russian mythology is “The Legend of the Call of the Variags.” It is an allegory that expressed a strongly held view of the relationship of the Russian people towards power.¹⁵ Although the legend was composed after the Variags had already conquered the Slavonians, it conveyed an interesting rationalization of oppression that fit easily within the Slavophile system. The invitation that the Slavonians composed declared, “We ourselves do not wish to participate in the sins of power. If you do not regard it as a sin, come and govern

¹²Carter, 18.

¹³Riasanovsky, 401-402.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Leo Tolstoy, *Essays From Tula*, “The Voice of Conscience from Another World, An Introduction” by Nicolas Berdyaev. Translation by Evgeny Lanmpert, (London: Sheppard Press, 1948), 243. The “Legend of the Call of the Variags” tells how in 826 CE the Slavonic tribes of Russia invited the Variags, who were of Scandinavian origin, to rule over them.

us.”¹⁶ The Slavophiles saw the “sins of power” as a temptation placed before Russia by Western rationalism, liberal constitutionalism and Enlightenment thought. By resisting the temptation to sin Russia avoided corruption of its superior values. Thus submission and obedience became attributes of the blessed. From this perspective the Russian people preferred submission to violence rather than participation in the violence of power. Because of this attitude “The Russian nation more than other nations has conserved true brotherhood, equality, humility, and love.”¹⁷

Paradoxically, while Slavophile ideology advocated political submission, it came close to religious anarchy. Although the Slavophiles believed in the superior nature and supreme historical mission of Orthodoxy, they condemned all legalism and compulsion in spiritual matters.¹⁸ They viewed the seventeenth-century schism within the church, the *Raskol'niki*, as being a protest against the policy of centralization and conformity that threatened to destroy ancient and mystical components of the indigenous religion of Russia.¹⁹

The Westernizers were more diverse than the Slavophiles. They represented many different social classes as well as different political perspectives. There was no one ideology or any kind of comprehensive system on which Westernizers agreed. Both Michael Bakunin and Vissarion Belinsky were Westernizers.²⁰ Alexander Herzen, although at first under the spell of the Slavophiles, by the ‘fifties’ and ‘sixties’ was an

¹⁶Ibid., 243.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Riasanovsky, 401-402.

¹⁹Stuart R. Thompkins, The Russian Intelligentsia: Makers of the Revolutionary State. (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), 54.

²⁰Ibid. Bakunin, 1814-76, who came from a gentry home is known as “the ‘founder of nihilism and apostle of anarchy.’” Belinsky, 1811-48, whose father was an impoverished doctor, became the most famous Russian literary critic of his time.

extreme Westernizer and advocate of Western political and economic ideas.²¹ The Westernizers generally supported mildly liberal programs with an emphasis on gradualism and popular enlightenment. They took a positive view of Western political and economic development. While they praised the work of Peter the Great they wanted even further westernization. Religion was not usually an important aspect of the worldview of the Westernizers, although some turned to agnosticism and Bakunin developed a violent atheism.²²

Berdyayev refused to adopt the Slavophile ideology that depicted Russia as a victim of Western ideas and ideologies. He did not blame the West for Russia's problems and saw many aspects of Western thought and life that could benefit Russia. In a strong criticism of the Russian intelligentsia he declared that "It is unworthy of free beings always to blame everything on external forces and thus justify their own failings. Russia can only be freed from its "internal bondage" when "we accept responsibility and cease blaming everything on others". Russia must rely on what Berdyayev called its own "spiritual values."²³ In this turn toward the spiritual Berdyayev was representative of an active segment of Russian intellectuals during the Silver Age.

Throughout Berdyayev's writings there were references to the debate between the Slavophiles and the Westernizers. He turned often to a discussion of the Slavophile vision for Russia. Even though he agreed with some aspects of the Slavophile view he rejected the agenda of the Slavophiles as a dangerous ideology that threatened individual

²¹Isaiah Berlin, "Introduction", The Memoirs of Alexander Herzen: My Past & Thoughts, (Berkeley: University of California [sic] Press, 1973), xxv. In 1847 Herzen emigrated to Paris, never to return to Russia. He became the spokesman for the Westernizers but always maintained his connections to the Slavophiles. Although he viewed the Slavophiles as romantic reactionaries and misguided nationalists, he valued them as potential allies against the Tsarist bureaucracy. Stuart R. Thompkins, The Russian Intelligentsia: Makers of the Revolutionary State, (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), 57.

²²Riasanovsky, 403.

²³Ibid., 16.

freedom. In his analysis of the debate between Slavophiles and Westerners Berdyaev saw the conflict as another example of the Russian penchant for extremism and polarization and he, predictably, rejected both extremes. “There was a visionary element in both the Slavophiles and the Westernizers...but both the Slavophile and the Westernizing points of view were mistaken” in their appraisal of Russia’s past as well as Russia’s future.²⁴

The debate between Westerners and Slavophiles demonstrated Berdyaev’s ability to interpret things differently from others. He strongly criticized the Slavophiles on three major points. He realized that although the Slavophiles and the Westernizers developed two opposing schools of thought the debate always centered on the issue of separation; to be separate or not to be separate from the West; to be separate from each other; to be all one thing or all the other.²⁵ The polarized positions were troublesome to Berdyaev because each demanded total allegiance to one and rejection of the other. There was no place for a creative synthesis, an individual viewpoint or a different way altogether. He saw the entire debate as a symptom of the alienation and stagnation within the Russian intellectual community.

A second source of concern for Berdyaev was the danger of messianic nationalism that was imbedded within the Slavophile ideology. Berdyaev made it clear throughout his writings that he was not a Russian nationalist. He opposed nationalistic movements in general and Russian nationalism in particular.²⁶ He believed that the most dangerous aspects of nationalism were found in the ideology of the Slavophiles.

Berdyaev wrote that the seventeenth century schismatics, whom the Slavophiles revered, and the nineteenth Slavophiles made the same mistake. The vision of each

²⁴Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*, 42.

²⁵Riasanovsky, 401.

²⁶Berdyaev, *Dream and Reality*, 257.

group led people “to live in the past and in the future but not in the present.”²⁷ Each group found their inspiration in “a social-apocalyptic utopia.”²⁸ Berdyaev saw the church schism of the seventeenth century as a point of “profound division of Russian life and Russian history into two streams.” Indeed it was a “deep-seated spirit of division which was to last on until the Russian revolution...It was a crisis of the Russian messianic idea.”²⁹ Berdyaev believed that the Slavophiles came to wrong conclusions because they started with wrong assumptions. They wrongly viewed history as organic. Berdyaev opposed this view of history, particularly Russian history. He wrote, “Interruption is a characteristic of Russian history. Contrary to the opinion of the Slavophiles the last thing it is, is organic.”³⁰

A third criticism that Berdyaev leveled against the Slavophiles was that their ideology combined two aspects of Russian culture that should be kept separate. Berdyaev charged that the Slavophiles confused what he called Russian super-culture with Russian pre-culture. He believed it to be the historic task of Russian self-awareness to make a distinction between the “Logos...on the Russian heights and the wild chaos in the Russian depths. The Slavophile conception...confused the Logos with chaos, super-culture with pre-culture...the Slavophile idea is neither possible nor desirable.”³¹

Berdyaev brooded about the “primeval chaos that still moves within Russia” and contrasted “the servility of the soul” with “the dizzying heights” of Russian culture.³² He

²⁷Berdyaev, The Russian Idea, 12.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid., 11. “The Schism of 1666 began over seemingly trivial questions of ceremonial details, of unison or harmony in singing, or of the use of two fingers or three in making the sign of the cross. It grew into something much greater. The theme of the Schism was the philosophical interpretation of history as it was linked to the theme of the Russian messianic work -that of bringing forth the Third Rome. Was the Russian Tsardom in fact a true Orthodox Tsardom: The feeling that God had forsaken the Tsardom was the chief directing motive of the Schism.”

³⁰Ibid., 3.

³¹Nicolas Berdyaev, The Meaning of the Creative Act, translated by Donald A. Lowrie. (London: V. Gollanz, 1955), 326.

³²Ibid.

acknowledged that Russia was least of all a land of average conditions, of average culture. Rather, "Russia has always been, in everything, a land of great contrasts and polar contradiction."³³ Berdyaev plumbed the depths of this dark topic as few others have. He wrote that among Russians there is a "double belief." In his view this "double belief," came from "a combination of the Orthodox Faith with pagan mythology and folk poetry" and provided "an explanation of many of the inconsistencies to be seen in the Russian people."³⁴

The clash of materialism, positivism and utilitarianism with metaphysics, religion and spiritualism is a familiar conflict in western culture. In Russia the struggle was the same but the manifestations were extreme: autocracy versus nihilism; schismatics within orthodoxy; class alienation; intellectual warfare; artistic revolution.

During the 1890's Marxism gained support in many intellectual communities of Europe. It also gained converts among Russian intellectuals. The Right, the conservatives and the reactionaries, had little to offer those who wanted change and reform.³⁵ Marxism appealed to scholars as well as members of the radical and revolutionary movement. Marxism, the rational counter to nineteenth century Romanticism, was scientifically convincing as well as exciting. Berdyaev saw Marxism as having the added benefit of "aiding the process of Europeanizing Russia's intelligentsia, affording, as it did, contact with the west." He said that that early Marxism had "little resemblance to the Marxism out of which Bolshevism later developed." Early Russian Marxism was "less dogmatic and less totalitarian than in later years" and it still "permitted a differentiation of spheres of thought."³⁶

³³Ibid.

³⁴Berdyaev, The Russian Idea, 3.

³⁵Riasanovsky, 499.

³⁶Lowrie, 44.

Like many university students of the time Berdyaev became interested in the reform program of the Social Democrats.³⁷ Berdyaev, as an early active Marxist, was part of the movement that organized and agitated for reform in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Late in his life Berdyaev wrote “I have asked myself more than once what compelled me to become a Marxist, albeit an unorthodox, critical and freethinking one; and why I should still have a ‘soft spot’ for Marxism.” He answered himself with varying degrees of complexity. “I could not associate myself with the socialist Populist...with its implied submissiveness to the ‘power of the soil’, and its disguised Rousseauism.”³⁸

Certainly a strong aversion to populism was a partial motive for Berdyaev’s revolutionary affiliation, but there are other explanations. He assumed the role of the rebel early in his life and never abandoned it. The rebel in search of a cause explains much of his behavior. Berdyaev acknowledged that “my adherence to revolutionary ideas appears ...to be a very complex matter.” He explained that he eventually went through “a revolution of the spirit against political revolutionaries; for at times they seemed to me not revolutionary enough, and indeed positively reactionary.” He also acknowledged, however, that his “temperament revealed...the operation of a constant duality, and aristocratic impulse within a revolutionary.” Indeed as he said he “does not follow the trail of the majority of the Russian intelligentsia.” He concluded that “Actually, I was not much of a political revolutionary.”³⁹

³⁷Marshall S. Shatz and Judith E. Zimmerman, editors and translators, *Vekhi*, 166-167. Riasanovsky, 450. “By the turn of the century Russian radicals had formed two important parties: the Social-Democratic Workers’ Party, the SD, and the Socialist Revolutionaries, the SR. The Social Democrats were founded in 1898. In 1903 the SD split into the Bolsheviks, “members of the majority” led by Vladimir Ulianov, Lenin, and the Mensheviks, “members of the minority”. The Socialist Revolutionaries represented the older populist tradition of Russian radicalism with some borrowing from Marxist doctrine. The SRs spoke for the interests of the peasantry.”

³⁸Berdyaev, *Dream and Reality*, 119.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 111.

By the spring of 1897 Berdyaev was spending most of his time in revolutionary activities among workers.⁴⁰ He took part in the sporadic student demonstrations in Kiev. In March of that year there was a call for a demonstration.⁴¹ Berdyaev felt it was his duty to go. "The demonstration took its usual course. Someone produced a red flag, the crowd sang the 'Marseillaise,' there were occasional shouted slogans of the Social Democratic party but that was all." Then there was "some scuffling with the mounted police, but no shooting, no use of Cossack whips and the police responding by marching the whole group off to prison."⁴² Berdyaev's rooms were searched, but after a few days he was released, like most of the others, with a warning to avoid trouble in the future. Berdyaev continued his underground activities.⁴³

Berdyaev wrote that Russian Marxism caused a crisis among the intelligentsia and shook their world to its very foundation. When the Marxists attempted to take an academic approach as opposed to the romantic socialism of the Russian populists. As Marxism gained converts increasingly there was "a blind acceptance of a theory without too much appreciation of what it might mean in practice." The leaders of Russian Marxism "gathered in their salons for interminable discussions, these enthusiasts accepted the world of Karl Marx as Moslems accept the Koran-any argument could be confirmed by the proper quotation."⁴⁴ Many of these young enthusiasts, "boudoir

⁴⁰Lowrie, 45. Berdyaev was recruited by a Jewish friend, a printer, who hoped that Berdyaev, "despite his 'idealist' heresies, would undertake leadership of a workers' group."

⁴¹Ibid. The demonstration was called because of the protest suicide of a female student while in Petropavlovsk Fortress in St. Petersburg.

⁴²Berdyaev, *Dream and Reality*, 121. Lowrie, 45.

⁴³Lowrie, 45-46. "1898 was a crucial year for the Social Democrats. A series of secret lectures was organized with one party member, V. O. Vodovozov speaking on the political and social systems of western Europe. "As usual these lectures were followed by endless, often violent argumentation, with Berdyaev, Longvinsky, Lunacharsky and other future Communist leaders like Ratner participating. Berdyaev's perspective in these arguments centered on his philosophical approach."

⁴⁴Ibid., 43.

Bolsheviks”, were simply not interested in people. “They did not know life, and considered it unnecessary to know it.”⁴⁵

Kiev was one of the chief centers of the underground party movement. “The clandestine press was of crucial importance in the whole Social Democratic party effort.”⁴⁶ The party’s propaganda was spread both by lectures and by the printed word. In March of 1898 the police found the printing press of the Social Democrats in Kiev, along with a list of names and addresses of activists. This discovery led to a mass roundup of suspects. Berdyaev was arrested along with about one hundred and fifty others. Almost half of those taken into custody were intellectuals and the remainder were workmen. Included were all the members of the Social Democrats’ Central Committee.

While in prison Berdyaev was allowed to have books. Many were illegal such as those by Plekhanov, Bakunin, Marx and Nietzsche. He had Shestov’s new book on Nietzsche and Dostoevsky. “He reread Tolstoy, Schopenhauer and for the first time discovered Maeterlinck and Ibsen.” Ibsen was especially important. Ibsen was like “the explosion of a bomb in him.”⁴⁷ Through his readings Berdyaev felt like a member of an elite group and he identified with all the great rebels of history. There was “Luther, rebelling against authority, Marx against capitalism, the anarchistic Bakunin, Leo Tolstoy against history and civilization, Nietzsche against reason and morality, and Ibsen against society.” From then on Ibsen, next to Dostoevsky, was Berdyaev’s favorite author. The first stirrings of what he later referred to as his inner conversion began in this prison solitude.⁴⁸

⁴⁵Ibid., 44.

⁴⁶Ibid., 46.

⁴⁷Ibid., 48-49.

⁴⁸Ibid.

Berdyayev compared his experience in Tsarist prison with his time in a Soviet jail. During his imprisonment as a student in Kiev, “the prison regime was not too severe.” Berdyayev explains that “there was a difference in the guards. In the Tsar’s prisons the students were “guarded by soldiers...to whom the prisoners were not ‘enemies of the people’...under the Soviets, on the contrary, guards are told their prisoners are ‘enemies of the revolution,’” and “the regime in prison is of the same fabric of terror as the rest of the government.”⁴⁹

After six weeks in prison Berdyayev was released under the recognizance of professors of the university until the court decided his case. The case of the young revolutionaries of Kiev was not resolved for two years. Most of the group, almost all the Social Democrats, were sentenced to two years exile to the northern province of Vologda under police surveillance.⁵⁰ Along with the court decision came expulsion from the University.⁵¹

Berdyayev recalled the two years of waiting for trial and sentence as “one of the happiest times of my life, a period of uplift and flowering.”⁵² He was a very popular lecturer and it was during this time that he began to write. He had many articles published and wrote his first book, Subjectivism and Individualism in Social Philosophy. Berdyayev described this work as “immature,” but introduces in it a theme that recurs throughout his life and work. He began his attempt to deal with the relationship between *a priori* assumptions and the mental and emotional qualities of what he called the “concrete man.” “The character of knowledge is not only a matter of logic, but also of

⁴⁹Berdyayev, Dream and Reality, 121. Lowrie, 47.

⁵⁰Ibid., 123. Lowrie, 49.

⁵¹Ibid., 122. Lowrie, 46. Although Berdyayev never earned a university degree he later received Professorship of Philosophy at Moscow University. At the end of his life, in 1947, the University of Cambridge conferred an honorary doctor of divinity degree on Berdyayev.

⁵²Ibid., 126. Lowrie, 49.

society, for the subject in the act of knowing is...a concrete man endowed with certain mental and emotional qualities and placed within certain social relationships with other men.”⁵³ This was one of his first literary assaults on intellectual and ideological absolutism. He said that in these early days he wanted to show the possibility of a synthesis of critical Marxism and the Idealist philosophy of Kant. Unlike other Marxists, however, he had no sympathies with Hegelianism. His inquiry eventually led him to existentialist philosophy. He incorporated his early work into his later book Solitude and Society. Thus during the two years of pre-exile Berdyaev already showed movement away from Marxism toward what he called “something finer than communism.”⁵⁴

Before leaving for exile in Vologda Berdyaev made a visit to St. Petersburg. This visit had all the attributes of what Berdyaev described as his “discordant” social and cultural background. On the same day that he dined with his cousin, Prince Trepov and a director of the Ministry of the Interior, he met Peter Struve for the first time.⁵⁵ It was also during this visit to Petersburg that Berdyaev formed a literary connection with a faction within critical Marxism that had the greatest leaning towards Idealism. Both of these contacts became intensely important in the intellectual evolution of Berdyaev.⁵⁶

The period of exile in Vologda prefigured Berdyaev’s later break with Marxism and his spiritual re-orientation. Ironically, although serious and permanent differences developed between him and his friends he remembered it as the time of his greatest popularity. Indeed it seemed to be the only time in his life that Berdyaev felt that he was part of any group. But the strain of Berdyaev’s differences with Marxists was beginning

⁵³Ibid., Dream and Reality, 126.

⁵⁴Lowrie, 51.

⁵⁵Berdyaev, Dream and Reality, 124. Subjectivism and Individualism in Social Philosophy contains a preface by Struve. At the time Struve and Berdyaev occupied similar ideological position. Berdyaev says that while their positions were similar their motives were different.

⁵⁶Ibid., 133.

to affect many of his relationships. During the Vologda period several articles were published that exacerbated Berdyaev's growing split with Marxism. The two that caused the greatest furor were "The Struggle for Idealism: and "The Ethical Problem in the Life of Philosophical Idealism."⁵⁷ Earlier Berdyaev had sometimes been "looked down on as a romantic, an aristocrat' and a 'black swan'" but increasingly he was regarded as "a 'dangerous individualist'"⁵⁸ The danger was intensified by the fact that politically he remained a Social Democrat with strong leanings to the extreme left. He interpreted his growing alienation as being due to the fact that "I came into conflict with...the totalitarianism of the Russian intelligentsia, which demanded the unreserved subjugation of personal conscience to that of the group."⁵⁹

Berdyaev described the "dangerous individualism" that enraged his fellow Marxists as simply being his own "peculiar revolutionary impulse. Much of what I did was a deliberate challenge to my surroundings in exile."⁶⁰ Berdyaev's entire life was a melodrama of falling in with, and subsequently falling out with, the people with whom he came into contact. While in exile at Vologda the opportunities for making both friends and enemies were legion.⁶¹ At times Berdyaev's contrariness seemed to serve as an antidote for boredom, but at other times there was evidence of a more serious need. "In

⁵⁷Ibid., 134. "Problems of Idealism" was prefaced by a quote from Pushkin, "Thou art a king, live alone and freely tread the open road whither thy lordly mind induces thee."

⁵⁸Ibid., 130, 134.

⁵⁹Ibid., 129.

⁶⁰Ibid., 130.

⁶¹Ibid., 130-131. Vologda was an important center of political deportees. Many Social-Democrats and Social-Revolutionaries were stationed there or passed through on their way to other locations of exile. Berdyaev reports that "many of the exiles came to see me at the 'Golden Anchor', the inn where I was staying." One was Bogdanov (Alexander Malinovsky). Berdyaev says that at this time "I was already known for my 'Idealist' and 'metaphysical' tendencies. Bogdanov, being a psychiatrist, regarded these as symptoms of a psychic abnormality. The irony is that subsequently Bogdanov himself suffered from a serious nervous disease and spent a considerable time in a mental home, whereas I have safely avoided this institution despite my 'Idealism.'"

their company the atmosphere became oppressive...there was an atmosphere which seemed to force one into a strait-jacket and made it impossible to breath.”⁶²

Berdyaev’s move to St. Petersburg in 1904 put him at the center of the Russian cultural renaissance. During this period of his life Berdyaev exhibited a burst of intellectual promiscuity. He was part of the group of symbolist writers and philosophers that attended intellectual discussions in Viacheslav Ivanov’s “tower” where the topics ranged from epistemology and aesthetics to problems of social and political reform.⁶³

Berdyaev was also a member of the intimate circle of the novelist and critic Dmitry Merezhkovsky and his wife the poet Zinaida Hippus. His period of involvement with the ideas of the Merezhkovsky circle placed him at the very edge of the world of the mystical and the occult. The doctrine of this group centered on the idea of a “Third Testament”, or “a new revelation which would reconcile good and evil, Christ and Anti-Christ, the flesh and the spirit, pagan self-affirmation and Christian brother-hood.”⁶⁴ Of course this stop on Berdyaev’s intellectual journey was as temporary as all the others. Even though the New Religious Consciousness of Merezhkovsky advocated freedom and the throwing off of the “slave morality of traditional Christianity,” it too asked for a high degree of conformity, even submission, to an ideology.

Berdyaev’s pattern of embracing and then abandoning a political and philosophical ideology followed the pattern already firmly established in his life. This

⁶²Ibid., 130.

⁶³Billington, 487. The poet Ivanov was the ‘crown prince’ of the Religio-Philosophical Society of St. Petersburg. It met in his seventh-floor apartment known as “The Tower.” Ivanov invited his associates to join him in plunging ‘from the real to the more real.’

⁶⁴Aileen Kelly, *Toward Another Shore: Russian Thinkers Between Necessity and Chance*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 168.

pattern was evident in his actions during the crisis of 1905-6. In 1905 an imperial manifesto created an elective Duma with consultative power, in effect establishing a semi-constitutional monarchy. On May 6, 1906, the government decreed The Fundamental Laws. These decrees provided the framework of the new Russian political system.⁶⁵ After free elections the First Duma convened on May 10, 1906. Although Berdyaev supported many of the efforts of the Kadet party he never joined it. The new system of government was supported by moderate and liberal statesmen, but it did not satisfy many members of the intelligentsia or the masses. It certainly did not satisfy Berdyaev. Berdyaev counted himself with the radical element during debates, although he opposed the radical politics of Bolshevism. By 1906 he was completely disillusioned with the new representative Duma for what he considered to be its partial and piecemeal plans for reform. He delivered a vitriolic speech in which declared, "these Russian Girondists will not save Russia, for something great and important is necessary to accomplish such a salvation."⁶⁶ The idea of a constitutional monarchy was not radical enough for Berdyaev. During this period Berdyaev became increasingly estranged from the moderates and liberal factions, and especially from Peter Struve.

Struve was a leading figure among the Legal Marxists. The ever widening gap between Struve and Berdyaev shadowed the division between the proponents of Legal Marxism and Revolutionary Marxism as well as the deep chasm between the perspectives of the pragmatist and the idealist. Struve believed that evolution rather than revolution was necessary for the ultimate success of socialism in Russia. He argued that the

⁶⁵Riasanovsky, 454. Under the Fundamental Laws, the Tsar retained huge powers. He continued in complete control of the executive, the armed forces and foreign policy. He kept his unique relation to the Russian Church. He had the power to call together the annual sessions of the Duma and to disband the Duma. He had the power of veto over legislation.

capitalist phase could not be bypassed on the way to socialism.⁶⁷ Struve ultimately became the darling of the liberal intelligentsia in exile.

Berdyayev wrote that “Struve was always much more of a politician than I and a most brilliant political writer.” Berdyayev, by his own analysis occupied a much more leftist position than Struve. Although both Struve and Berdyayev were similar in their early phases of critical Marxism they moved in very different directions. Struve said that at “one time he had high hopes for Berdyayev.” Berdyayev said of Struve that he “gave one the impression of being attracted by the doctrine of Marx because it seemed to provide an historical justification for industrial capitalism.” Although Struve was responsible for much of the program of the newly formed Social-Democratic party Berdyayev said, “he [Struve] was never a true socialist at heart.”⁶⁸

At the time of upheaval and unrest after the 1905 abortive revolution, the nationalistic utopian conservatism of the Russian Slavophiles “took on a millennial and racist character” and was much more virulent in some of its negative positions than it had been previously. “In the crisis of 1905-7, an anti-Semitic, proto-fascism emerged out of this ideology,” and by 1917 the extreme Russian Right had evolved into full-blown fascism.⁶⁹ During this period in Russian history, “political power rested in the Tsar and the semi-fascist political party known as the Union of the Russian People, or the Black

⁶⁶Nicolas Berdyayev, *Sub specie Aeternitatis*, (Article of 1906, reprinted in P, 1907, 397), translated as *The Meaning of the Creative Act*, quoted in James Billington, *The Icon and The Axe: An Interpretive History of Russian Culture*, 480.

⁶⁷Frederick C. Copelston, *Philosophy in Russia*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 246.

⁶⁸Berdyayev, *Dream and Reality*, 133. Late in life, after many public and private arguments between the two, and after the permanent break between them, Berdyayev writes “Struve moved from ‘legal’ Marxism to revolutionary liberalism. Then after 1905 to an acceptance of post-Petrine Russian imperialism, and finished up as a reactionary in the ‘emigration.’” Struve’s opinion of Berdyayev and his ideas are the subject of many critical articles published after 1923 when both are émigrés.

⁶⁹Stephen Carter, 147.

Hundred.”⁷⁰ Indeed as the climate of reaction increased the “vision of 1905 was transformed into a reality of massive and merciless violence.”⁷¹

The right-wing Black Hundred promoted a program of nationalism that Berdyaev found even more alarming and dangerous than the agenda advocated by the left-wing radicals. Throughout his career he warns of the dangers of racism and anti-Semitism inherent in nationalistic messianism, particularly as expressed in Russia. Berdyaev established himself as a foe of anti-Semitism in his early student days and it is one point on which he shows uncharacteristic constancy throughout his life.⁷² The anti-Semitism of Dostoevsky, his favorite Russian author, was a source of distress to him. He writes, “I do not think that I like the person Dostoevsky very much.”⁷³

Berdyaev belonged to the generation that carried out the Revolutions of 1905 and 1917. Although he started out with the revolutionaries he ultimately become one of the most outspoken critics of the radical intelligentsia. In his early years as a Marxist Berdyaev identified two conflicting aspects of Russian Marxism. There was “on the one hand, insistence that man’s fate is determined wholly by economic materialism, and on the other, the passionate messianic faith that a time would come when, in a perfect society, man could no longer be dependent upon economics.”⁷⁴ Early on Berdyaev was in disagreement with other Marxists such as Lunacharsky over what Berdyaev saw as the

⁷⁰Riasanovsky, 452. The Black Hundred was a coalition of the extreme Right, the army and the police. Squads of thugs and hooligans beat and killed Jews, liberals, and other intellectuals. It was proto-fascist in nature and lived off of ethnic and religious hatreds. It’s message appealed especially to wealthy peasants and to members of the lower middle class in towns.

⁷¹Alexander Yanov, The Russian New Right, (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, 1978) 4.

⁷²During the entire Nazi occupation of Paris Berdyaev writes articles attacking the regime. Several of his friends, both Jewish and non-Jewish died in concentration camps. Many of his writings deals with the evil of anti-Semitism and he feels that it is an especially acute in Russia.

⁷³Lowrie, 258.

⁷⁴Lowrie, 44.

utopian messianic vision of Marxism. Berdyaev argued that Marxism was more than science and politics, it was also a faith, a religion, with a belief in a coming Messiah and a new chosen people, the proletariat.⁷⁵ Berdyaev said that on this point one of the sharpest contradictions of Marxism occurs. “Marxism switches from materialism to idealism...There is nothing scientific about the myth of the proletariat; it is a matter of faith, a creation of Marxist imagination.”⁷⁶ He argued that “of the two aspects of Marxism, materialism and messianic faith, it is only the second that could ever inspire revolutionary will and self-sacrifice.”⁷⁷

By 1907 Berdyaev came to believe that the characteristics of Marxism were diametrically opposed to individualism and that it is an ideology which subordinates concepts such as truth and justice to the class struggle.⁷⁸ Berdyaev’s acceptance and subsequent dismissal of Marxism fit with his life-long quest for freedom. Originally, he was dissatisfied with the oppressive policies of the ancient regime. Communism proved seductive to his need for order but eventually his passion for individualism and his search for freedom displaced the needed order of Marxism. Berdyaev came to view Marxism “more as a religion than as a science.”⁷⁹

It follows that Berdyaev’s personal vision of freedom would lead him to strongly oppose Marxism as “yet another variation on the theme of religious millenarianism”⁸⁰ He saw messianism of any type, sacred or secular, as the source of suffering and strife. “The whole tragedy of history is due to the working of the messianic idea,” and to “its

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Rowley, 24.

⁸⁰Ibid.

constant effect of causing division.”⁸¹ There was a strong argument to be made that Berdyaev broke with Marxism because its political outgrowth in communism had become a “rigidly orthodox, literalist, authoritarian sort of religion.”⁸²

Berdyaev predicted that the revolution, when it came, “would introduce old evils under new names.”⁸³ The idea of revolution disturbed Berdyaev because its development too closely mirrored Berdyaev’s internal conflict of order vs. freedom. The aftermath of the Revolution proved to Berdyaev that “The Russians are incapable of bringing forth a happy medium.”⁸⁴ Later he reminded the world that “The Russian Revolution has turned out just as Dostoevsky foresaw it because Dostoevsky understood that socialism in Russia was a religious matter”⁸⁵ The Russians, to Berdyaev, “display a colossal energy for destruction” because of their attempts to bring about “the maddest of all Utopias.”⁸⁶ Certainly “with the Russian spiritual turn of mind the revolution could only be totalitarian.”⁸⁷

By 1909 Berdyaev’s split with Marxism became public and final. In that year the criticisms of Marxism by opposing factions of Russian intellectuals were expressed in a volume of seven essays entitled Vekhi.⁸⁸ The authors of the essays, in particular, Peter Struve, Serge Bulgakov and Nicolas Berdyaev, represented three distinct strains of

⁸¹Nicolas Berdyaev, The Beginning and The End, (New York: YMCA Press, 1952; reprint, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957), trans. by R. M. French, 200.

⁸²Matthew Spinka, Nicolas Berdyaev: Captive of Freedom, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), 9-18; quoted by Thomas Idinopulos, The Erosion of Faith. (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 155.

⁸³Berdyaev, Christian Existentialism, 21.

⁸⁴Berdyaev, The End of Our Time, 148-9.

⁸⁵Ibid., 148.

⁸⁶Ibid., 200.

⁸⁷Berdyaev, The Russian Idea, 249.

⁸⁸ Riasanovsky, 501. This is translated usually as Signposts, but Berdyaev’s biographer, Donald Lowrie, calls it Milestones. The difference in the title is significant as to how the essay by Berdyaev should be read. A signpost is that which points the way, a milestones is a marker that denotes movement.

Russian intellectualism.⁸⁹ Berdyaev as a contributor to this collection of essays and was at the forefront of the attack on the radical intelligentsia. In his essay, “Philosophical Verity and Intelligentsia Truth” Berdyaev accused Russian radicals of showing “an utter disregard for objective truth, religion, and law.”⁹⁰ He also charged the Marxist with being guilty of “an extreme application of the maxim that the end justifies the means, with destruction as their only effective passion.”⁹¹ Although Vekhi represented the ideas of a minority of Russian intellectuals it caused a great intellectual ‘stir’ at its publication. As the first public attack on the radicals it provoked discussion, debate and condemnation. This attack on the Left was all the more powerful because none of the critics could be identified with the Right.⁹²

The publication of Vekhi demonstrates the vitality and diversity of the Russian intellectual community prior to the Revolutions of 1917. Although the contributors to Vekhi were united in their opposition to the radicals on the left and the populist on the right they represented other significant splits within the Russian intellectual community. These seven not only disagreed with the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks, they had serious disagreements among themselves. The debates in Vekhi show that there were alternatives to the duality of right-wing reactionism or radical Marxism. The strength of

⁸⁹Shatz and Zimmerman, introduction,, Vekhi, xi-.xxxiv. The other four authors were Michael Gershenzon, Gogdan Kistiakovskii, A. S. Izgoev. Semen Frank. Michael Gershenzon conceived of the idea of Vekhi as a means “to tell the Russian intelligentsia the bitter truth about itself.” Gershenzon became a well-known literary critic and historian; Izgoev (pseudonym of Alexander Lande) was a liberal journalist and Kadet Party activist with a Marxist background. He was a member of the staff of the Kadet newspaper and Struve’s journal, Russian Thought. He became a member of the Kadet Central Committee in 1906; Bogdan Kistiakovskii was a moderate Ukrainian nationalist. Although he was influenced by Marxism he never joined the Social Democratic Party. He was interested in the expansion of minority rights within the Russian Empire; Semen Frank participated in Marxist activities during his university days but later abandoned Marx for Nietzsche. In later years he was Struve’s assistant t on various newspapers and magazines.

⁹⁰Riasanovsky, 501.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Ibid.

the debates are counter arguments to the inevitability of Bolshevism. The authors of Vekhi do not present one monolithic alternative. Of particular significance is the split, which eventually results in alienation and personal dislike, between Berdyaev and Struve.

The Struve/ Berdyaev schism has profound significance for an understanding of past, as well as present, choices facing Russia. Struve described the split as reflecting “traditional divisions between Slavophiles and Westernizers” but that description is simplistic and does not stand up to scrutiny. Berdyaev is no Slavophile. Bulgakov is a follower of the philosopher Solov’ev, but Solov’ev cannot be dismissed as a Slavophile.

Struve did not acknowledge the diversity of belief among those with whom he disagrees. He wrongly identifies Berdyaev and Bulgakov as being of one belief. Berdyaev cannot be fused seamlessly with Solov’ev, nor can Solov’ev be classified as a Slavophile. Even more problematic in Berdyaev’s case is that a charge of dogmatism, either religious or political, cannot be supported unless dogmatism means refusing to agree with the group, or with Struve.⁹³

At the core of the debate between Struve and Berdyaev was the old struggle between rationalism and romanticism; between pragmatism and idealism; between this world and otherworldliness. Within this dichotomy there are further splits. The ideas of Struve represent one possibility, Berdyaev another and Bulgakov yet another.⁹⁴ To ignore the differences between these visions dilutes the richness of the debate, limits the diversity of alternatives and is intellectually myopic. Insight into Berdyaev’s personality

⁹³Berdyaev certainly never desired or attempted to lead any movement. Berdyaev’s biographer, Lowrie recounts how Berdyaev has no patience with the many Russian émigrés who visit to express their admiration for him. Rather he enjoyed those who came to disagree and debate. This attitude is reminiscent of the statement by Marx, Grocho not Karl, “Whatever you’re for I’m against.”

⁹⁴Aileen Kelly, in Toward Another Shore follows, uncritically, the lead of Struve and mistakenly blends the motives and ideas of Berdyaev and Bulgakov. What Struve sees as “the evasion of a problem in the dogmatic otherworldliness of a Tolstoy or a Berdyaev” Kelly sees as much more serious. She concurs with Struve that “the moral poison” secreted by “a certain type of Russian philosophizing intellect” is dangerous and to needs to be rejected.

and personal history explains why he would be repulsed by orthodoxy of either the right or the left. His opposition to liberalism and the subsequent conflict with Peter Struve is complex and probably involves the personal psychology of both Struve and Berdyaev.

By the time of Vekhi's publication both Berdyaev and Bulgakov had moved toward religion. For Bulgakov it was a return to his early traditions, but for Berdyaev it was a search for traditions that he had never had. The religion of Bulgakov differs from that of Berdyaev in kind rather than degree. But to Berdyaev's contemporaries, particularly to Struve and Frank, it appeared to be all of a kind.⁹⁵

Eventually, Struve became a leading thinker and political leader of the moderate conservatives; Bulgakov entered the priesthood and developed into the most controversial Orthodox theologian of the twentieth century; Berdyaev acquired world fame as a personalist philosopher, champion of "creative freedom" and a highly unorthodox, if not heretical, member of Russian Orthodoxy.⁹⁶

In every encounter with ideologies or universal systems, either to the right or left, sacred or secular, Berdyaev defended personal freedom. His pattern of behavior as well as his writings demonstrated that he was psychologically, emotionally and philosophically incapable of allegiance to a movement or adherence to any ideology that had more than one member, himself. His obsession with freedom of the personal spirit was stronger than any ideology. Even in his transition to Christianity he "does not

⁹⁵These differing world views are personified by the character Solness in Ibsen's play Master Builder. This is the play that Berdyaev described as having the effect of 'a bomb exploding' within him when he first read it. Perhaps in the story Berdyaev glimpsed the world vision toward which he was inexorably moving. The master builder ultimately rejects building houses for people as well as building church towers for God to do the impossible thing and build 'castles in the air.'

⁹⁶Riansanovsky, 500-501.

abandon freedom of thought in favor of subservience to ecclesiastical dogmatism or an exchange of one form of dogmatism for another.”⁹⁷

Berdyayev’s criticism of Western democracy, which has posthumously attracted the attention of right-wing reactionaries as well as the condemnation of liberals, is not unlike his criticism of Marxism. From Berdyayev’s perspective Democracy was, as was Marxism, another ‘sort of religion’.⁹⁸ As he put it, “Democracy has ceased to be a political matter and has become a religious and cultural problem: the spiritual rebirth of society and the re-education of the people.” He argued that democracies had “enunciated the freedom of choice, but have not been able to keep their balance on that principle.” In order to sustain themselves “they must turn to, must choose, must submit themselves to, some absolute truth and that takes us a long way from democracy.”⁹⁹ Thus Berdyayev opposes both Marxism and Democracy because each claims to possess the absolute truth.

The very concept of an absolute truth was to Berdyayev at odds with personal spiritual freedom. He argued that the ossification of freedom in liberal democracies forced each [person] to “retire within himself, into his own family, or individual economic interests, or his own business enterprise” and to call that freedom. Thus the “very word freedom is often, mistakenly, interpreted as meaning ‘leave me in peace.’”¹⁰⁰ Thus for Berdyayev democratic ideology was as morally bankrupt as Marxist ideology.

Ultimately Berdyayev abandoned all hope for political systems and ideologies. Berdyayev’s personal manifesto stood in opposition to all political, religious and ideological dogmas. His contrariness had the potential for alienating almost everyone.

⁹⁷Copleston, 353.

⁹⁸Berdyayev, *The Russian Idea*, 202.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Nicolas Berdyayev, *The Fate of Man in the Modern World*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1961). trans. by Donald Lowrie, 45.

A society of free men, a society of personalities, is not either a monarchy or a theocracy or an aristocracy or a democracy, nor is it authoritarian society nor a liberal society, nor a bourgeois society nor a socialist society: it is not fascism nor communism, nor even anarchism as far as objectivization exists in anarchism.¹⁰¹

The early twentieth century was a heady time for Berdyaev and other Russian intellectuals. Many embraced utopian social and political systems while anti-authoritarian activists directed their energies away from the pragmatic and the practical toward something finer. The ideologies of utilitarianism, positivism and materialism dominant from the sixties were seriously challenged by philosophical idealism. By the time of the crisis of 1905 many educated Russians who at first had embraced the idea of social reform through political revolution were searching for other answers to Russia's problems.

The possibilities of creative art lured many Russian intellectuals away from political activism. Others moved toward religion and metaphysical philosophy. Educated Russians, especially writers and artists, became apolitical and asocial. Creative art and philosophy rather than political activism dominated much of the Russian landscape. For a time the finer things seemed to present the best alternative to failed political ideologies. But this did not turn out to be the final synthesis of freedom and order that Berdyaev needed in order to bring harmony in his world. In his intellectual evolution and optimistic expectations for the future of Russia, Berdyaev was a mirror of the Silver Age.

¹⁰¹Berdyaev, Slavery and Freedom, 41-71.

CHAPTER III

THE IDEAS OF BERDYAEV: LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY

The Karamazovs are not scoundrels
but philosophers...all real
Russian people are philosophers.¹
Fyodor Dostoevsky

It is a property of the Russian people to
indulge in philosophy...The fate of the
philosopher in Russia is painful and tragic.²
Nicholas Berdyaev

I suffer therefore I exist.³
Nicholas Berdyaev

During the Romantic Age the muses of philosophy and literature were inseparably linked in the minds of Russian intellectuals. For those trained in the western academic tradition the significance of literature in Russia is a difficult concept to grasp and the study of Russian philosophy appears to be nothing more than vague metaphysical speculation. Russian cultural and intellectual history is complicated by the fact that the leading Russian philosophical thinkers were also literary critics and made their living by writing book reviews. Literature in Russia, as contrasted with Western culture, has always been viewed broadly and philosophers were political, social, and cultural critics as well as literary critics.

¹Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamozov*, trans. Constance Garnett, ed. and with a foreword by Manuel Komroff, (New York: Signet Classic, 1980), 556-557.

²Berdyaev, *Dostoevsky*, 14.

³Nicholas Berdyaev, *The Divine and The Human*, trans. R. M. French, (London: G. Bles, 1949), 66.

In the tradition of western culture literature is usually viewed as entertainment and diversion or it is used for education and instruction. The utilitarian purpose of literature fits within the rational framework of western culture. In Russia, particularly in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the function and importance of literature was quite different. Unlike Westerners “the Russians look to literature for prophecy rather than entertainment.”⁴

Philosophy, like literature, occupied a unique place in Russian culture in the nineteenth century. The study of philosophy among Russians, from its beginning in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was decidedly introspective and man-centered. Philosophy was especially important during the Silver Age. The works of Vladimir Solov’ev and his followers had a profound influence on the intellectual elite and thus on the development of Russian literature and art as well as theories of social reform.⁵ Solov’ev wrote on a variety of difficult philosophical and theological subjects. Almost everything he stood for, from imaginative and daring theology to a sweeping critique of the radical intelligentsia, came into prominence in the early twentieth century. He not only was a strong critic of the radical creed of the revolutionaries of the age, he was also a foe of Russian chauvinism and political and religious reactionism.

Certain themes in literature and philosophy remain constant throughout the nineteenth century and on into the post-Revolutionary period.⁶ These recurring themes

⁴Billington, 353.

⁵James M. Edie, James P. Scanlan and Mary-Barbara Zeldin, Russian Philosophy, (Volume I. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965), 55. Vladimire Solov’ev lived from 1853-1900. He was the most influential of the Russian philosophers of the nineteenth century. He taught at the University of Moscow from 1874 until 1876 then moved to St. Petersburg where he studied and lectured at the University. When Alexander II was assassinated in 1881, Solov’ev, in a public lecture, demanded that Alexander III pardon the assassins. This incident ended Solov’ev’s academic career.

⁶Billington, 480. Philosophy and literature merge at many junctures in Russian culture during this period.

include division and separation, struggle and suffering, good and evil within the context of free-will, and ultimately the meaning of individual existence.⁷

In contrast to Western philosophy the development of Russian philosophical thought has been non-academic and non-institutional. After the Decembrist uprising of 1825 instruction in philosophy was formally forbidden in Russian universities. The ban was not lifted until 1863. From 1863 to 1889, instruction was limited to lecture-commentaries on selected texts of Plato and Aristotle.⁸ Thus the literary critic, rather than the university professor, became the interpreter of philosophic ideas. The major exception to this was Solov'ev.

From the 1830's on, the informal philosophical discussion group, or circle, was the major instrument of philosophical education. The circle became the major conduit for the introduction of both the ideas of German metaphysics and French socialist theory into Russian intellectual life.

Berdyayev, like other intellectuals of his time, saw in the arts and literature the realization of a special destiny for Russia. Russia had an important part to play in the coming redemption of humanity. The blended role of the artist/philosopher assumed new importance during the turbulent times of the late imperial period. The artist, particularly the artist who worked with words, was looked upon as a prophet.

Political, social and cultural criticism has a long tradition in Russian literature. This type of literary activity may well be uniquely Russian.⁹ As early as the eighteenth century Nicholas Novikov's literary journals were used as a forum for independent social criticism in Russia.¹⁰ Thus, in Russia, the artist occupies a different position and has a

⁷Edie, Scanlan and Zeldin, Russian Philosophy, ix.

⁸Ibid., x-xi.

⁹Edie, Scanlan and Zeldin, ix-x.; According to the editors "the untranslatable Russian word *publitsisika* " is used for this form of literature.

¹⁰Billington, 242.

different purpose from that in the west. The poet “is held in the highest esteem as the organ of eternal truths; he is the true herald of the world who must strike down and unmask vice; he is the dread teacher of the world.” Finally the artist has “a sacred duty to teach people the good and to guide people onto the true path.”¹¹

The ultimate task of the writer was to prophesize and to teach.¹² Dostoevsky believed that “Shakespeare was not merely a writer but a prophet sent by God to proclaim to us the mystery of man and of the human soul”¹³ Later the Religio-Philosophical Society of St. Petersburg viewed Dostoevsky as a Christian seer.¹⁴ The work of the Society’s leader, literary critic and mystic Demitri Merezhkovsky, made a great impression on Silver Age intellectuals in general and Berdyaev in particular. At the height of the Silver Age Merezhkovsky was “the most widely read man in Russia.”¹⁵ Merezhkovsky’s book on Tolstoy and Dostoevsky carried enormous weight and influenced the entire generation of Silver Age artists, writers and philosophers. This general attitude of reverence for literature and for the author as prophet was expressed later by Gorky when he referred to The Brothers Karamozov as “a fifth gospel.”¹⁶

The works of two Westerners, Shakespeare and Sir Walter Scott, were of particular importance for nineteenth century Russians. Gogol called Scott “the Scottish sorcerer.” Scott’s influence was so great that he inspired the writing of history as well as

¹¹Ibid., From an 1818 poem by Nadezhdin. Nadezhdin was the Schellingian professor of art and archeology at Moscow during the 1830’s. He believed that artifacts of past civilizations were occult symbols. He was the first Russian to use the term ‘nihilist’ in describing the materialism which was opposite of his own idealism.

¹²Ibid., 343.

¹³Ibid., 426.

¹⁴Ibid., 497. The Religio-Philosophical Society of St. Petersburg was established in 1907 “to the memory of Vladimir Solov’ev” and lasted until 1912. The Society’s view of Dostoevsky was perpetuated in the works on Dostoevsky by two of the members, Viacheslav Ivanov and Nicholas Berdyaev.

¹⁵Lowrie, Rebellious Prophet, 89.

¹⁶Riansanovsky, 639, Billington, 497. Maxim Gorky was the pseudonym for Alexis Peshkov. Gorky became the dean of Soviet writers. “According to some specialists his death in 1936 was arranged by Stalin.

of historical novels. Russian romantics, as did romantics in all parts of western culture, identified with “feats of chivalry, metaphysical quest and heroic opposition to authoritarianism.”¹⁷ Russians dreamed of being “a knight for an hour” and pseudo-medieval romances influenced the ‘spiritual knighthood’ of higher order Masonry. The greatest literary source of fascination for modern Russian thought, however, was Shakespeare’s Hamlet.

The 1775 Russian translation of Hamlet of the famous monologue of the melancholy prince began with “to live or not to live.” Among Russian aristocrats and intellectuals of the nineteenth century “the question of suicide became literally a matter of life and death. The question of whether or not to take one’s own life became known in Russian thought as ‘the Hamlet question.’”¹⁸ For many Russians of the early nineteenth century the “Hamlet question” ranked first among the “cursed questions” facing mankind. The melancholy and indecision of Hamlet seemed to mirror their own predicament. There was the unlikely combination of a search for the meaning of life combined with world weariness. Turgenev used several Hamlet figures in his writings and many of his works ended in suicide.¹⁹ By the late years of the reign of Alexander I the high incidence of aristocratic heroic suicide was used as an argument for tightening literary censorship, particularly censorship of the works of Shakespeare.²⁰

The German philosopher Hegel, already a potent force in Russian thought, blamed Hamlet’s subjectivism and individualism, both weaknesses in Hegel’s opinion, on a lack

¹⁷Billington, 353. “See Peter Struve, “Walter Scott and Russia,” SEER, 1933, Jan, 397-410.”

¹⁸Ibid. 354-5.

¹⁹Ibid., 356. One of the most famous Hamlet figures in Russian literature is found in Turgenev’s first novel, Rudin. He also used Hamlet as a symbol of the late-Nicholaevan generation of intellectuals in “Hamlet and Don Quixote.”

²⁰Ibid., 355.

of a structured world view. Such was the lot of those who stood for “proud and isolated individualism” against the “rational flow of history.”²¹

The fascination with Hamlet among educated Russians sprang from the quasi-theosophic ideas of Johann Hamann, the “magus of the North.” It was Hamann who “first taught the young Herder to regard the works of Shakespeare as a form of revelation equal to the Bible and to use Hamlet as his basic textbook for this new form of symbolic exegesis.”²² Hamann’s idea of finding symbolic philosophic messages in literary texts was commonly accepted in Russian thought by the early nineteenth century. The idea that art was divine activity was imported into Russia through the philosophy of Schelling.²³ For most Russian artists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the purpose of art was not to depict the reality of the world but to envision the possibilities of the future and to transform the world.²⁴

Not only did the generation of the Russian Silver Age believe that the idea of Russia was best expressed through literature and art, they were excited over the possibility of solving the social questions of the age with the “alchemy of art.”²⁵ They sought answers to the problems of the age that would be applicable for all mankind. Their interest in questions of form and technique in art were not isolated from real life events, but were part of their hopes for building a better world. When the Russians of the Silver Age delved into the mythological world of antiquity they turned admiring eyes to Prometheus. The figure of Prometheus had long held a certain fascination for romantics.

²¹Ibid..

²²Ibid., 353. Hamann was an influential pietist preacher, in Königsberg. He was a student of the occult and a bitter foe of what he felt to be the excessive rationalism of his neighbor and contemporary, Immanuel Kant.

²³Samuel E. Stumpf, Socrates to Sartre, (New York: Mcgraw-Hill book company, 1982), 314. Schelling was a fellow student and friend of Hegel. Hegel’s first published work was on the Difference between the Philosophical Systems of Fichte and Schelling in which he defends the ideas of Schelling.

²⁴Billington, 483.

²⁵Ibid., 479.

Prometheus, the Greek Titan chained to a mountain by Zeus for giving fire and the arts to mankind, was idealized by Marx.²⁶ Goethe, Byron, and Shelley elaborated on the legend in their writings. The concept of Prometheanism was particularly pervasive in intellectual circles during Russia's Silver Age. "Russian intellectuals sought like Prometheus to bring fire and the arts to humanity. Creative art offered Promethean possibilities for linking Russia with the West, man with man, and even this world with the next."²⁷

The search for understanding of the Russian idea led Berdyaev, like his contemporaries, to the arts, to music, to poetry and fiction. The fiction of Gogol, Turgenev, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, the poetry of Pushkin and Alexander Blok, the plays of Chekhov and the music of Musorgsky, were seen as inspired and prophetic. The fact that Berdyaev considered The Meaning of the Creative Act his most inspired work is indicative of the importance Silver Age intellectuals attached to the concept of the act of creation as mystical and religious. The work was published in 1916 with the subtitle "an attempt at the justification of man."²⁸ Berdyaev says that the idea behind every form of creative art is "the creation of another way of life...the breaking through from this world to the free and beautiful cosmos."²⁹ The "free and beautiful cosmos" of art, for a time at least, seemed to Berdyaev to offer new possibilities for "harmonizing the discords of an increasingly disturbed world."³⁰ The blending of art, literature, philosophy and social commentary in Berdyaev's writings is characteristic of the Silver Age. He saw in the arts

²⁶One may make an argument for Marx being a romantic if socialism, as Berdyaev contends, is yet another manifestation of messianic utopianism.

²⁷Billington, 479-480.

²⁸Ibid., 480.

²⁹Ibid., Berdyaev, *Smysl' tvorchestva*, (M, 1916, 220), trans. as The Meaning of the Creative Act.

³⁰Ibid.

and literature the realization of a special destiny for Russia and believed that Russia would play an important part in the coming redemption of humanity.

For Berdyaev the two giants of Russian literature, Fyodor Dostoevsky and Leo Tolstoy were the most important oracles of the idea of Russia. "I have a great indebtedness to Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Tolstoy instilled in me in my early youth a deep awareness of my mother country."³¹ Berdyaev saw the contrast between Dostoevsky and Tolstoy as representative of different aspects of the mystery of Russia. Tolstoy's works present an objective picture of objective life. His novels "portray static things, social organization as it existed and as it exists. He magnificently recreates the exterior world in its diversity."³² In his novels Tolstoy looked backward to the past and outward into the present and describes what he sees in epic proportions. With genius Tolstoy described the diversity of tragic events to be found within the normal and rational forms of everyday social life. "His prime concern was to oppose the false values of civilization and the iniquities of history."³³

Tolstoy exposed one aspect of the dualism of civilized life. He wrote of the opposition and tension between the outward "life in society" and the inner "life in the depths." Berdyaev agreed that "there is always a contrast between what a human being says and how he behaves in the framework of his existence in society and civilization with what he says in his inmost self."³⁴ Tolstoy guided Berdyaev to important insights into the Russian idea. "The case of Tolstoy leads to a very serious thought, that truth is dangerous" and that "the whole social life of Man is based upon a useful lie." Berdyaev contended that "the pragmatism of falsehood is a very Russian theme which is foreign to

³¹Berdyaev, *Dream and Reality*, 89.

³²Berdyaev, *Dostoevsky*, 21.

³³Berdyaev, *Introduction to Letters From Tula*, 10.

³⁴*Ibid.*

the more socialized peoples of Western civilization. For Berdyaev, as for Tolstoy, the “pragmatism of falsehood” explained the source of many things individuals, as well as institutions and nations, hold dear.³⁵

Berdyaev found no fault in Tolstoy’s art but sees a sad flaw in the man. He stated that “like a true Russian Tolstoy was a maximalist” who took extreme and uncompromising positions. Berdyaev also understood, however, that Tolstoy was a maximalist engaged in a fierce internal struggle. There was “the great conflict between Tolstoy’s artistic genius and his moral convictions.” In the end, Berdyaev argued, the former was sacrificed for the latter.³⁶ Berdyaev, ever the synthesizer of opposing ideas, could not identify with the dichotomy that persisted to the end in Tolstoy’s life.

Berdyaev acknowledged Tolstoy as a great interpreter of the idea of Russia and a great writer, but it was Dostoevsky with which Berdyaev identified. “It is possible that Tolstoy was a finer artist than Dostoevsky, that his novels, as novels are the better...but Dostoevsky is the greater thinker of the two.”³⁷ Berdyaev contended that “he who understands Dostoevsky...has read in part the mystery of Russia.”³⁸ It is also true that he who understands Dostoevsky’s idea of Russia understands, in large part, Berdyaev’s idea of Russia. Berdyaev readily acknowledged the decisive influence of Dostoevsky in his life. He said, “While I was still a youth a slip from him, so to say, was grafted upon me. He stirred and lifted up my soul more than any other writer or philosopher has done.” Further he explained that “for me people are always divided into “dostoievskyites” and those to whom his spirit is foreign.”³⁹

³⁵Berdyaev, The Russian Idea, 151.

³⁶Berdyaev, Introduction to Letters From Tula, 10.

³⁷Berdyaev, Dostoevsky, 23.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 16.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 7.

Dostoevsky was the archetype of the writer as philosopher and prophet. Silver Age intellectuals, including artists, philosophers and political activist, looked to Dostoevsky as the interpreter of the idea and destiny of Russia.⁴⁰ Indeed Dostoevsky saw the messianic nature of the Bolshevik Revolution and Berdyaev believed that the Russian revolution turned out just as Dostoevsky foresaw that it would. “Dostoevsky understood that Socialism in Russia was a religious matter.”⁴¹ Berdyaev, following Dostoevsky’s lead, argued that socialism is messianic. He contended that “the real concern for pre-revolutionary intellectuals was not politics but the salvation of mankind without the help of God.”⁴² This example of messianism “believes that there is only one elect class, the people of the covenant, the proletariat. The proletariat is the new Israel and it is to be the liberator and redeemer of mankind.” Thus Berdyaev saw socialism as simply “the old Hebrew millenarism come to life again in a secular shape.”⁴³

The Silver Age promethean vision of the salvation of mankind through a synthesis of art with social and political action was a modern variant of old Russian messianic pretensions. It was a secular version of the idea of Russia as the Third Rome.⁴⁴ “There is a parallel between the apocalyptical monks in the sixteenth century who believed that Moscow was the site of the Third Rome and the apocalyptic revolutionaries of the twentieth century who envisioned Moscow as the site of the ‘third international.’” The Kremlin came to symbolize “Russia’s thirst for some earthy taste of the heavenly

⁴⁰Ibid., 23.

⁴¹Berdyaev, The End of Our Time, 148.

⁴²Ibid..

⁴³Ibid., 183.

⁴⁴Billington, 58, 73. The idea of the Third Rome was a fourteenth century belief based on the hope that the Christian Empire had not died with the fall of Byzantium and the loss of the Orthodox kingdoms of the Balkans. By 1511 the doctrine of the Third Rome was established in Russia. The Russian Third Rome was to “radiate forth from the Orthodox Christian faith to the ends of earth more brightly than the sun.”; Billington, 48: Moscow was also referred to as Jerusalem and The New Israel.

kingdom.”⁴⁵ It is well argued that “the Russians who were active in the Social-Democratic movement were attracted to Marxism by the idealistic religious nature of Russian Marxism.”⁴⁶ Religious messianism and romantic Prometheanism were blended during the Silver Age to form a uniquely Russian creation, religious Marxism.

The ideas of Dostoevsky and the ideas of Berdyaev were so intertwined that at times it is impossible to distinguish one from the other. They agreed on many things but there were also important differences. Berdyaev broke with Dostoevsky on issues such as Dostoevsky’s anti-semitism. He declared that “I do not think that I like the man Dostoevsky very much.”⁴⁷ But intellectually and spiritually Dostoevsky and Berdyaev are kindred spirits. For Berdyaev, as for many Russians, “All contemporary literature is following in Dostoevsky’s footsteps...to talk of Dostoevsky still means to talk of the most painful, profound issues of our current life.”⁴⁸ For Berdyaev those ‘painful and profound issues’ included ‘division and separation,’ the necessity of evil, mankind’s suffering, and most importantly, personal freedom.

The problem of division within man fascinated Dostoevsky. The theme of the divided hero appeared in all of his works from the time that he wrote The Double in 1846. He called his divided hero “the greatest and most important type.” Dostoevsky focused on the idea of “bringing the ‘divided inner impulses’ of men into open confrontation in order to overcome the sense of separation and division in modern man.”⁴⁹ Although the theme of the divided soul of mankind, and of Russia, was the

⁴⁵Ibid. 48.

⁴⁶Rowley, 7.

⁴⁷Lowrie, Rebellious Prophet, 258.

⁴⁸Billington, 415. V. Pereversev a, footnote cites V. Alexandrova, “Dostoevsky Returns,” NL, 1956, Feb 27, 19-20.

⁴⁹Billington, 416. Citation from Carr, Dostoevsky, 43-44, from an unreferenced letter to his brother.

subject of many writers of the period, it is the work of Dostoevsky that had the greatest influence on the intellectuals of the Silver Age.⁵⁰

Dostoevsky's writings exposed the inner division of the Russian soul, but more importantly, they exposed the inner division of the human soul. "Beneath conscious life there is always hidden an unconscious world. That cleavage is the essential theme of all Dostoevsky's novels."⁵¹ His works represented "parts of a tragedy, the inner tragedy of human destiny, the unique human spirit revealing itself in its various aspects and at different stages of its journey." For Dostoevsky, unlike Tolstoy, "there is no use looking to any established order sanctioned by past history." Dostoevsky "turned mankind's eyes towards the unknown future, towards the Becoming. Such art is prophetic." Dostoevsky exposed "the underground disturbances of human nature...he unveils the secret of man, and for that purpose studies him in his unconsciousness, folly, and wickedness rather than in his stable surroundings."⁵²

Berdyayev described Dostoevsky's writing as "experiments in human nature which used a new method of investigation." The work of Dostoevsky "formulated a new science of mankind. He subjected man to a spiritual experiment, putting him into unusual situations and then taking away all external stays one after another till his whole social framework had gone." The intense interest began "from the moment that man sets himself up against the objective established order of the universe and manifests his

⁵⁰Diana Greene, "Gender and Genre in Pavlova's *A Double Life*," *Slavic Review* Volume 54, Number 3 (Fall '96), 563, *A Double Life* was written in 1848 by Karolina Pavlova (1807-1893). In a combination of prose and poetry the work depicts two kinds of consciousness existing independently of each other, the realm of everyday life and the intensified realm of dream life. Within the context of Russian romantic literature of the period the heroine can be seen as Russia when she is told by her dream companion "I am the secret of your dream/which you could not attain with your mind/Which you understood with your heart," 242-3. The theme of the division between dream and reality, between heart and mind between materialism and spirituality is carried forward by many later poets and philosophers.

⁵¹Berdyayev, *Dostoevsky*, 26.

⁵²Berdyayev, *Dostoevsky*, 21-22.

arbitrary will.”⁵³ Both Dostoevsky and Berdyaev wanted to know what happened to man when, having liberty, he must turn to arbitrary self-will.

The theme of freedom ran through Dostoevsky’s writings. In his analysis of Dostoevsky’s work Berdyaev said “Man’s painful pilgrimage toward liberty leads him to the limits of inner division. Such is the destiny of Raskolnikov, of Stavrogin, or Ivan Karamozov.” It was finally in the “Legend of the Grand Inquisitor” that “this dialectic of the destiny of mankind reaches its height. Ivan Karamozov represents the last stage on the road of willfulness and rebellion against God.”⁵⁴ Berdyaev wrote, “the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor strikes a terrible blow at all authority and all power-it lashes out at the kingdom of Caesar not only in Roman Catholicism but also in Orthodoxy and in every religion just as in communism and socialism.”⁵⁵

To Berdyaev it is clear that all of Dostoevsky’s heroes are different aspects of Dostoevsky. There was nothing objective about Dostoevsky’s writing. “All his heroes are really himself; they tread the path that he trod; the different aspects of his being, his difficulties, his restlessness, his bitter experiences are all theirs.”⁵⁶ Dostoevsky’s stories concentrate on his personal struggles. It is with similar subjectivity that Berdyaev writes about Dostoevsky. Berdyaev sees in Dostoevsky’s characters a passion for freedom that parallels his own.

Berdyaev was speaking of himself as well as of Stavrogin or Raskolnikov when he said “man does not adapt himself to a rational organization of life and puts freedom before happiness.”⁵⁷ “The value I attach to freedom accounts for the fact that my thought could never crystallize into any fixed traditional pattern. I have never complied with any

⁵³Ibid., 45- 46.

⁵⁴Ibid., 51.

⁵⁵Berdyaev, The Russian Idea, 153.

⁵⁶Berdyaev, Dostoevsky. 21.

⁵⁷Berdyaev, Dream and Reality, 56.

philosophical tradition...I did not even need to break with authorities, since I never acknowledged any.”⁵⁸

One of the great insights of Dostoevsky was that real freedom requires a high degree of irrationality. Berdyaev concurred and said, “freedom is irrational and senseless to the highest degree.”⁵⁹ Although the exercise of freedom may be irrational, it is not without purpose. Both the writer and the existentialist philosopher understood this.

One may will against one’s own interest-sometimes one has to. Free choice, personal caprice, the maddest of fancies-those are what man is after, quintessential objects that you can’t classify and in exchange for which all systems and theories can go to hell. In only one single case does man consciously and deliberately want something absurd and that is the silliest thing of all, namely, to have the right to want the absurd and not to be bound by the necessity of wanting only what is reasonable.⁶⁰

Berdyaev proclaimed freedom the central issue of human existence. “All things in human life should be born of freedom and pass through freedom and be rejected whenever they betray freedom.”⁶¹ Dostoevsky and Berdyaev understood that freedom requires both the rational and the irrational.

Just as Dostoevsky represented the Russian artist/philosopher, Berdyaev represented the Russian philosopher/artist. He saw his task as more like that of the symbolist poets than that of the systems builders of rational philosophy. For Berdyaev the fact that he possessed little, if any, capacity for analytical and discursive reasoning and has no interest in systems or doctrines was an advantage. Like the artist, he worked by inspiration. He said of himself, “My thinking is unsystematic. I have been much

⁵⁸Ibid., 58.

⁵⁹Berdyaev, Dostoevsky, 51.

⁶⁰Ibid., 52.

⁶¹Berdyaev, Dream and Reality, 58.

criticized for my carelessness and apparent incapacity for thoroughgoing philosophical analysis. I accept this criticism.” He confessed that in the process of deductive reasoning and philosophical argument his thoughts “seem to dissolve into sudden and disturbing visions” and “the thoughts to which I attach greatest importance come to me like flashes of lightning, like instantaneous illuminations.”⁶²

It is not surprising, given his intellectual, cultural, emotional and psychological history, that when Berdyaev became immersed in religion he was drawn to mysticism. He concluded that “my whole philosophical approach is radically incompatible with a belief in the possibility of a rational ontology.” He noted that “any rationalization of the divine-human relationship, any attempt at expressing it in terms of a rational philosophy makes nonsense both of that relationship and of that philosophy.” Thus Berdyaev rejected Thomasian rationalism as well as modern attempts at rational religion. He concluded, “living in direct contact with the ultimate mystery calls for mysticism.”⁶³

The intellectual tradition of metaphysics and gnosticism is an old and persistent western intellectual tradition. It survived the attacks of the Enlightenment and flourished in many European intellectual cultures in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Berdyaev believed that German Idealism is the strongest current in the post-Enlightenment tide of anti-rationalism and romanticism. Berdyaev connected the much older belief system to German idealism. The ancient rhetoric of myths, allegories and symbols were the coin of the realm in this world. Berdyaev contended that “in order for the door to be left open to the mystery of the divine-human relationship, it can only be spoken of in symbolic and mythological terms.” Furthermore “all questions of human existence are always spoken of in symbolic and mythological terms.” Berdyaev declared

⁶²Ibid., 214.

⁶³Ibid., 180.

that “no knowledge is free from mythology-materialism mythologies about matter and positivism about science.”⁶⁴

Berdyayev was careful to point out that the idea of myth “should not be identified with make-believe or with anything which is contrary to reality.” Rather he said, “the greatest realities are concealed in the myths of mankind.” Berdyayev then tied his general theme to Christianity. “Christianity is mythological through and through, as indeed all religion is...but Christ is not susceptible to rational explanation and we can only give an account of him in mythological terms.”⁶⁵ Thus mythology represented an attempt to express and articulate inexpressible truths. He warned, however, of the dangers inherent in both mysticism and the “myths of mankind.” Berdyayev opposed any type of mysticism that is “hostile towards man and human personality” and especially “abhors any attempt at the dissolution of the person and the annihilation of individuality in a nameless God-head, or for that matter, in the whirlpool of cosmic forces.”⁶⁶ It was essential to “free oneself from the influence” of all superstitions about mysticism and myths. Berdyayev viewed cultural myths as valuable vehicles of expression but dangerous if taken literally.

The symbolic and mythological terms used within the tradition of the Gnostics and mystics were an integral part of the intellectual and cultural life of Russia in the Silver Age.⁶⁷ The major line of Russian religious thinkers, including Berdyayev, followed a thread of thought going back through Vladimir Solov'ev to the German Gnostic Jacob

⁶⁴Ibid., 179.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Ibid., 180.

⁶⁷Caitlín Matthews, *Sophia, Goddess of Wisdom: The Divine Feminine from Black Goddess to World-Soul*, (London: Thorsons, 1992), 150. Gnosis means knowledge. The Gnostics, or ‘knowers’ were active from about the second century AD. Gnosticism underlies many of the mystical traditions of the West. It draws upon a variety of strains of spirituality including Judaic mysticism, classical mystery religions, and above all on Plato’s “Timaeus.” The Gnostics propounded a parallel version of Christianity and survived for several centuries until declared a Christian heresy.

Boehme.⁶⁸ The writings of Boehme were extremely important in the development of thought in the Silver Age. His ideas were popular with writers, artists and philosophers and he “may well have been the most important single influence on the formation of a Russian philosophical tradition of idealism.”⁶⁹

Berdyayev acknowledged his debt to Boehme time and again in his writings. Boehme provided the metaphysical foundation for many of Berdyayev’s ideas. He viewed Boehme as “the fountainhead of the dynamism of German philosophy, one might even say of the dynamism of the entire thought of the nineteenth century.”⁷⁰

Boehme and those who were influenced by him, including Solov’ev and Berdyayev, were opposed to rationality as a basis for belief in God. Boehme’s God, and the God in which Berdyayev came to believe, was not the God of the deists.⁷¹ The rational clockmaker of the mechanical universe created the world out of his own essence while in Boehme’s theory there is something ontologically more primordial than God. In German it is called the *Ungrund*, the abyss or “nothingness.” According to Boehme the world was created out of nothingness. Within this nothingness was a source power comparable to the Aristotelian idea of ‘pure potency.’ The *Ungrund*, as pure potency, is irrational and free. Out of it is born God, a suprarational spirit. Thus out of the irrational is created the rational.⁷²

The anti-rational methods that Berdyayev favored reflect the views of Solov’ev. Solov’ev revived the works of Boehme and conceived a new idealism. It was this mystical idealism that became the major philosophic rival in late Imperial Russia to the materialistic doctrine of Marx. The two new philosophic currents that emerged in Russia

⁶⁸Jacob Boehme, 1575-1624.

⁶⁹Billington, 310.

⁷⁰Berdyayev, “Ungrund and Freedom”, xxxiii.

⁷¹Billington, *The Icon and The Axe*, 310.

⁷²Eddie, *Russian Philosophy*, Volume III, 145.

during the Silver Age, dialectical materialism and transcendental idealism both built upon existing intellectual and cultural traditions of the intelligentsia. “The materialist claimed to be the heirs of the iconoclastic sixties; the idealist claimed to be developing the traditions of Dostoevsky’s reaction to iconoclasm.”⁷³

The seemingly disparate philosophic ideologies of materialism and idealism have a common intellectual origin. They are rooted in the classical dualism of Greek humanity as expressed in the struggle between the artistic and the scientific ideologies of philosophy. They also draw on the same mythological origin. The concept of the soul, either divided or unified, is germane to any analysis of Russia’s Silver Age. “The artistic idea was of the ‘true and immortal’ soul while the scientific idea was of the ‘true and mortal’ soul.”⁷⁴

The very concept of truth is also heir to the old vision of the unification of the two ideas of the soul.⁷⁵ This is what Solov’ev was trying to achieve when he spoke of overcoming the split between science and faith. He spoke of “free and scientific theosophy” which would recognize as equally valid and ultimately complementary three methods of knowledge: the mystical, the intellectual, and the empirical.⁷⁶ Thus within the allegorical framework of the Silver Age the truth of the materialist as well as the

⁷³Billington, 456.

⁷⁴Otto Rank, *Art and the Artist*, (New York: Agathon Press, 1968), 347. The development of Greek views on the soul had a decisive ideological influence on the evolution of Christianity as well as on the whole art-ideology of the West. The two early currents of Greek philosophy are of particular significance. The mystical branch passed from Pythagoras through Parmenides, Heracleitus, Plato, and St. Paul. The naturalistic branch progressed from Thales to Hippocrates, Democritus to Epicurus. Certain philosophers, Socrates, Aristotle, Marcus Aurelius, merged the two currents. Within this context the evolution of the idea of the soul progressed and changed over time. There was a distinct division between the soul of the dead, the “psyche” in Homer, and the functions of the living. The soul then evolved into a kind of dualistic existence of the two ideas of the soul and an assumption of a “psyche” that exists in the living. Christianity built on this unification of the two ideas of the soul. “The Christian concept of soul has resulted in the complete spiritualization of humankind”

⁷⁵Ibid., 348.

⁷⁶Billington, 467.

'truth' of the idealist is ultimately to be found in the unification of the divided soul of Russia.

Many Russian thinkers, including Solov'ev, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Berdyaev, agonized over "the division of the Russian national character, which strains in opposite directions and seldom succeeds in integrating impulses in a middle ground."⁷⁷ The many splits within the Russian cultural character include the division between the spiritual and material; the ascetic and sensual; the civilized and the animalistic; the romantic and rational; the Western and Eastern; fathers and sons; authority and freedom; totalitarian and nihilistic. Added to these other divisions is the split inherent within Russian sophiology.

The strange philosophy called sophiology came out of the Gnostic tradition. Gnosticism in general, and in Russia in particular, draws on a creative and complex mythology that represents qualities and functions of the culture in an allegorical way.⁷⁸ Gnosticism encompassed a wide variety of creation myths often at variance with orthodox Biblical accounts. Notably the idea of Sophia, or Divine Wisdom, was present in many of these creation myths. This mysterious entity appears under various names in several religious traditions, but the essential quality of Sophia is chastity.⁷⁹ The chaste Sophia, the "Divine Wisdom" of spirituality, is at war with the fallen Sophia, the natural feminine image, of materialism.

"The dualistic symbols of the female as virginal idealism and maternal reality are both rooted in the deepest mythological archetypes of Russian thought."⁸⁰ The natural

⁷⁷Mikhail Epstein, "Daniil Andreev and the Mysticism of Femininity", Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, ed., *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Press, 1997), 336.

⁷⁸Caitlín Matthews, *Sophia Goddess of Wisdom*, 151.

⁷⁹Epstein, 334:

⁸⁰Ibid.

and material aspects of the feminine represent the forces of nature while the spiritual and virginal represent the wisdom, or intuitive powers inherent in mysticism, religion, romanticism and the creative arts. Materialism and sophistry glorify different aspects of the mythological feminine elements of nature and wisdom.⁸¹ The idea was linked not only to the image of the Christian Virgin and the 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' of European romanticism, but most likely also to the "damp mother earth" of pre-Christian Russia and the patriotic icon of Mother Russia⁸²

Mythical traditions are especially important in any analysis of cultural and intellectual history. The myth, whether religious, artistic, or patriotic, "lays down over earlier tradition the particular cultural stratum of the present." Indeed the myth in its higher forms is "the best, and at times the only, source of knowledge of the ideologies of the present."⁸³ Most of the intellectuals of the silver age react in one way or another to the myths and symbolism prevalent in Russian culture.

In early 1878 Solov'ev gave his famous lectures on God-manhood. The theme of these lectures was the role of Christianity in overcoming the separation between man and God. Dostoevsky attended these lectures and was greatly influenced by the philosopher's theories. Solov'ev, like Dostoevsky, was "haunted by the problems of division and separation."⁸⁴ An intellectual bond developed between the two and later in the same year they went on a religious pilgrimage together. Solov'ev was the partial model for Alyosha Karamozov in The Brothers Karamozov and it is in this greatest of Dostoevsky works that there is a total blending of philosophic thought and literature.⁸⁵

⁸¹Ibid., 336.

⁸²Billington, The Icon and The Axe, 351.

⁸³Rank, 207.

⁸⁴Billington, 166.

⁸⁵Ibid., 467-8, 458.

As Dostoevsky walked the narrow ridge between literature and philosophy, Berdyaev walked the ridge between philosophy and theology. He always insisted that he was not a theologian but a philosopher.⁸⁶ He drew much of his thought from German idealism as well as the mysticism of Boehme. His philosophical view came, however, from the inculcation and blending of the ideas of Solov'ev, Dostoevsky, Kirkegaard, Ibsen and Nietzsche. The thread that connected these varied thinkers, and that attracts Berdyaev, is a belief in the priority of freedom in the human experience.

Boehme's dictum of "know a thing by that which opposes it" fits with Berdyaev's personal emotional and intellectual inclinations. Inherent in the theory of the *Ungrund* is the contradiction of the rational coming from the irrational. "The polar opposites of unity and multiplicity, passivity and impassivity, positivity and negativity, Being and nothingness are all present in an undifferentiated state within the primordial abyss."⁸⁷ Solov'ev's theory of god-manhood is based on the *a priori* assumption of free and irrational nothingness, the *Ungrund*, as the primordial force of creation. Within the *Ungrund* are all of Aristotle's possibilities for matter. Berdyaev defines the underlying potency of the abyss as freedom. Thus freedom is prime matter and contains the potential for all things. God is preceded by freedom and it is from primordial freedom that God creates Himself. As God creates himself from the abyss of freedom, so He creates man from freedom. This is the basis of Solov'ev's metaphysical theory of god-manhood and Berdyaev makes it the foundation of his philosophy of freedom.

In the metaphysical creation myth of the *Ungrund* "There is no ontological difference between human beings and God because all of reality is contained in the primal unity of the abyss. Unlike the traditional Christian myth that views creation as

⁸⁶James M. McLachlan, *The Desire to be God: Freedom and the Other in Sartre and Berdyaev*, New York: Peter Lang, 1992) 120.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 121.

static and unchanging, the god-manhood theory views creation as an ever-moving force. Movement and change are viewed as characteristic of all creation. The creative act is an ongoing process and man has a role to play in that process. In the theory of god-manhood man and God are partners, or co-creators. "God calls man to perform the creative act and He is expecting an answer to His call...God's call is addressed to the abyss of freedom, and the answer must come from it."⁸⁸

The essential element in the spiritual life is freedom. "Freedom is the eternal basis of the human spirit-the spirit is freedom."⁸⁹ Freedom is not a matter of choice for "God has laid upon man the duty of being free." Berdyaev envisioned freedom as the force behind the 'being-becoming' of creation. God and man are partners in creation and creation is open-ended and continuous. "Humans, ordinary individuals in their humble way both create and are created."⁹⁰ Any version of creation that is static, absolute, or deterministic places limits on both human and divine freedom.

The creative force of which Berdyaev spoke bridges the spiritual and the material world, "Creativeness has two different aspects...There is the primary creative act in which man stands face to face with God, and there is the secondary creative act in which he faces other men and the world."⁹¹ In his early philosophical work, The Meaning of The Creative Act, Berdyaev built on the foundation laid by Boehme and Solov'ev. He blended the traditions of gnosticism and mystical idealism with the artistic symbolism so popular during the late imperial period. The work contained all the recurring themes of Berdyaev's life. He repeatedly returned to these ideas in his later works, sometimes to reaffirm, sometimes to challenge or contradict his earlier ideas. The Meaning of The

⁸⁸Nicolas Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man, trans. N. Duddington, (London: G. Bles, 1937), 128.

⁸⁹Berdyaev, The Fate of Man in The Modern World, 45.

⁹⁰David Richardson, Berdyaev's Philosophy of History, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968), xiii.

⁹¹Berdyaev, The Destiny of Man, 128.

Creative Act is a cultural artifact of the Silver Age and in it Berdyaev contemplates the topics dear to Russian intellectuals of his generation; man and God, good and evil division and unification, freedom and determinism, messianic ideologies, and suffering.

Philosophers and poets of the silver age were partial to the language of feminine mysticism and gnosticism in their circles, lectures and publications. As always Sophia walks where the mystics and Gnostics walk. The influence of Vladimir Solov'ev furthered the acceptance of the image of Sophia, or Divine Wisdom among intellectuals of the late imperial period.⁹² A topic that was often discussed in mystical terms was Russia, past, present and future.

The problem of division that obsessed Solov'ev and Dostoevsky also obsessed Berdyaev. As he turned his attention to Russia and its division and suffering he used the allegorical language of the Gnostics and of feminine mysticism to describe the spiritual anatomy of Russia, the soul of Russia. Berdyaev said that Russia suffers from a division of the masculine and the feminine principles within the national character.⁹³ The term masculine represents, among other things, the rational, scientific and material while feminine represents emotion, intuition and spirituality. Berdyaev used the popular rhetoric of the day to personify the idea of metaphysical as well as ideological division. It was well known among his contemporaries that the missing God of Boehme was feminine and that Solov'ev had recurring visions of the missing Madonna. The symbolist poet Blok wrote of an illusive "beautiful lady." The image of Sophia as Divine Wisdom

⁹²Billington, 466. The image of 'the divine woman' first came to Solov'ev at the age of nine. A second vision of Sophia came to him in the British museum in the mid-seventies. He immediately set off for Egypt, where he had a third vision of Sophia. It was these visions of the 'divine feminine principle' which inspired both his poetry and his social theories. The sophia of Solov'ev is a combination of the feminine principle of Jacob Boehme's theosophy as well as the 'divine wisdom' of the Greek East.

⁹³N. O. Lossky, History of Russian Philosophy, (New York: International Universities Press, 1951), 416.

was an integral part of mystical idealism.⁹⁴ But Berdyaev took the discussion to new heights with his reflections on Boehme's theory of androgyny.

Boehme made the distinction between "the virgin" and "the woman." "The 'virgin' was the feminine Sophia lost to Adam in The Fall. Eve, 'the woman' was created for this world."⁹⁵ For Berdyaev the distinction between Sophia and Eve is crucial. The true Fall of mankind was "the fall of the androgen, the separation into male and female"⁹⁶ It is Sophia rather than Eve that is the missing feminine element. The unified soul is the androgynous union of feminine Sophia with the masculine element of creation. "The world-differentiation into male and female can never finally wipe out the basic genuine bisexuality, the androgynous quality in man. In truth neither man nor woman is the image and likeness of God but only the androgyny."⁹⁷

In later works Berdyaev delved deeper into the subject of androgyny. On the psychological and physical level he concurred with Freud's theory in Totem and Taboo and declared that "Man is not only a sexual but a bi-sexual being, combining the masculine and the feminine principle in himself in different proportions and often in fierce conflict." On the spiritual level he stated that "the Oedipus complex of Freud may be interpreted symbolically and mystically in the light of the cosmic struggle between the masculine and the feminine principles."⁹⁸ Should Berdyaev's theory of androgyny be taken literally or symbolically? Probably both. There are "strong hints of sublimated homosexuality" in the egocentric world of Russian romanticism. "It finds philosophic

⁹⁴Billington, 311, Saint-Martin and Baader followed Boehme in making Sophia, the mystical principle of true wisdom and lost femininity, a fourth person with in Trinity.

⁹⁵Berdyaev, Destiny of Man, 186.

⁹⁶Berdyaev, The Meaning of The Creative Act, 185.

⁹⁷Ibid., 184.

⁹⁸Berdyaev, Destiny of Man, 62.

expression in the fashionable belief that spiritual perfection required androgyny.”⁹⁹

Berdyayev is not vague on the topic when he wrote, “natural sex life is always tragic and hostile to personality”; “the sexual act is always a partial failure of the personality and its hopes”; “sex life in this world is radically defective and spoiled.”¹⁰⁰

The theme of separation and suffering appears and reappears in Berdyayev’s writings. Suffering caused by the separation of man from God as well as by the separation of God from man. Like Solov’ev Berdyayev interpreted all of the interests of humans; intellectual pursuits; social impulses; sexual longings as expressions of a ‘homesickness,’ or longing for the lost unity between God and man.¹⁰¹

Berdyayev’s philosophy of freedom is his struggle to reconcile human suffering with the idea of a Christian God. He contemplated both the justification of man and the justification of God within the reality of evil in the world. It is the old question posed by Job. “Why is it that man suffers so much in this world and is it possible to justify God in view of such an amount of suffering?”¹⁰² Berdyayev confided that “the problem of the justification of God in face of the measureless pain in the world has always been a source of infinite torment to me. I cannot admit the conception of an almighty, omniscient, punitive deity beholding this stricken world of ours.”¹⁰³

There is only one answer to the question of “why evil exists” that allowed Berdyayev to believe in God. It is the same answer Dostoevsky gave. It is freedom. Freedom is the cause for the seemingly chaotic condition of human suffering but

⁹⁹Billington, 349. The circles of the intellectual community were exclusively male and there was little room for women in the masculine world of literature and art. There was “an element of sublimated sexuality in the creative activity of the period.” The careers of Bakunin and Gogol seemed to partially compensate for sexual impotence.

¹⁰⁰Berdyayev, *The Meaning of The Creative Act*, 192-93, 191.

¹⁰¹Billington, 310.

¹⁰²Berdyayev, *The Divine and The Human*, 68.

¹⁰³Berdyayev, *Dream and Reality*, 66.

suffering is the necessary price of freedom. The knowledge of the suffering brought on by freedom was of paramount concern to Berdyaev. He saw it as the great paradox of human existence. This human dilemma was personified in "The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor."

For Berdyaev freedom required resistance and struggle, even resistance to God and struggle with God. Evil, or at least the potential for evil, was a necessary component of freedom. Berdyaev said "I call freedom empty when it is unaware of resistance, when it is too easy. It is by conflict and in the experience of resistance that freedom is tempered and strengthened." What does mankind get out of this struggle? What does God get out of this struggle? "Out of the struggle comes a new creation. Creativity is the mystery of freedom."¹⁰⁴ In the theory of "god-manhood" man and God struggle together in the continuing creation of each other. Through this theory Berdyaev identified himself with spiritual Christianity rather than any outward form of Christian orthodoxy. "He does not accept any orthodoxy but the orthodoxy of the individual...his focus was the hero of freedom-the universal Christ portrayed in Dostoevsky's story of The Grand Inquisitor."¹⁰⁵

A single-minded vision of freedom led Berdyaev on a circuitous intellectual journey beyond Hegelian philosophy,¹⁰⁶ past Slavophilism, through Marxism to mystical

¹⁰⁴Nicolas Berdyaev, Truth and Revelation, (London: Geoffrey Bles, Ltd., 1953), trans. by R. M. French, 85.

¹⁰⁵Indianopulos, The Erosion of Faith, 154.

¹⁰⁶Riansanovsky, 400; Two German philosophers, Schelling and Hegel, exercised strong influence on the Russians. It was largely an interest in Schelling that led to the first philosophic 'circle' and the first philosophic review in Russia. Schelling "affected poets, professors, groups of intellectuals and even schools of thought such as the Slavophile"; Berdyaev, Dream and Reality, 278; During his years at the University of Kiev Berdyaev was interested in Hegelian philosophy but soon rejected it. He writes that "I am, both intellectually and emotionally, opposed to realist conceptualism and do not believe in any general ideas or universals representing...a supposed essence of things." Neither is he able to "identify myself with the nominalist position, because it appears to undermine the idea of the human person." Berdyaev thus removes himself from the 'either/or' debate in Russia between opposing schools of philosophical thought and moves into the 'free cosmos' of his own thought; Berdyaev, Dream and Reality, 87, 205; Berdyaev is comfortable admitting that he had little, if any, capacity for analytical and discursive reasoning and had no

idealism and artistic Prometheusism, and ultimately to an unorthodox and personal form of spirituality. He produced no formal system and opposed all system building on the grounds that the system builders claimed self-evident truths upon which to build.

Berdyayev's philosophy was calculated to provoke thought rather than to provide answers. He believed that one must always be willing to declare himself against his own previous opinions.

Berdyayev's intellectual journey seems haphazard, unpredictable, and unstructured. It is all of those things. There is one constant in his thinking, however. "Externally one may have the impression that my philosophical views change. But the original motive forces have remained the same."¹⁰⁷ The moving force is always his concept of freedom. Toward the end of his life he describes himself as a believing freethinker. His unfinished work found after his death in 1948 reveals that his philosophy of freedom had led him to the belief that "man's co-creativity with God is even more important than man's personal salvation."¹⁰⁸

Berdyayev declared that there is no possibility of a perfect society, a perfect culture and a perfect philosophy outside the spiritual realm.¹⁰⁹ Even the future of Russia is a spiritual question. "There can be no salvation for her apart from a spiritual re-birth. A materialistic contest for power can only aggravate the evil and intensify her decomposition."¹¹⁰ Throughout human history "the incarnation of the spirit has been mistakenly sought in hierarchical authority and temporal institutions. The symbolical

interest in systems or doctrines. Rather, like the artist Berdyayev worked 'by inspiration.' He writes, "in my thoughts the normal course of philosophical argument seemed to dissolve into vision." Thus Berdyayev is more akin to the symbolist poets such as Alexander Blok than to the rationalist philosophers of the western-academic tradition.

¹⁰⁷Lowrie, 245.

¹⁰⁸Berdyayev, *Truth and Revelation*, 53.

¹⁰⁹Berdyayev, *The End of Our Time*, 199.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, 140.

incarnation of the spiritual in authority and historical bodies is the way of the fallen world.”¹¹¹ The true incarnation of the spirit is freedom. Any attempt at perfection in the world of the material, the natural, the rational life is not only impossible it is dangerous to the principle of freedom.

The late imperial period, the Silver Age of Russia, was a time of prophets and visions. Historians and political analysts continue to search for systematic and rational explanations for why things happened as they did in Russia. For those who live in the “realm of Caesar” it is enough to speak of economic forces, class warfare, Slavophiles and Westernizers, the decline of the intelligent, an impotent bureaucracy, a weak Tsar, or any number of other logical theories. But for those, like Solov’ev, like Dostoevsky, like Tolstoy and like Berdyaev, who dwell in the “realm of the spirit” such explanations are not adequate. Other kinds of thinking and other kinds of words are required. The struggle within Russia during the Silver Age was a struggle within the soul of Russia and this conflict could only be expressed in symbolic terms, allegories and myths. Rather than an ideological division there was a metaphysical division; Mother Russia suffered, wandered and wrestled with Divine Wisdom, Sophia; the feminine and masculine in the Russian psyche longed for the perfect state of androgyny; man and God struggled in a state of co-creation; out of primordial freedom good and evil were created and, as in the “Legend of the Grand Inquisitor,” Christ and Anti-Christ stood face to face.

¹¹¹Nicolas Berdyaev, Spirit and Reality, trans. by George Reavey, (London: G. Bles, 1946), 167.

CHAPTER IV
BERDYAEV AND RUSSIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY

The Russians are in fact schismatics. It is a deep-rooted trait in our national character.¹
Nicolas Berdyaev

Russia demands all or nothing, its mood is either apocalyptic or nihilistic and it is therefor incapable of building up the half-way kingdom of culture.²
Nicolas Berdyaev

Schism and schismatics are abiding themes of Russian history. The problem of division has plagued Russia throughout its modern history. Division and separation fascinated Russian writers, philosophers and social reformers of both Golden Age of the 1840's and 50's and the pre-Revolutionary Silver Age.³ Nicolas Berdyaev believes that although the manifestation of Russian separation and division changes with time, circumstance and ideology, it is polarization rather than compromise that remains a constant.

In the seventeenth century there was religious separation between Orthodoxy and the Old Believers.⁴ In the eighteenth century serious divisions developed due to the modernization programs of Peter the Great. Peter's vision for Russia focused on the west

¹Berdyaev, *The Idea of Russia*, 10.

²Berdyaev, *Dostoevsky*, 161.

³Billington, 417.

⁴Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 220. In 1666-7 Russian Church councils were held to settle a dispute over matter of corrections in church liturgy. The reforms were upheld but many rejected the changes and refused to abide by church law. The Old Believers were severely persecuted in the seventeenth century. They reorganized in the eighteenth century, survived through the nineteenth century and on through the Revolution. Old Believers still exist in Russia today.

and rather than the romanticized glory of the Muscovite period. The reign of Catherine The Great was marked by upheavals that grew out of the separation of the aristocracy from the peasantry. After the Pugachev rebellion the separation widened.⁵ The events of the French Revolution exacerbated the problems of division between the ideas of autocracy and the ideas of enlightened liberalism.

In the nineteenth century the divisions within Russian culture and society multiplied. Intellectuals were separated from the non-intellectual aristocracy.⁶ An enduring split developed between Slavophiles and Westernizers. During the reign of Alexander II reforms were enacted in an attempt to deal with the alienation between the government and the people. The emancipation of the serfs in 1861 and the establishment of the zemstvos were early attempts to bridge some of the social divisions within Russia.⁷ During the reactionary time of the sixties and seventies divisions within society were also the focus of populist movements such as "To the People" and "Will of the People."⁸

A favorite theme of nineteenth century Russian literature was division and the opposition of opposing forces. The influence of literary ideas reinforced and intensified the emotions surrounding the divisions of Russian culture and society. In the mid-century nineteenth century generational and ideological divisions were personified in the separation of the "sons" from the "fathers". In Turgenev's Fathers and Sons the generation of the sixties is contrasted with the earlier generation of the forties.⁹ The

⁵Riasanovsky, 287. The Pugachev rebellion, which began in 1773, "grew out of the injustices of the Russian social system. It became a mass uprising among the Ural cossacks but ultimately engulfed huge areas of eastern European Russia. The observation made by Riasanovsky is that "the Pugachev rebellion served to point out the chasm between French philosophy and Russian reality."

⁶Billington, 417.

⁷Riasanovsky, 415. The zemstvo assemblies and boards were established in 1864 to further the modernization and democratization of local government.

⁸Ibid., 425-6. The "To the People" movement was begun by Russian university students who believed that they could mobilize the rural masses for revolution. The "Will of the People" was a revolutionary society which engaged in a terroristic offensive against the government in order to force reform. Members of the "Will of the People" killed Alexander II in 1881.

⁹Billington, 417.

younger generation preferred deeds rather than words. The passions of those of those deeds continued through the Silver Age and guided the men and women who crafted the Revolution. In The Possessed Dostoevsky explored the division between the ideas of the young nihilist Peter Verkhovensky with those of his father. Literature chronicled the growing assault on tradition, stability and order by the forces of upheaval, nihilism and chaos.

Although the problem of divisions within Russian life was a preoccupation of religious, philosophical, literary and social thought for at least two centuries, interest in the topic reached its height during the Silver Age. Very likely there were as many ideas of Russia during the period as there were Russians. There certainly was never unity on the subject. Berdyaev was one of many caught up in the debate. Due to his famous work, The Russian Idea, he has been the chief interpreter the idea of Russia for westerners.¹⁰

For Berdyaev the “idea of Russia” centered on the themes of division, suffering and redemption. The disaster of Revolution, years of exile and the horrors of the totalitarian regime of Stalin only reinforced his views. On the surface the circumstances, ideologies, and personalities changed, but the underground fault lines remained. At the end of his life Berdyaev saw the same old “Russian complaint,” the virulent “sickness of the soul,” that he saw as a young man in pre-revolutionary Russia. He saw “old evils with new names.”¹¹

Berdyaev provided profound insights into the problems of Russia. His idea of Russia has two interconnected parts: the Russian identity and the Russian destiny. He believes that the Russian identity is in a perpetual state of crisis. Russia is unsure of itself

¹⁰Tim MacDaniel, The Agony of the Russian Idea, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 10.

¹¹Berdyaev, Christian Existentialism, 21.

and there is a sense of instability. He saw the earthly aspect of the Russian messianic idea as misguided, misplaced and dangerous.

The writings of Berdyaev describe Russia as it is rather than as it should be. He rejects the usual interpretation of Russia's messianic destiny. Rather than an earthly apocalyptic event Berdyaev anticipated a spiritual revolution. He referred to the split between the worldly and the spiritual as a division between the "realm of Caesar" and the "realm of the Spirit." Berdyaev opposed worldly messianic nationalism and saw it as the source of cultural chauvinism, ethnic and racial exclusion, religious dogmatism, ideological totalitarianism, material determinism and nationalism. As a religious freethinker, an intellectual iconoclast, and something very near to a political anarchist it could hardly be otherwise. He referred to all varieties of control, by either God or man, as a demon—the demon of the will to power.

Rationalist thinkers depict the idea of Russia as an interaction of powerful external forces with a complex set of Russian traditions, experiences and expectations. This mix includes the cultural legacy of the myths and images of ancient pagan religions; the intellectual legacy of literature, philosophy, art and music; the educational system; the institutional and social elements of Russian life such as the tsarist state, the Orthodox Church and the peasant commune. This type of analysis of the idea of Russia also considers the pressures of modernity on Russia and the inevitable reactions against the forces of change. For non-rationalist thinkers like Solov'ev, Dostoevsky and Berdyaev this sort of explanation is not enough. There is much more to the idea of Russia than fits into such narrow boundaries. There is also a deep human psychological component that must be added to the mix.

For many Russians of the Silver Age the struggles of Russia corresponded to the basic struggles of the human experience. These shared struggles included the conflict

between the individual and the general; individual personality versus universal order; subjective and objective thought; idealism and materialism; individual freedom and the power of the state. An eschatological sense of history adds to the importance of these struggles. Berdyaev interpreted the Russian eschatological frame of mind as a manifestation of insecurity and instability within the national psyche. It is a manifestation of the national search for a sense of worth. He declared that “the Russian frame of mind is clearly eschatological.”¹² Berdyaev understood the significance of this Russian trait better than most. He observed that “it is a property of Russian spirituality to switch over the current of religious energy to non-religious objects.”¹³

In certain historical periods of stress, crisis, or dislocation there are signs of an “eschatological psychosis” within Russian culture. “The decline and fall of Byzantium in 1453 coincides with a widespread flight into apocalyptic prophecy.”¹⁴ Apocalyptic expectations were very strong in the late Muscovite period. There are successive waves of religious expectations concerning the establishment of Moscow as the Third Rome and Russian saviors are abundant in modern Russian history.

During times of crisis the Russian tradition of viewing literature as an agent of prophecy reinforces and perpetuates apocalyptic expectations. Berdyaev stated that within Russia the “the impossibility of political action led to politics being transferred to thought and literature.”¹⁵ Dostoevsky’s apocalyptic expectations are clear in The Brothers Karamazov when Father Paisiy declares “out of the East of the land the light arises and let there be light...even if it be but at the end of the ages”.¹⁶

¹²Berdyaev, The Russian Idea, 153.

¹³Berdyaev, The Origin of Russian Communism, 21.

¹⁴Billington, 12, 56. The eschatological forebodings increased as the Turks advanced on Byzantium. Billington states that “In times of change and dislocation, the historical imagination tended to look for signs of the coming end of history and approaching deliverance.”

¹⁵Berdyaev, The Origin of Russian Communism, 20.

¹⁶Berdyaev, The Russian Idea, 153.

Berdyayev described the divisions within Russian culture as primordial struggles within the Russian psyche. Interestingly a current rationalist thinker agrees with Berdyayev. Mikhail Epstein in a more restrained and less poetic style than Berdyayev says, “two opposing tendencies developed in the history of Russian culture. One was the idea of the primacy of generalization and unification. This view leans toward ‘ideocracy’ and totalitarianism.” In sharp contrast “the other tendency defended the value of individuality and saw danger in all general ideological constructs.”¹⁷ Berdyayev is definitely one of those who saw danger in all ideological constructs. For Berdyayev this tendency is the old division within mankind. It is the division that Dostoevsky knew so well; it is the struggle between order and chaos, between freedom and slavery; it is the creative force of human existence. Berdyayev called it the mystery of freedom and Berdyayev loves a good mystery.

For mystics the best way to describe a mystery is with myths, metaphors and allegories. The metaphor of open space is a favorite of Russian literature. Nineteenth century Russian literature used this metaphor repeatedly in describing the idea of Russia, particularly in relation to Russia’s eastern heritage. The image of “the infinite flat distances” is an example of “a moment of recognition in the national awareness.” There comes a time “when a place suddenly exposes its connections to an ancient and peculiar vision.”¹⁸ The ancient and peculiar vision of Russians, at least during certain times in their history, was of the vast open steppes of the east. Berdyayev echoed this national

¹⁷Mikhail Epstein, “An Overview of Russian Philosophy,” (Mikhail Epstein Home Page, 1995). Epstein argues that the totalitarian tendency appears under a wide variety of names including “national unity,” “back to the soil movement,” “unification of churches,” “comprehensive kinship,” “proletarian internationalism,” and “classless society.” He also includes Sophiology with the totalitarian movements. The variety and diversity of the theories within Sophiology, the autonomy of the cults, and the fierce individuality of many of the proponents of Sophiology cast doubt on this claim. Epstein argues that the anti-totalitarian tendency is found under names such as personalism, existentialism, religious liberalism, and conceptualism.

¹⁸Simon Schama, Landscape and Memory, (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 16.

awareness as he observed, "In Russia man is dominated by the land and its elements, and indiscipline is common to both."¹⁹

The mystery and allure of the freedom of wild open spaces in conflict with the need for the order of civilization is a story as old as civilization. The struggle between Cain and Abel represents the same idea. The ancient story of the friendship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu is the earliest personification of conflicting urges within man—the struggle between discipline and indiscipline, between order and chaos, between control and freedom, between good and evil. Gilgamesh of the walled city was called a god. Enkidu, born on steppes was an animal and man. The story tells of their becoming human together. The story of Gilgamesh, like the stories of Dostoevsky, and like the philosophy of Solov'ev and Berdyaev, are studies of what happens when man turns away from the established order and moves toward arbitrary self-will.

In the tradition of romantic literature, Berdyaev described the soul of the European as "a castle fortified by a religious and cultural discipline." By contrast "the soul of the Russian soul is drawn to infinite flat distances and is lost in them."²⁰ The distant horizon obviously suggests the possibility of escape from discipline, from regulated boundaries and from preordained order. Berdyaev presented a fearful vision of the Russian soul as "apocalyptic and fluid, ever gliding onward towards the beckoning horizon, especially to that far one which seems to hide the end of the world."²¹ The vision of the beckoning horizon of the eastern steppes is a powerful metaphor for the Russian eschatological frame of mind.

¹⁹Berdyaev, *Dostoevsky*, 162.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹*Ibid.*, 163.

The image of the Russian as the “unhappy wanderer in his native land” was well entrenched in Russian literary tradition by the late nineteenth century.²² Dostoevsky believed that “the nomadism of the Russians, their restless and rebellious wandering, was a profoundly national trait. “Dostoevsky loved this wanderer and was hugely interested in his destiny.”²³ Berdyaev saw the image of the wandering Russian as important in understanding the idea of Russia. He observed that “the formlessness and indiscipline of the Russian soul results in the Russians wearing themselves out for nothing at all and disappearing into space.”²⁴

Unremitting suffering and searching is the stuff of Russian literature. The perceptions of the great Russian writers, Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Chekov and Tolstoy exposed what Berdyaev called the “tragedy and crisis” of Russia. “The Russian soul takes upon itself the burden of responsibility for the world. Every truly Russian soul knows this tragedy and this crisis and this does not permit us to live a happy cultural life.”²⁵ Berdyaev said, “when with great difficulty a Russian accepts ‘the cult of pure values’ and becomes a lover of truth, he desires nothing less than the complete transfiguration of life, the salvation of the world.”²⁶ There are no halfway measures. Berdyaev believed that this is an original, yet sad, trait in Russian culture. “It is the trait that gives rise to a heaviness and gloominess in Russian life.”²⁷

From Berdyaev’s perspective the crisis of national identity was apparent in Russian national messianic expectations. Messianism represented one of the great dangers of Russian nationalism. Nationalism is a modern phenomena that has influenced

²²Ibid., 179. Berdyaev was quoting Puskin.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., 163.

²⁵Berdyaev, The Meaning of The Creative Act, 325.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

Russian politics at least since the middle of the nineteenth century. Its influence has not, on the whole been benign. Panslavism, a term first used in 1826, was “expansionist messianism with overtones of racial superiority.”²⁸ During the crisis of 1905-7, anti-Semitic proto-fascism such as seen in The Black Hundred “helped undermine the parliamentarianism of the Duma and to discredit Russia in the eyes of the international community.”²⁹ During the upheavals of 1917 the extreme Right evolved into full-blown fascism. The forces of the radical left also incorporated nationalism into their program. In Russia today messianic apocalyptic nationalism is a threat to all hopes for a secure and stable future. The threat from right wing nationalism appears to be as dangerous as the threat of a resurgence of communism.

The insights of Nicolas Berdyaev concerning nationalism are relevant for today’s world. He saw Russian nationalism as a form of apocalyptic messianism and he believed it to be a dreadful force. Berdyaev viewed nationalism, like religion, as an emotional rather than rational phenomena. It grows out of a need or will to believe rather than a grouping of measurable common characteristic. From this perspective nationalism can be described as either a “state of mind” or a “determination of the will”.³⁰

For Berdyaev neither the source nor the definition of nationalism could be found solely in the anthropological characteristics of a group. Nationalism is a manifestation of what Dostoevsky calls “that other force.” The idea of nationalism begins within the individual and springs from personal emotions or needs. It is an emotional belief system that requires identification with the state and supreme allegiance to the state. Berdyaev

²⁸Carter, 18.

²⁹Ibid., 147.

³⁰The “state of mind” thesis is central to the work of Hans Kohn. Elie Kedourie refers to nationalism as a “determination of the will”.

did not believe that this is a good thing for mankind in general and for Russia in particular.

Nationalism is often confused with both patriotism and xenophobia. Patriotism is affection for one's country, or group. It is usually accompanied by a sense of loyalty to the country's institutions and enthusiasm for the country's defense. Xenophobia is a dislike of the stranger or the outsider and it results in a reluctance to admit him into the group. Both of these sentiments have been universally held in all ages. Neither, therefore, asserts a particular doctrine of the state or of the individual's relation to it. Modern nationalism does both.³¹

Today nationalism is one of the most powerful movements in the world. Open ethnic warfare is stalking central Europe. The remnants of the Soviet Union are in turmoil. Many African countries have endured decades of oppression and bloodshed in the name of imperialist nationalism. Asia and the sub-continent are seldom without the threat of nationalist eruptions. The Islamic world is held hostage by the forces of messianic nationalism. Indeed the world is witnessing "a convulsive ingathering of nations".³²

There are different theories concerning modern nationalism. Some view it as the outgrowth of shared anthropological characteristics. Others define nationalism as a modern form of tribalism. There are those who link nationalism with religion and still others who connect it to materialist and atheistic movements such as fascism or communism. For some, nationalism is seen as a religion in itself that wrongly "sets up its dark gods."³³

³¹Kedourie, Elie, Nationalism, (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1966), 74.

³²Nathan Gardels, "Two Concepts of Nationalism: An Interview with Isaiah Berlin," The New York Review, 21 November 1991, 19.

³³Carlton J. H. Hayes, Nationalism: A Religion, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960), 18.

There are two major variants of the theory of nationalism as a form of tribalism. In one version, nationalism grows out of wanting to belong to a group. The idea of nationalism as “no more than the sense of belonging to an in-group” certainly does not engender a sense of alarm.³⁴ Rather it gives nationalism an almost warm and cuddly quality. The second version describes nationalism as an inherent “fear of the other.” It comes from a natural fear of the stranger, or of outsider, and the stranger becomes the enemy.³⁵ This view often fosters an attitude of exclusiveness, intolerance and scapegoating.

Theories that view nationalism solely as a natural outgrowth of tribalism ignore both the modernity and the virulence of modern nationalism. Furthermore the description of nationalism as a version of “the cruder tribalism of primitive peoples” assumes that nationalism represents progress.³⁶ The characteristics of both dislike of the stranger and exclusion are common to all human groups at all times and in all places. Exactly because of that they cannot serve as the sole definition of either the tribe or nation.³⁷ There is degree of intellectual myopia in the naturalistic theory of nationalism. This view does not recognize modern nationalism as a truly new and dangerous phenomena.

A more realistic, though still limited, theory sees nationalism as coming from a militant attitude of defense caused by the actions of other people.³⁸ The “response to threat” explanation of nationalism fits neatly into state propaganda packages and is the

³⁴Crane Brinton, The Shaping of the Modern Mind, (New York: New American Library, 1953), 6.

³⁵Max Sylvius Handman, “The Sentiment of Nationalism”, The Political Science Quarterly, 36 (1921): 106.

³⁶Louis L. Snyder, ed. The Dynamics of Nationalism, (Princeton, New Jersey: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1964), 29.

³⁷Kedourie, 74.

³⁸Handman, 104.

one that is easiest to call on for an easy explanation of national behavior. It is also the point at which nationalism and patriotism become easily intermingled.³⁹

The anthropological theory is one of the most widely accepted explanations of nationalism. It focuses on the identifiable shared external characteristics of a group of people and views these as the driving force behind nationalistic movements. Certainly anthropological features are part of the dynamics of nationalism, but they do not fully explain it. The arguments against an anthropological definition of nationalism are strong. "The phenomena of nationalism can be present without the common characteristics of language, race, culture, or religion as a common factor. Likewise nationalism can be absent when all of these characteristics are present."⁴⁰ In modern times "the world is so diverse and races, languages, religions and traditions are so intermixed, that none of them can be a convincing reason why people should form one state."⁴¹ Just as there is no compelling reason for people who speak the same language but whose history is different to form a single state, neither is there a reason for people who speak two or more different languages, practice different religions and have different cultures, not to form a state. The existence of Britain and America, separate countries with much in common, and the union of English and French Canadians within the Canadian state, are counter arguments to an anthropological explanation of nationalism.⁴² The uses of external characteristics to define nationalism "are attempts to reduce nationalism to some kind of intelligible variable." Nationalism is instead "an ideal of a different order."⁴³

³⁹Serge Shmemann, "What's Wrong With This Picture of Nationalism," New York Times, 21 February, 1999, Section 4, 1. A recent version of the 'response to threat' explanation of nationalism suggests that the nationalistic demands of ethnic groups such as those of the Kosovars and the Kurds is a result of the threat to small groups created by a global economy. "In a complex and new universe of porous borders and interconnected economies there are new political uses of nationalism and ethnicity."

⁴⁰Kedourie, 74.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Anthony D. Smith, Theories of Nationalism, (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972), 150.

What is left as an explanation for the phenomena of nationalism when all the easy answers are 'found wanting'? There are many who believe that "nationalist movements are neither historical, ethnic, religious or territorial movements." As early as 1882 Ernest Renan, in his lecture "What is a Nation", concluded that the will of the individual must ultimately indicate whether a nation exists or not."⁴⁴ Ahad Ha'am, the Jewish nationalist, expressed the same view. "It is a mistake," he wrote, "to think that Jewish nationality exists only when there is an actual collective national ethos...its reality is dependent on nothing but its presence in the individual psyche."⁴⁵ From this perspective it is argued that nationalism is "first and foremost a state of mind, an act of consciousness."⁴⁶ It is a determination of the will and an act of faith. It cannot be fully explained within the confines of rationality. In Freudian terminology nationalism, like religion, represents displaced feelings. Dostoevsky wrote that "nations are built up and moved by another force which sways and dominates them the origin of which is unknown and inexplicable."⁴⁷

While there is widespread agreement that nationalism is a real and active phenomena in the modern world there are contradicting assessments of the impact of nationalism on mankind. In defense of nationalism the ideals of enlightenment thought are often evoked. "English nationalism is identified with the concept of individual liberty."⁴⁸ Such views link modern nationalism to the ideas John Locke in 1688, the American Revolution of 1776 and The French Revolution of 1789.⁴⁹

⁴⁴Kedourie, 81.

⁴⁵Ibid., 80-81.

⁴⁶Hans Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism, (New York: Collier Books, 1946), 10.

⁴⁷Fyodor Dostoyevsky, The Possessed, trans. Andrew R. MacAndrew (New York: Signet Classic, 1962), 237.

⁴⁸Synder, 29.

⁴⁹Ibid.

There are scholars who consider nationalism a force with the potential for both good and evil. “There is a ‘Janus-faced posture’ of nationalism. The force of nationalism has moved mankind toward the highest expressions of cooperative and creative life” yet it has also “indulged mankind’s dark side and resulted in the depths of human depravation.”⁵⁰ Those who see some good in nationalism contend that nationalist revivals can bring advantages and blessings. Culture and art often thrive. Artistic giants such as composers Dvorak and Chopin and the artists David and Delacroix came out of nationalist movements.⁵¹

There are those, however, who do not believe that nationalism has at any time moved mankind toward the highest expression of cooperative and creative life or provided blessings for mankind. Rather nationalism harbors “elements of secret conspiracy, terrorism, ruthless reprisals, and above all totalitarianism. Many millenarian pogroms and sectarian struggles have sprung from nationalism. In the extreme “nationalism annihilates freedom in the service of the state.”⁵²

The religious overtones of nationalism are causes for alarm. Indeed nationalism demonstrates dangerous religious characteristics. It is argued that “man’s religious sense, his spirituality, is manifest not only in great religious systems and in the animism and pagan cults of primitive peoples, but in contemporary communism and especially in modern nationalism.”⁵³

Berdyaev stood in opposition to every variant of nationalism. He believed that extreme nationalism is a form of political messianism. Nationalism is a false religion that serves a false god. Berdyaev sees the same danger in nationalism that he sees in all

⁵⁰Smith, 256.

⁵¹Smith, 13.

⁵²Keodurie, 1.

⁵³Hayes, 18.

universal utopian schemes. The danger lies in the suppression of the spirit of the individual for some great or grand cause. For Berdyaev nationalism, like all forms of universalism, are a threat to individual freedom.

In Berdyaev's opinion the very nature of nationalism is repressive. He opposed nationalism because nationalism stands in opposition to freedom. Berdyaev made his views of nationalism clear when he proclaimed, "I believe that the innumerable nationalistic societies and associations of to-day present a betrayal of the idea of true nationhood—a kind of International of the right."⁵⁴ He continued, "I dislike the very term 'foreigner' or 'alien' with all its evil undertones and overtones, and I cannot put myself in the position of distinguishing human beings according to their nationality."⁵⁵ In even stronger terms Berdyaev declared that "few things are more repulsive than national conceit, arrogance and exclusiveness, and I find these instincts particularly repulsive in Russians. This applies above all to anti-Semitism."⁵⁶

Berdyaev believes that Russian nationalism has a symbiotic relationship to apocalyptic, messianic utopianism. He saw the most powerful expressions of Russian nationalism, as well as the strongest condemnations of it, in Russian literature. In The Possessed Dostoevsky has Shatov voice the Slavophile point of view in a conversation with Stavrogin. Stavrogin: "Do you believe in God? Shatov: I believe in Russia...I believe that the new advent will take place in Russia...I believe. Stavrogin: And in God? Shatov: I *shall* believe in God."⁵⁷

As the voices of nationalism, racism and anti-Semitism speak to the discontent of Russians today, the potential for another convulsion of nationalism exists. There is a

⁵⁴Berdyaev, Dream and Reality, 257.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Dostoevsky, 239. The emphasis on "shall" is Dostoevsky's.

very real danger of a resurgence of right-wing Russian messianic nationalism. "Russian nationalism could acquire a momentum of its own, particularly if it develops in reaction to the newly emerging local nationalism."⁵⁸ The old scapegoat of an international Jewish-Masonic conspiracy is already being blamed for the poor conditions in Russia. Given the present situation a movement toward either neo-Stalinism or right-wing Russian nationalism could occur. From the perspective of Berdyaev the latter would be as bad, perhaps worse, than the former.

Berdyaev warned of the use of ancient myths and images in the cause of messianic nationalism. The myth, although not factual, is a powerful propaganda tool in the seduction of the national psyche. As people play out the myth it becomes self-fulfilling. The romanticized myth of the past becomes the reality of the present. In Russia the "damp earth mother," Mother Russia, the Third Rome, and all dreams of utopian systems and messianic destiny fit into this pattern.

There are many dangers inherent in nationalism but the theory of the useful lie is at its core.⁵⁹ Berdyaev concurred with the idea put forward by Plato that in the life of religions, institutions, and nations, just as in the life of individuals, there is "a pragmatism of falsehood."⁶⁰ He realized, as did Tolstoy, that the truth is highly dangerous for those who need and nurture the useful lie.⁶¹

Predictions about the potential for disaster in Russia abound in the writings of Berdyaev. Early in this century, Berdyaev warned of the dangers of right-wing religious nationalism. He saw nationalism as inexorably linked to religiosity.

⁵⁸Carter, 149.

⁵⁹The idea of the useful lie is originally found in Plato's Republic. The idea has been used throughout western history. Tolstoy incorporated it into his ideas on resistance to government.

⁶⁰Berdyaev, The Russian Idea, 151.

⁶¹Ibid.

Nationalism can function either as a companion to religion or as a substitute for religion. Berdyaev observed that Russians have the capacity for taking religion to frightening extremes. In one of his most chilling observations about Russia he said that

The Russians have demonstrated the extremist consequences of certain ideas. They are an apocalyptic people and they could not stop short at a compromise. They had to make real either brotherhood in Christ or comradeship in Antichrist. If the one does not reign, then the other will.⁶²

There are many examples of the Russian propensity for religious excesses. He classified the Russian Revolution as a prime example of the destructive potential of Russian religiosity. "The Russian revolution has turned out just as Dostoevsky foresaw it. Dostoevsky understood that Socialism in Russia was a religious matter."⁶³ Berdyaev contended that "the real concern of the pre-revolutionary intellectuals was "not politics but the salvation of mankind without the help of God."⁶⁴ Communism, at least "since the Russian Revolution, has had a distinctly religious appeal." Communism as a materialist and atheistic religion promises an earthly paradise.⁶⁵ With communism as a substitute for religion "the Russian people, in full accordance with their particular mentality, offered themselves as a burnt-offering on the altar of an experiment unknown to previous history."⁶⁶

For Berdyaev the disaster of the Revolution was made worse by the fact that not only are Russians by their very nature a spiritual people they are a non-political people.

The Russian does not look on his property as sacred, he has no philosophical justification for having temporal possessions at all, and he

⁶²Berdyaev, The End of Our Time, 206.

⁶³Ibid., 148 .

⁶⁴Ibid., 140.

⁶⁵Hayes, 15.

⁶⁶Berdyaev, The End of Our Time, 148.

believes in his heart that it would be better for him to be a monk or a wandering pilgrim. The ease with which private property has been abolished in Russia is due to this national spirit of detachment from earthly goods. The merchant likewise feels that he has made his profits by very doubtful means and that sooner or later he will have to do penance for them.⁶⁷

Throughout his writings Berdyaev steadfastly maintained that “the Russian question is above all a spiritual question.”⁶⁸ Berdyaev believed that the Russian people, by tradition, approach everything from a foundation of spirituality and that, paradoxically, it is this spiritual nature of the Russians that holds the key to both their salvation and their destruction.

The national propensity for extremism inherent in the spirituality of the Russians is especially dangerous when linked to the idea of national destiny. “There exists in the Russian people a vigorous messianic consciousness.”⁶⁹ Berdyaev declared that “the whole tragedy of history is due to the working of the messianic idea,” and to “its constant effect of causing division.”⁷⁰ The Russian is attracted to, even yearns for utopian schemes, but these schemes will not solve Russia’s problems. From Berdyaev’s perspective, neither socialism nor free market capitalism was appropriate for Russia. It is not totalitarian communism or democracy that will save Russia. He viewed orthodox religion as an impediment to true spirituality. By far the worst possible path for Russia is messianic nationalism. Berdyaev believed that the spiritual, non-political, nature of Russia requires the creation of a new national synthesis and a spiritual response to the temporal world.

⁶⁷Berdyaev, *The End of Our Time*, 150-51.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 140.

⁶⁹Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*, 2.

⁷⁰Berdyaev, *The Beginning and The End*, 200.

Although Berdyaev consistently opposed Russian nationalism, particularly the racist and anti-Semitic extremes, he is sometimes claimed by the very people with whom he disagrees.⁷¹ In 1964 members of a right-wing radical group VSDhSON read Berdyaev's writings from the perspective of their ideology. Although it was exactly the kind of group with exactly the kinds of ideas that Berdyaev opposed throughout his life VSDhSON claimed him as their own. These right-wing radicals filtered the ideas of Berdyaev through their own belief system and lifted out the parts that fit with their agenda.

Berdyaev admitted that "the paradoxical and even contradictory character of my thought has produced the curious result of my having sometimes won the approval of my ideological opponents." He acknowledged that "my thought has often been misunderstood and misinterpreted, and for this I am probably myself largely to blame."⁷² But Berdyaev issued a disclaimer to all seekers after ideologues when he says that his vocation is to proclaim not a doctrine but a vision. "I work and desire to work by inspiration, fully conscious of being open to all the criticism that systematic philosophers, historians, and scholars are likely to make, and, in fact have made."⁷³

The use of Berdyaev's writings by the right-wing groups as well as re-readings of the harsh criticism of Berdyaev by Peter Struve, leader of the Russian liberals in exile alarmed many scholars in the west. Some viewed Berdyaev's ideas as extremely dangerous. In one published study of Russian right-wing groups Berdyaev is called "the

⁷¹John B. Dunlop. The New Russian Revolutionaries. (Belmont, Mass: Nordland Publishing Company, 1976), 13. In 1964 a right-wing radical group, VSKhSON, was formed in the Soviet Union. Its aim was to "overthrow the [Soviet] dictatorship" VSKhSON also promoted a political program which was permeated with racism and anti-semitism. "A spiritual struggle...is in progress. Two paths are open to mankind: free contact with God...or Satanocracy." The banned works of Nicolas Berdyaev were used by members of VSKhSON. Two of his works, The Russian Idea and The New Middle Ages were used to recruit members.

⁷²Berdyaev, Dream and Reality, 105.

⁷³Ibid., 179.

teacher of the right.”⁷⁴ Berdyaev’s work, The New Middle Ages, was described as being “permeated through-out by echoes of Fascism and by a rejection of democracy for Russia.”⁷⁵ Some critics of Berdyaev’s ideas viewed his writings as supportive of a political and religious messianic destiny for Russia. In the context of the Cold War, intellectuals, both on the right and on the left saw in the writings of Berdyaev signs of whatever they feared most. Although he hated anti-Semitism and opposed fascism he was viewed as a dangerous right-winger. The Soviet Union banned his works as anti-communist but he was labeled a Soviet sympathizer by many within the Russian émigré community.⁷⁶ Berdyaev was always opposed to nationalism in general, and Russian nationalism in particular, yet as recently as 1998 the Russian historian Aileen Kelly labeled him a “neo-romantic nationalist” but also a “religious dogmatist”, a “utopian thinker”, a “Slavophile,” a “maximalist,” a “disdainer of compromise” and a “secretor of moral poison.”⁷⁷

Perhaps the fear engendered by Berdyaev’s ideas speaks to the continuing influence of literature on the beliefs and actions of Russians. Literature has long been used as a weapon in political and social warfare. The giants of the Golden Age sought answers to the ‘cursed questions’ of their time through literature and poetry. The generation of the Silver Age believed that the “alchemy of art” would solve the social problems of their age.

Berdyaev understood the power of an idea presented in literary form. For better or worse, the Russian writer is often considered a prophet or seer. Berdyaev thought of

⁷⁴Yanov, The Russian New Right, 29.

⁷⁵Ibid. Yanov states that The New Middle Ages, 1923, is “a provocative work that has suprisingly never been translated into English”. Yanov cites the passage that refers to Fascism as “a creative phenomenon” and to Mussolini as “perhaps the only creative statesman of Europe.”

⁷⁶Ibid., 30, 61.

⁷⁷Kelly, Toward Another Shore, 155-200.

Dostoevsky in this way. The power of the ideas of Dostoevsky's led Berdyaev to write that "the worth of Dostoevsky was so great that to have produced him is by itself sufficient justification for the existence of the Russian people in the world" and at the last judgment of nations "he will bear witness for his countrymen."⁷⁸ Although contemporary Russian literature does not reach the heights of the works of Tolstoy or Dostoevsky, it continues to serve the dual function of social criticism, interpretation and prophecy. It also serves as a vehicle of national introspection and reflection concerning both the Russian national identity and the Russian destiny. Many Russians still believe in the creative power of literature and the arts. Fifty years after Berdyaev's death and over one hundred years after the death of Dostoevsky the idea of understanding Russia through literature still lives. It is through literature that the soul of Russia finds a voice.

The modern Russian émigré Andreï Makine echoes the idea of both Dostoevsky and Berdyaev as he contemplates Russia. Makine views 'the Russian destiny' through the eyes of his French grandmother. "The cruel history of this immense empire, of its famines, its revolutions, its civil war, was nothing to do with her...We Russians had no choice. But through her eyes...we could see an unfamiliar Russia that needed to be discovered."⁷⁹ Tatyana Tolstaya instinctively knows what most Westerners do not know about this novel. "The grandmother incarnates everything in the Russian fate...she is Russia herself." Her love story told "is the inexplicable tortuous love for Russia and what is traditionally considered Russia's 'feminine' being."⁸⁰

Modern Russian writers understand the divisions of the Russian soul as well as those who wrote of these things in the past. There remains "the sense of two layers of a

⁷⁸Berdyaev, *Dostoevsky*, 277.

⁷⁹Andreï Machine, *Dreams of My Russian Summers*, translation by Geoffrey Strachan (New York: Arcade Publishing) 1995, 66.

⁸⁰Tatyana Tolstaya, "Love Story," *The New York Review of Books*, Volume XLIV, number 18, 20 November, 1997, 4-6.

single existence being cut off, divided, disconnected...one can see an analogous conflict...a simultaneous merging and disengaging.”⁸¹ Just as in the time of Dostoevsky; just as in the time of Berdyaev, these things are still understood. The old feeling of separation, of longing for a lost part of Russia, of looking at Russia from a distance is the same for the modern exile. “For the first time in my life I was looking at my country from the outside, from a distance...I looked back to contemplate.”⁸² This echoes the sentiment of Dostoevsky’s character Versilov, “It is only the Russian who has the faculty of being more and more Russian as he becomes more European.”⁸³ Toward the end of his life, after decades of forced exile from Russia, Berdyaev writes, “Never have I felt so close to Russia...I am faced again and again, but never so vividly as now, with the complexity and tragic nature of Russian destiny.”⁸⁴

Modernity often brings forth incurable nostalgia for ancient regimes.⁸⁵ Many Russians today would concur with Talleyrand’s eighteenth century lament, “Oh how beautiful life was before the Revolution.” The writings of ‘the countryside’ writers such as Kazakov’s The Smell of Bread, Solukhin’s Virgin Soil Upturned and Valentin Rasputin’s Farewell to Matyora are expressions of political and social criticism as well as powerful vehicles for the promotion of nationalistic ideas and programs.⁸⁶ These works, as well as others of the genre, concentrate on the themes of the evils of industrialization, a nostalgia for Mother Russia, conspiracies against the environment, and a suspicion of women’s liberation. This new literature often advocates chauvinism and anti-semitism.⁸⁷ Some of the literature of contemporary Russia echoes the long held belief in a national

⁸¹Tolstaya, 6.

⁸²Makine, 33.

⁸³Berdyaev, Dostoevsky, 172-3.

⁸⁴Berdyaev, Dream and Reality, 309.

⁸⁵Michael Ignatieff, “Book Review,” New York Times, 2 November, 1997, 9.

⁸⁶Carter, 91-93.

⁸⁷Carter, 92-99.

destiny that includes Moscow as the Third Rome. Many contemporary Russians, as in earlier time of crisis, are frozen between remembering the past and waiting for the future.

The relevance of Berdyaev's insights concerning the "Russian complaint" is evident in the case of Nikita S. Mikhalkov, Russia's most celebrated living film director. The creator of "Burnt by the Sun" has a new creative project. His aim is to "conjure up an ideal of Russia that its people can live by." He feels that Russia "needs the restoration of the real or idealized virtues of Czarist Russia." Mr. Mikhaldov, a Slavophile, casts himself as Russia's new political savior.

Using the alchemy of film art Mr. Mikhalkov follows in the tradition of the romantics of the Silver Age. He hopes to use his art to transform society. This self-styled prophet, like the schismatics of the seventeenth century, looks to the past for a vision of the future. He portrays "a Russia not as it was but how it should be."⁸⁸ The cinema of the twentieth century joins literature, art and poetry of the nineteenth century as the bearer of Russia's destiny. Thus on the eve of the coming century Russia faces many of the same choices she faced on the eve of the present one.

In any present-day discussion of the Russian identity or the Russian destiny historians, even intellectual historians, are suspicious of a national claim to exceptionalism. Any theory that demonstrates national uniqueness could easily be misread or willfully co-opted by flag-waving zealots. But Berdyaev contends that there is something exceptional about Russians. This exceptionalism, however, is not good for the Russian culture or the Russian people. He stated that "there is a polarization and inconsistency of the Russian people."⁸⁹ The national consciousness has "never been

⁸⁸Michael R. Gordon, "In Filmmaker's Ideal Russia, A Prsidential Role?", New York Times, 21 February, 1999, 3. Mr. Mikhaldov, a Slavophile, casts himself as "Russia's political savior".

⁸⁹Berdyaev, The Russian Idea, 2.

well-balanced, quietly sure of itself or free from hysteria.” It has never reached “spiritual manhood” and the nation is ill with “the Russian complaint.”⁹⁰

Berdyayev warned against repeating the mistakes of the past. He believes that Russia must not continue to perpetuate and exacerbate the problems of either internal or external separateness and polarization. Russia must find a new way, a creative way, to heal herself of her old ills. The way will not be found in either a monist or a dualist world view but in a new culture of pluralism.

As with every creation there is a struggle of opposing forces. The primordial struggle for the soul of Russia is not a struggle between east and west or between Slavophiles and Westernizers. Neither is it a struggle between idealism and materialism or between socialism and capitalism. The struggle and suffering of Russia is more profound than any of these. Berdyayev sees the struggle as the primal conflict between determinism and freedom.

The allegory of a primordial struggle deep within the soul of ‘underworld man’ is a persistent theme of the Silver Age.⁹¹ In The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor the struggle for the soul of mankind represents the struggle for the soul of Russia.

“Dostoevsky was essentially a Russian and a writer about Russia, and the riddle of the Russian soul can be read in him. He was the herald of the Russian idea and of the Russian consciousness.”⁹² Berdyayev saw the choice put forth to mankind by The Grand Inquisitor as the same choice laid before Russia. That choice is between the “earthly bread” of authority or the “heavenly bread” of freedom. Berdyayev’s life and work

⁹⁰Berdyayev, Dostoevsky, 161.

⁹¹Ibid., 52.

⁹²Ibid., 277.

demonstrate that “there is nothing more seductive for man than the freedom of his conscience, but there is nothing more tormenting either.”⁹³

⁹³Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, 254.

CONCLUSION

If I were consistent I would not speak or
Write at all. But I have the courage to be
inconsistent, and I cannot be silent.¹

Nicolas Berdyaev

When I was younger I was a 'idealist' in
bad as well as the good sense of the word:
I probably still am. 'Idealism' may, indeed,
be a mere egotism of the crank: but it may
also spell life in that region of the spirit in
which imagination dwells.²

Nicolas Berdyaev

In his lifetime Berdyaev never considered himself a leader much less a hero. Yet he has been called the hero of personal freedom. He has also been called the captive of freedom and, indeed, the "unbearable burden of freedom" was the central theme of his life. Like a bound Atlas Berdyaev carried that burden with him always. His obsession with freedom took him on an intellectual odyssey that was as circuitous as that of the Greek legends. The journey was characterized by wrong turns, dead ends, miscalculations and mistakes, and Berdyaev readily admitted and recorded all of these. Even though he came to see many of his early ideas as wrongheaded, he believed that it was all a necessary part of his intellectual quest.

When he was older and venerated, Berdyaev bristled at being overly respected and respectable. "To my surprise and annoyance I find that I am becoming known as a 'teacher of life.'" Concerning his elevation as a hero Berdyaev remarked that "I should like to assure my readers that I am nothing of the sort." Instead a hero Berdyaev felt

¹Berdyaev, *Dream and Reality*, 294.

that he was “a rebel who desires freedom from the bondage of things, objects, abstractions, ideologies and the fatalism of history.”³

The desire for freedom and the concomitant need to rebel against abstract religious, philosophical and political orthodoxy forced Berdyaev to immerse himself in the writings of other intellectual rebels. Early in his life Berdyaev was moved by the writings of Dostoevsky;⁴ later in his life Berdyaev was moved by the writings of Kierkegaard.

Like Kierkegaard, like Jacob in the Old Testament, Berdyaev wrestled with many opponents. These opponents were mighty. Berdyaev strove not only with man, not only with holy Mother Russia, but like the Kierkegaardian hero, with God himself. As Kierkegaard proclaimed in Fear and Trembling: “a person is remembered in the world not only for what he loved in life but also for the greatness of the things that he strove against.”⁵ The opponents should be worthy ones: “For he who strove with the world became great by overcoming the world, and he who strove with himself became greater by overcoming himself; but he who strove with God became greater than any of these.”⁶

The opposite of freedom for Berdyaev was the curse of determinism, rationality, and order. Freedom or free-will was grounded in chaos, anarchy and irrationality. The man who was free must be a rebel. This theory of division and resistance is the underpinning of all aspects of Berdyaev’s life and work. His lifelong defense of individual freedom, his belief concerning the source of evil in the world, his theory of

²Ibid., 298.

³Ibid., 309.

⁴Berdyaev finds the most profound insights into the idea that humans require the freedom to rebel in the literary works of the great Russian writers, especially the works of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. Berdyaev describes Dostoevsky as a Russian wandering about in the world of the spirit. This description also applies to Berdyaev.

⁵Soren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, (New York: Penguin, 1986) 59.

⁶Ibid., 59.

God-manhood, his theory of androgyny, his ideas about creativity, his insights into the soul of Russia, his opinions on nationalism in general and messianic nationalism in particular, his analysis of literature, and his introspection concerning himself are all based on this theory. Berdyaev's idea of freedom must allow for not only the possibility of irrationality, foolishness, and madness, but also for imperfection and even evil.

The freedom of life grounded in chaos, anarchy and irrationality is best expressed in the stories and novels of Dostoevsky. Berdyaev totally agreed with Dostoevsky's man from underground who said, "why don't we reduce all this reasonableness to dust with one good kick."⁷ Instead of following the deadly path of order and rationality, we must follow the chaotic mess of anarchy and irrationality. To Berdyaev and to Dostoevsky, the "caprice of ours" to follow irrationality "may in fact be the most profitable of anything on earth for it preserves the chiefest and dearest thing, our personality and our individuality."⁸

Many students of Russia and the world tend to dismiss the world of the imagination; the world of ideas and the primacy of individual freedom. The study of history fortunately does not fit into neat little cubbyhole. Like Russia it is sometimes messy and often chaotic. This theme is best expressed by the greatest essayist and student of modern Russia--Isaiah Berlin. Berlin agreed with Berdyaev and Berdyaev's heroes, Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky. "If human life can be ruled by reason the possibility of life as a spontaneous activity involving consciousness of free will is destroyed."⁹ Berdyaev on this important theme goes even further than Berlin. "Absolute perfection, absolute order and rationality," Berdyaev declared might turn out "to be an

⁷Dostoevsky, Notes From Underground, trans. by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, (New York: 25.

⁸Ibid., 8.

⁹Berlin, Hedgehog and the Fox, 9.

evil.” Moreover this pursuit of the absolute might be “a greater evil than the imperfect, unorganized, irrational life which admits to a certain freedom of evil.”¹⁰ This shunning of the absolute does not mean that humans should shy away from intellectuality. It is in the world of ideas that man exercises the greatest free-will and that is why ideas are of the greatest interest and concern to mankind. Ideas have a power of their own though modern scientific thinking tends to deny their value. Berdyaev called ideas the destiny of the living being; “its burning motive-power.”¹¹ Ideas for Berdyaev “are man’s daily bread and he cannot live without pondering the questions of God, Satan, immortality, freedom, evil, the destiny of mankind.”¹²

Berdyaev considered ideas to be living, concrete and substantial things; the source of the human personality. He saw history as a study of the power of ideas to arouse humans to action. Thus history, for Berdyaev, could never be an objective study. “History is not an objective empirical datum .” Instead for Berdyaev “history is a myth,” but “one that is a manifestation of the greatest reality.”¹³

Berdyaev said, “a purely objective history would be incomprehensible.”¹⁴ Other scholars agree. Isaiah Berlin wrote, “History would be an excellent thing if only it were true.”¹⁵ Despite the best efforts of Comte and those who followed him history is no science. “The factors which determine the life of mankind are varied and complex and

¹⁰Nicolas Berdyaev, “the Ethics of Creativity” in Ultimate Questions, ed. and trans. by Alexander Schmemmann, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 272.

¹¹Berdyaev, Dostoevsky, 12.

¹²Ibid., 219.

¹³Oliver F. Clarke, Introduction to Berdyaev, (London: Geoffrey Bles Ltd., 1950), 103. Cites Berdyaev in Freedom and the Spirit, 70.

¹⁴Nicolas Berdyaev, The Meaning of History, trans. by George Reavey, (London: G. Bles, 1936), 31.

¹⁵Berlin, The Hedgehog and the Fox, 25.

historians select from them some aspect, say the political or the economic, and represent it as primary, as the official cause of social change.”¹⁶

We must not suppose that the idea of history as myth makes history false and useless. On the contrary, myth best explains the realities of life just as the great stories of Dostoevsky represent fiction that is much more than fiction. As our teachers in the humanities have always emphasized the old tales of mythology and literature are things that never happened but are forever true. The myths of history “tell stories of past events as they are preserved in popular memory and they conceal the greatest realities of a culture. They are the concrete expressions of abstract ideas and the images of an ideal world.”¹⁷

Berdyayev commenting upon Dostoevsky attacked the easy path to enlightenment where seekers wished “that man were more narrow.”¹⁸ For the idealist the complexity and mystery of human existence only enriches life. “He who knows no mystery lives in a flat, insipid, one-dimensional world.” And indeed “if the experience of flatness and insipidity were not relieved by an awareness of mystery, depth and infinitude, life would no longer be livable.”¹⁹ Berdyayev lived and pursued life in all its nastiness, complexity, and splendor. His was not a one-dimensional world. His world was Russia.

Finally, who is Berdyayev? Is he, as has been charged, a dreamer, an opinionated iconoclast, a mad romantic, a dangerous individualist, a “gentle protester”, a “black swan,” or is he a fox who confounds all the hedgehogs of the world? He is all of the above often concurrently. How Russian of Berdyayev.

¹⁶Ibid., 27.

¹⁷Clarke, 103. Cites Berdyayev, *Freedom and the Spirit*, 70.

¹⁸Berdyayev, *Dostoevsky*, 18.

¹⁹Berdyayev, *Dream and Reality*, 299.

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This work was completed in 1914 and first published in Russian in 1916. It is a reflection of current philosophical trends in Russia in the pre-war period. Presents the foundation of Berdyaev's philosophical convictions which reappear in many later works. The main themes are freedom and creativity as manifest in human personality. Topics discussed include: individualism and universalism; gender-androgyny; marriage and the family; art; morals; structure of society; occultism and magic. Partially written during a sojourn in Italy.

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First published in Russian in 1923 as The World View of Dostoievsky. A philosophic/literary essay on Dostoevsky based on lectures and studies in seminars. It centers on the social, philosophical and religious implications of Dostoevsky's "Legend of the Grand Inquisitor." Topics discussed include: ideas as representative of the spirit of mankind; God, man and creativity; freedom; evil; love; revolution; socialism; Russia.

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Translated by George Reavey. London: G. Bles, 1936.

First published in Russian in 1923. A publication in original form of a series of lectures first delivered in Soviet Russia. The ideas were developed in 1918 during the early Bolshevik rule and delivered as lectures and studies in seminars in 1919-20 at Moscow's Free Academy of Spiritual Thought. The work is an exposition of the general principles of Christian dialectic. Topics discussed include: the historical tradition; the metaphysical and the historical; Christianity and history; the theory of progress in history; the renaissance and humanism; the advent of the machine and the disintegration of the human image.

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A collection of five essays first published in Russian in 1924. Includes a work published in Russian as The New Middle Ages. A collection of meditations on the catastrophic events of the Russian Revolution and Civil War. Contemplates the disastrous influence of technological science and the dominance of politics in the lives of individuals. Describes Berdyæv's ideas of existential metaphysics.

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The work is an expansion of an article written in 1905 and was first published in Russian in 1926 as A Sketch From the History of Russian Religious Thought. A sympathetic study of Constantine Leontiev even though Berdyaev stands in staunch opposition to Leontiev's social and religious philosophy.
- _____. Freedom and the Spirit. Translated by Oliver Fielding Clarke. London: G. Bles, 1935.
First published in Russian in two volumes in 1927-28 as Philosophy of the Freedom of the Spirit. Written after Berdyaev embraces religion. Presents Berdyaev's main metaphysical ideas. Contemplates the question of religious liberty within the context of individual freedom. Topics discussed include: symbol, myth and dogma in religion; evil in the world; mysticism, theosophy and gnosis; freedom of the spirit.
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First published in Russian in 1931. An essay on paradoxical ethics in three parts. Part I includes a study of the problem of ethics in philosophy, science and religion. Part II is a study of ethics in the law and concrete problems of ethics. Part III considers eschatological ethics: death and immortality; good and evil.
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This work is a direct attack on Marxism. Depicts the world as engaged in conflict between opposed forces. It is "dedicated to the memory of Karl Marx who was the social master of my youth and whose opponent in ideas I have now become." Topics discussed include: Marx's theory of class war; criticism of Marx's theory; the aristocrat, bourgeois and workman; Christianity and class war; man as citizen; freedom and coercion in society.
- _____. The Russian Revolution. Translated by D. Bennigsen. London: Sheed and Ward, 1931.
One volume of a seven volume publication of essays by several leading European philosophers. This volume presents two Berdyaev journal articles. The topics are the religious psychology of Russia and communistic atheism and Communism as a religion.
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English collection of four Berdyaev journal articles. Topics include: the bourgeois mind; man and machine; Christianity and human activity; the worth of Christianity and the unworthiness of Christians. Attacks the bourgeois mind as representing a state of soulessness and bourgeois culture as the triumph of mediocrity.
- _____. The Fate of Man in the Modern World. Translated by Donald A. Lowrie. London: S.C.M. Press, 1934.
Continues and expands on the ideas in The End of Our Time. A pessimistic view of the dehumanization of society and the secularization of

Christianity. Offers criticisms of Capitalism and Soviet Russia as well as Hitler and Nazi Germany. Hitler described as promoting the 'theater of hatred'; Germany seen as in constant need of an enemy and 'pathological in character'; Soviet Russia living on hatred and in search of 'wreckers' and 'harmers'. Capitalism is anti-personal and exercises the power of anonymity over human life.

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First published as I and the World of Objects: Philosophic Knowledge of Solitude And Society. A collection of five philosophical meditations. Topics discussed include: conflict between religion and science; subjective and objective philosophy; knowledge and being; knowledge and freedom; subjective and objective knowledge; time and knowledge; freedom and determinism; the ego and society; the ego and the personality; monism and pluralism.

. The Origin of Russian Communism. Translated by R. M. French. London: G. Bles, 1937.

First published in German in 1937 as Sources and Thought of Russian Communism. A cultural history of the relationship of Marxism to cultural forces, particularly religion. Presents an analysis of various social-intellectual movements of nineteenth-century Russia. Study of the national and international implications of Communism. Topics discussed include: the Russian intelligentsia; slavophilism and westernization; socialism and nihilism; anarchism; Russian nineteenth century literature; classical Marxism and Russian Marxism; Russian Communism and the Revolution; Communism and Christianity.

. Christianity and Anti-Semitism. Translated by Alan A. Spears & Victor B. Kantner. The Hand and Flower Press: Aldington, Kent, 1938.

Attack on anti-semitism written during the mid-stage of German oppression of Jews but before the Nazi holocaust entered its most savage phase. The thrust of this essay is the condemnation of Christianity for propagating, fostering and tolerating anti-semitism. Topics discussed include: anti-semitism as racism based on the mythology of a Jewish race; anti-semitism as a political and economic weapon; anti-semitism as the manifestation of feelings of inferiority of certain groups; anti-semitism as competition for the status of 'the chosen' or 'favored' people; refutation of the legend of a Jewish world conspiracy.

. Slavery and Freedom. Translated by R. M. French, London: G. Bles, 1939.

First published as Concerning the Slavery and Freedom of Man. A study of freedom in relation to human personality and society. Written during the period just prior to World War II. Berdyaev expresses alarm in a world of clashing ideologies and shrinking freedom. Expands on ideas presented in earlier works. Topics discussed include: God and freedom; nature and freedom; society and freedom; civilization and freedom; individualism; slavery and war; the slavery of nationalism; the bourgeois spirit as slavery to property and money; the slavery of collectivism; the slavery to sex; slavery of history.

. Spirit and Reality. Translated by George Reavey. London: G. Bles, 1939.

Discussion of the difficulty of pursuing spirituality in the modern world. Focus on technology as an anti-human force and the Capitalist economy as

enslaving the human spirit. Thoughts on the bourgeois similar to ideas in The Bourgeois Mind and Other Studies in Modern Life. Other topics discussed include: asceticism; suffering; evil; mysticism; spirituality.

_____. The Russian Idea. Translated by R. M. French. London: G. Bles, 1946.

First published as The Russian Idea: Fundamental Problems of Russian Thought of the Nineteenth Century and Beginning of the Twentieth Century. A study of the basic ideas which guided the leading intellectuals of nineteenth-century Russia and the relationship of these ideas to social, cultural and political events. In this work Berdyaev is both a cultural historian and a philosopher of history. Topics discussed include: the Russian national type; Russian thought; eschatological and prophetic character of Russian thought; the religious theme in Russian thought; Russian nineteenth century thought; the problem of humanism; philosophy of history.

_____. The Beginning and the End: Essay on Eschatological Metaphysics.

Translated by R. M. French. London: G. Bles, 1947.

First published as Essay On Eschatological Metaphysics: Creativity and Objectification. Describes Berdyaev's metaphysical position as a whole. Includes a metaphysical interpretation and critique of Kant; the mistakes of German idealism; subjective and objective creativity; the 'classical' and the 'romantic' in creativity; messianism and history..

_____. The Divine and the Human. Translated by R. M. French. London: G. Bles, 1947.

First published in French as Existential Dialectics of the Divine and the Human. A collection of meditations on recurring themes of Berdyaev's life. Topics include the crisis of Christianity; the significance of Nietzsche; the doctrine of the trinity; modernity; fear; suffering; evil; war; manhood; spirituality; messianism and history. Translated into English in 1952.

_____. Towards a New Epoch. Translated by Oliver Fielding Clarke. London: G. Bles, 1949.

An English collection of Berdyaev journal articles. The articles have one theme, the world-crisis and Russia's role in it. The articles are written from the point of view of the philosophy of history rather than from a political perspective. Topics discussed include: trends in humanism; socialism as contrasted to Communism; social revolution; personality and community in Russian thought; the difficulties of freedom; freedom and creativity; Sartre and existentialism; Russia in the future.

_____. Dream and Reality: An Essay in Autobiography. Translated by Katherine Lambert. London: G. Bles, 1949.

Berdyaev's title was Selfknowledge: An Essay in Philosophic Autobiography. This autobiography is an attempt at self-analysis and chronicles Berdyaev's developing thought down through the years. In this work historical facts are of secondary importance and are mentioned not to represent the events of Berdyaev's life but to show his reaction to them. His friend and biographer,

Donald Lowrie, describes it as "repetitious, unsystematic and altogether fascinating."

. The Realm of Spirit and the Realm of Caesar. Translated by Donald A. Lowrie. London: V. Gollanz, 1949.

Berdyev was at his desk working on this book when he died of a massive heart attack. His title was The Kingdom of Spirit And the Kingdom of Caesar. The book was completed by friends and family from rough notes left at the time of his death. It is not a smooth, literary work. With the exception of some divisions into paragraphs it is just as Berdyev wrote it with in his rapid staccato style, with few transitions and frequent repetitions. Topics discussed include: spirituality; technics; socialism; authority; the hierarchy of values-ends and means; the contradictions of freedom. Community- collectivity-*sobornost*; the contradictions in Marxism; nationalism; utopia; the sphere of the mystic.

. Truth and Revelation. Translated by R. M. French. New York: Harper and Bros., 1953. London: G. Bles.

A posthumous publication of essays written toward the end of Berdyev's life that reflect his evolving thinking on the recurring themes of his writing. Topics include transcendental man; degrees of consciousness; the pragmatic, Marxist and Nietzschean conceptions of truth; freedom and the creative act; the paradox of evil; new forms of Godlessness; the ethics of hell and anti-hell; reincarnation and transfiguration.

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