The Palgrave Handbook of Russian Thought

Edited by Marina F. Bykova
Michael N. Forster · Lina Steiner

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Preface

This new volume in the series *The Palgrave Handbooks* offers an in-depth survey of the development of Russian thought. It covers Russia's intellectual history from the late eighteenth century to the dissolution of the Soviet Union—from the first inception of a distinctly Russian philosophical and literary tradition through its astonishingly rich development in the nineteenth century to the orthodox Marxism and dissident thought of the Soviet era and beyond. The most lively and influential period in Russia's long intellectual history, this remarkable time produced philosophical, literary, and religious ideas that had a powerful impact on the country's cultural, political, and socioeconomic development, as well as on the intellectual, cultural, and political development of the whole world.

Despite its enormous significance, Russia's intellectual legacy still remains largely unknown to Anglophone readers, who continue to be wary of the Russian tradition and skeptical of its value. This includes not only the Soviet period, which is often perceived as lacking in creativity and original insights, but also the great nineteenth century, which Western historians have often characterized as a period of uncritical absorption and imitation of European ideas. Concerning the Soviet period, the end of the ideological confrontation between East and West and the opening up of the Soviet archives have led to a dramatic increase in the amount of information available concerning Russian thought during this period. However, these discoveries remain largely unknown to the public, which continues to rely on only a handful of texts produced during the Cold War. So there is a whole new world of ideas for the public to discover here. Concerning the nineteenth century, the suggestion that the Russian thought of this period just uncritically absorbed and imitated European ideas is, if anything, even more clearly mistaken.

The present volume was conceived by its editors as a sort of sequel to Isaiah Berlin's 1978 classic, *Russian Thinkers.* One of the best and best-known Anglophone studies of Russian thought, Berlin's collection of essays covered a somewhat limited period from the 1840s to the 1880s, mainly focusing on key

figures in Russian literature while disregarding concurrent philosophical developments. Published at the height of the Cold War, his work had a deep, long-lasting impact on the interpretation of Russia's intellectual history in the Anglophone world and on the cultural and diplomatic dialogue between Western countries and the Soviet Union. During the decades that have elapsed since the dissolution of the USSR, it has become clear that the crucial problems that Berlin identified in Russia—for example, the absence of a unified Russian identity, the conflict between the state and the intelligentsia, and the popular allure of the "Russian idea"—have lost none of their relevance. This is reflected in recent intellectual debates in Russia, which have grown ever more intense since the 1980s, when the Soviet ideological regime was relaxed, permitting a resurgence of theories and ideas that had been repressed since the 1920s as well as the development of a variety of new intellectual movements. But the landscape of Russian thought has since changed almost beyond recognition, and understanding it requires a thorough reexamination and new reflection. The lack of relevant publications and information in English has hitherto impeded this, however.

The Handbook of Russian Thought fills this lacuna, offering a reliable presentation and discussion of the broad sweep of Russian thought from the late eighteenth to the late twentieth centuries, including its most recent forms. Recognizing the richness of this subject and the impossibility of grasping it adequately by using any of the traditional reductive interpretations of the history of Russian thought, the book employs a fresh, comprehensive, flexible approach that considers Russian thought in the context of the country's changing historical landscape and takes into account the deep connections between Russian philosophy, literature, religious ideas, politics, and public life. Acknowledging the importance of Western influence on Russian thought, the book also contextualizes Russian thought in relation to the European and, more broadly, Western intellectual tradition that impacted it, updating the relevant data and throwing crucial light on the original ideas, theories, and debates that were generated in Russia.

The aim of this *Handbook* is to help readers to navigate the complex terrain of Russian thought and to learn to appreciate its unique legacy and historical significance. Consisting of thirty-six chapters written by internationally recognized scholars of Russian philosophy, literature, and intellectual history, the volume provides an authoritative account of Russian thought that makes it accessible to a broad readership while also upholding the highest standards of research. The list of contributors includes both distinguished and younger scholars from eight countries (Russia, the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Italy), all of whom are acclaimed for their research, making this volume a valuable source of information based on cutting-edge scholarship. In addition to established accounts of individual figures, schools, and movements within the Russian intellectual tradition, these contributors present many new interpretations of Russian thought and its developmental dynamics. This book also includes detailed critiques of a

number of the ideas and arguments that have been developed by Russian thinkers and considers contemporary controversies surrounding their views. The work combines a comprehensive overview of Russia's major thinkers and intellectual currents with specialized contemporary research. It will therefore appeal not only to a broad public seeking to advance its understanding of Russian thought but also to specialists from a variety of human sciences, including philosophy, literary studies, history, political science, and psychology. The editors hope that this *Handbook* will encourage new explorations of the exciting realm of Russian thought and new discussions of the country's rich intellectual and cultural legacy.

Raleigh, NC, USA
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An earlier version of Chap. 8 (by Nelly V. Motroshilova) was originally published as “Osnovnye printsipy. Problemnye sfery i izmereniia filosofii V. Solovyova” in *Mysliteli Rossii i filosofiia Zapada. V. Solovyov. N. Berdyaev. S. Frank. L. Shestov* (Moscow: Izdatel′stvo “Respublika”; Izdatel′stvo “Kul′turnaia revoliutsiia,” 2007, 83–102). Permission for our English translation has been granted by the publisher as the copyright holder.

An earlier version of Chap. 10 (by Yulia V. Sineokaya and Anton M. Khokhlov) was originally published as “Lev Shestov’s Philosophy of Freedom” in *Studies in East European Thought* 68: 213–227 (2016); https://doi.org/10.1007/s11212-016-9257-6. The material is re-used here with permission from the publisher as the copyright holder.

A Note on Transliteration

We have used the Library of Congress Transliteration Table to transliterate Russian terms and names into English. However, a number of proper names are transliterated according to the older convention (e.g., Fyodor Dostoevsky, Vasily Rozanov, and Vladimir Solovyov).

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The idea for this volume originated in connection with a conference that we organized at the University of Bonn (Germany) in October 2017 with the help of generous financial support from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation: "Russian Thinkers Between the Revolution and Tradition." Several of the papers presented at that conference have been transformed into chapters for this *Handbook*; additional chapters were commissioned and added subsequently. The Alexander von Humboldt Foundation provided generous funding not only for the original conference but also for required translational work. We would therefore like to thank the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and the University of Bonn for making both the conference and this volume possible. We would also like to thank the outstanding group of scholars who participated in the conference and/or have contributed to this volume. In addition, warm thanks go to Brad Damaré, Peter Golub, Lucia Pasini, and Valentin Frolov, who translated a number of the articles included in the volume, and to Simon Waskow of the University of Bonn for his editorial assistance. Finally, we would also like to express our gratitude to Phil Getz and the other editors at Palgrave Macmillan, who helped to bring this *Handbook* to life.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: On Russian Thought and Intellectual Tradition

Marina F. Bykova and Lina Steiner

> It is characteristic of the Russian people to philosophize […].
> The fate of the philosopher in Russia is painful and tragic.
> Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*

This volume is an extensive *Handbook of Russian Thought* that provides an in-depth survey of major figures, currents, and developments in Russian intellectual history, spanning the period from the late eighteenth to the late twentieth centuries. This was the most intense period in Russia's intellectual and political history, witnessing the emergence of original philosophical and social ideas and thinkers, great literature, art, and criticism. All of these together shaped the intellectual, cultural, and political history of Russia as it was making its way into world culture.

Although a century has elapsed since the appearance of the English translation of Thomas G. Masaryk's influential *The Spirit of Russia*, for many Anglophone readers Russian thought is still a conundrum.[1] Meanwhile, scholars specializing on Russian intellectual history have largely come to agree that the distinctive characteristic of Russian thought is its philosophical propensity.

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In Russia, the interest in the fundamental problems concerning such matters as existence, cognition, moral values, freedom, and other philosophical questions characterizes not only humanistic disciplines, but also art and culture in the broader sense.

Since the beginning of the 1900s there have been numerous efforts to traverse the vast and unfamiliar terrain of the Russian intellectual tradition by coming to grasp the role of philosophy and philosophical thought in Russian history.[2] Exploring a variety of more or less conventional pathways—from tracing the development of religious philosophy to sketching the clashes between materialism and idealism to scrutinizing Russian thought from the perspective of long-established subjects of philosophical inquiry—these endeavors attempted to throw Russian philosophy into relief by comparing it with, and assimilating it to, the West European philosophical tradition. For those few who expected to find in Russia a further elaboration of classical themes of *pure* philosophy, this comparison might have been disappointing. Russian philosophy may not have achieved such preeminence as its counterpart in ancient Greece, and it may not have created such sophisticated philosophical systems as those developed in German Idealism. And yet, as connoisseurs of Russian cultural and intellectual history have repeatedly pointed out, Russia is a philosophical nation in a more profound sense. In Russia, the term "philosophy" bears a much wider connotation than just an academic discipline. As Mikhail Epstein notes, "in Russia, philosophy is less a noun, a self-sufficient entity (a field, a discipline, a profession), and more an *adjective*, an attribute or a property of various *philosophical* activities: the philosophically oriented humanities, or philosophically inspired cultural creativity, or philosophical aims of sociopolitical undertakings" (Epstein 2019, 5). What "philosophy" signifies in Russia goes far beyond just specialized philosophical studies and surpasses themes and topics usually conceived as purely philosophical—even though, contrary to a still existing bias, as we hope to demonstrate by this volume, philosophy proper has always remained prominent in Russian intellectual discourse. Instead of being limited to one specific discipline, in Russia, "philosophy" is usually associated with an intricate practice of philosophizing.

Many observers explain this attributive usage of the word by the abuse that philosophy in Russia suffered during the Soviet period when it became associated with orthodox Marxism and was turned into ideology. To be sure, the social setting in which philosophy operated under the Soviet regime was hostile and oppressive; any appearance of non-Marxist and free thought was met with malicious attack(s). This led many original thinkers (e.g. Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), Alexei Losev (1893–1988), Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934), etc.) to retreat into other social and humanitarian disciplines—such as aesthetics, theory of classical culture, literary studies, and psychology—which appeared to be relatively immune from ideology and political oppression and thus became means for practicing philosophy in a more sheltered environment.[3]

But in the Russian context, even in the prerevolutionary years, "philosophy" was rarely associated with a specific discipline or highly specialized

scholarly practice. The influential Russian thinkers of the nineteenth century, including Pyotr Chaadaev (1794–1856), Alexander Herzen (1812–1870), Mikhail Bakunin (1814–1876), Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881), Nikolai Danilevskii (1822–1885), Nikolai Chernyshevsky (1828–1889), Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), Nikolai Fedorov (1829–1903), Konstantin Leontiev (1831–1891), and Vasily Rozanov (1856–1919), lacked academic affiliations; further, not one of them was an academic scholar. Even the founding father of Russian religious philosophy, Vladimir Solovyov (1853–1900), who lectured at Moscow University in his early years, 1875–1881, was forced to vacate his position after calling upon the tsar for clemency for those responsible for the murder of Alexander II.

Most of those who contributed to the Russian philosophical legacy—in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—were writers, critics, journalists, artists, politicians, or civil servants. They pursued philosophy through a variety of intellectual practices where literature, journalism, and literary and social criticism became their own creative means of philosophizing. Hence our focus in this *Handbook* is on *Russian thought*, and not on Russian philosophy or even philosophical thought, which would limit the scope of analysis and present a distorted account of the Russian intellectual tradition. Our goal in this volume is to reconstruct an amazingly vibrant picture of intellectual and cultural life in Russia from the early nineteenth to the late twentieth centuries, presenting it in its enormous complexity and intellectual vigor. This book employs a unifying approach to the subject matter, putting it into the context of Russia's changing historical landscape and considering different forms of its appearance in literature, art, social and political conceptions and theories, dominant moral systems, and religious beliefs, while rejecting any reductive or simplistic narrative that conceals the genuine character of Russian thought.

Russian intellectuals never excelled at producing abstract (pure) ideas that would have no substantiation in the actual world. They always applied themselves to the task of manifesting the most general ideas in Russian social relationships and in the substance of everyday life. Their ultimate goal was to *philosophize reality*, but this was much more than a pure contemplation, and rather required an active, reflective engagement with the existent reality. In this sense, a symbiotic relationship between literature, criticism, art, orthodox Christian faith, and philosophy has typified the Russian intellectual tradition since the early stages of its development. Thus, in order to properly appreciate the scope of Russian thought and unravel its multifaceted content, it is essential to take into account the intimate and intense connections between a variety of Russian intellectual pursuits, such as philosophy, theology, literature, art, cultural studies, politics, and social life. And this is the path this book follows.

Russian thought cannot be properly understood apart from its historical development. Its persistent and fervent immersion in the cultural, social, and political life of the people makes a historical perspective vital for understanding the key issues it debates and the solutions it proposes. Thus, before discussing

the structure of this *Handbook*, a brief history of Russian thought considered in the context of Russia's historical development is in order.

Historical Evolution

The peculiar characteristic of Russian thought, emphasized by many commentators, is that its emergence and early evolution came to be largely motivated by external rather than internal causes and processes. Instead of being a result of an organic national evolution, it grew out of foreign religious and moral precepts that Russian society embraced and assimilated after their acceptance by the country's rulers. Yet, although foreign philosophical and theological ideas profoundly affected Russian thought, the latter was not just a pure imitation or uncritical adaptation of Western ideas and theories of the time. Even those most receptive to foreign ideas adopted them with significant qualifications, which reflected specifically Russian concerns and interests.

The Russian cultural and spiritual tradition is long-standing, and its origin is usually associated with the introduction of Christianity in Kievan Rus' in the ninth century. This differs from Russian philosophy and *philosophically* inclined thought, a complex tradition that emerged only in the nineteenth century. As Russian philosophy matured, it went through several highs and lows, suffering from a number of political and social upheavals and temptations, from violent humiliation and the arbitrariness of the law, during both the tsarist regime and the totalitarianism of the Soviet era. Based on the intensity of philosophical reflection and the level of intellectual achievements, the development of Russian philosophically informed thought can be divided into three main periods: (1) the "philosophical awakening" of the 1830s and 1840s, which overlapped with the beginning of the Golden era of Russian literature; (2) philosophy of the Silver age, which spanned the last two decades of the nineteenth and the first two decades of the twentieth centuries; and (3) the intellectual renaissance of the latter half of the twentieth century. In order to understand the specific significance of these periods and appreciate the accomplishments associated with each of them, we will begin our excursion into the history of Russian thought with a brief characterization of the early stage of its development.

1. The Early Stage

The first philosophical ideas as well as the earliest usage of the term "philosopher" in Russia date back to *The Primary Chronicle*, compiled around 1113 by the semi-legendary Kievan monk Nestor. The *Chronicle* records several stories of Prince Vladimir's (972–1015) conversion of himself and his people to Christianity. According to the most famous among these legends, Vladimir, eager to adopt one of the neighboring countries' religions, was most impressed by a "philosopher" (sometimes described as a "scholar") sent by Byzantium in 986. Skilled in rhetoric and highly knowledgeable in his faith's canons, this missionary not only presented the Kiev Prince with a radiant image

of the Old and New Testaments' mysteries, but also persuaded him of the superiority of Orthodox Christianity over all other religious denominations and faiths. Intrigued by this presentation, Vladimir sent his ambassadors to Constantinople, where they were exposed to the most elaborate rituals while attending the liturgy in Saint Sophia cathedral. In 988, upon receiving his ambassadors' glowing reports, Vladimir converted himself and his people to Orthodox Christianity. To reinforce his decision, he married the Byzantine princess Anna Porphyrogenita (see Bushkovitch 2012, 7).

In late Byzantine culture Greek philosophy was losing its prestige as a body of knowledge in its own right and was turning into a handmaiden to Orthodox theology.[4] Nevertheless, Orthodox monks were still the beneficiaries and legatees of Greek *paideia*.[5] After Vladimir's baptism, Kievan Rus' began to absorb the writings of Eastern Church Fathers and through them the legacy of Greek, as well as Jewish, thought. Importantly, notwithstanding their connections to Constantinople, the Rurikovid rulers of Kievan Rus' also developed close political and trade alliances with a number of European kingdoms, including Norway, Britain, France, and Hungary.

The development of the Kievan Rus' was arrested by the Mongolian invasion in 1223. Two and a half centuries of the Mongol yoke left an indelible imprint on Russian civilization by bringing it into closer contact with several Asian civilizations that had been subdued by the Mongols and absorbed into their Empire. Only in 1472 did the Moscow Grand Duke Ivan III, by marrying the niece of the last Byzantine Emperor, Zoe (Sophia) Paleologue (who had been brought up at the Papal court in Rome), reassert Russia's ties with Europe and his readiness to shake off the yoke. Ivan III's vision was to transform Moscow into the "third Rome." During his reign, the country began moving toward establishing a Russian empire, which finally received the title of a *tsardom* during the reign of his grandson Ivan IV (the Terrible). The first Autocrat of All Russia, Ivan IV saw himself as an equal of the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. There began to emerge the idea of reconquering Constantinople from the Ottomans and adding it to the Russian *tsardom*, thus transforming it into the greatest Christian Empire of the world. Yet it was Catherine II who officially embraced this goal and made it central to her foreign policy in the 1770s.[6]

By this time, Russia had traveled a long path from being an appendage of the Mongol Empire to a vast and still expanding modern Empire whose German-born Empress had carefully shaped her identity as an enlightened autocrat by combining the traditional claim of being the principal defender of authentic Christianity with the new claim of being a *philosophically* minded monarch whose reason was as strong as her faith. A European brought up during the "philosophical age," Catherine II realized that a more utilitarian Enlightenment championed by her predecessor Peter the Great was insufficient for transforming Russia into a modern empire. She promoted ambitious visionaries and encouraged a number of cultural reforms (Madariaga 1991). Thus, in addition to supporting the Petersburg Academy of Sciences and Moscow University, in

1783 Catherine established the Russian Academy, whose aim was to cultivate the Russian language and literature, and appointed Princess Ekaterina R. Dashkova (1743–1810) as its founding President (Bushkovitch 2012, 129; see also Uspensky 1987).[7] However, the Pugachev uprising, followed by the outbreak of the French Revolution, made the Empress scale back her progressive reforms and become increasingly tyrannical. During this last quarter of the eighteenth century, the government persecuted the champions of the Enlightenment, including two significant philosophical writers of the period: the journalist and publisher Nikolai Novikov (1744–1818) and the writer and philosopher Alexander Radishchev (1749–1802). By imprisoning and exiling these outspoken critics of slavery, the government wished not only to punish them for attacking the status quo, but also to intimidate other potential free thinkers (Lossky 2011, 6–8). Upon his ascension to the throne, Paul I, who had been educated in the spirit of conservative liberalism, proved to be an even more brutal tyrant than his mother Catherine. He introduced an equivalent of the Salic law that banned women from the Russian throne. It went without saying that no woman could aspire to become an administrator or an academic (a situation that lasted until the 1917 Revolution). Paul's reactionary policies were particularly damaging for philosophy, which came to be seen as subversive. Thus since the 1790s the conflict between thinkers who aspired to *libertas philosophandi* and the state has become a recurrent feature of Russian history.

The first department of philosophy opened at Moscow University, Russia's first European-style University, established in 1755 on the initiative of Mikhail Lomonosov (1711–1765) (see [Istoriia MU] 1955, 2). According to Lomonosov's plan, there were originally three Faculties: Law, Medicine, and Philosophy. Viewed as a comprehensive understanding of the fields of science and humanities, philosophy served the purpose of basic (liberal arts) education but also offered several areas for specialization (Zenkovsky 1953, 1: 105–115).[8] Lectures were typically delivered in Latin, and only a few courses were taught in Russian. Lacking adequately trained domestic academics, Russian rulers invited foreign scholars to staff the University and other existing educational institutions (such as the theological educational establishments that had become widespread by the mid-eighteenth century). The majority of the first philosophy professors who served at Moscow University came from Germany. This trend continued into the beginning of the nineteenth century, and when in 1804 the new tsar Alexander I opened two new universities—one in Kazan and another in Kharkov—many professorial positions were filled by Germans. Although many of them were already well-established European scholars, their impact on Russian thought was relatively limited.[9]

Furthermore, after a brief span of liberalization during the first decade of Alexander I's reign, there followed a period of reaction that lasted through the 1860s. It is only logical that from that point on, ethical and socio-political concerns would preoccupy Russian intellectuals and dominate philosophical discourse, arguably to the detriment of what is usually considered pure (or theoretical) philosophy.

Since the first decades of the nineteenth century, there were a number of "dark ages" when the notion of philosophy in its Western European sense was regarded as a dangerous virus that might undermine the vitality of the Russian nation. In the wake of the Decembrist uprising in 1825, a number of professorial positions in philosophy at the Universities of Moscow, Petersburg, Kazan, and Kharkov were closed or drastically reduced. Throughout the 1830s–1860s the teaching of philosophy was frequently carried out by the faculties of natural science, law, and theology (Koyré 1929, 46–87). Even before 1825, philosophy professors were frequently harassed when their lectures and writings conveyed atheistic or liberal ideas that could be harmful to autocracy. Not only the followers of Kant and Fichte, but even the philosophers who were educated in the systems of Friedrich Schelling and Lorenz Oken, were often purged under Alexander I's reactionary Minister of Education Prince Alexander Golitzin (Koyré 1929, 46–87). Thus, for example, Alexander Galich (1783–1848), a Schellingian philosopher educated in Germany who taught at Petersburg Pedagogical Institute, was charged with atheism and revolutionary sympathies and dismissed from teaching (Sukhov 2012, 80–81).

When, in 1832, Golitzin was succeeded by the more liberal Count Sergei Uvarov, himself a long-term friend of Schelling who was also on friendly terms with Alexander von Humboldt and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, the situation became somewhat more favorable to students of German Romantic and early idealist philosophy. Uvarov himself exploited this philosophy to substantiate his own formula "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and the Nation," which served as the core of his doctrine of "official nationalism," used to justify his own policies for public education in Russia (Koyré 1929, 194–207; Whittaker 1984).

By that point, Schelling was already quite well known in Russia, thanks to the work of Daniil Vellanski (1774–1847), Professor of Physiology at the Academy for Medical Surgery in St. Petersburg. As Zenkovsky remarked, "Vellanski's importance to the development of philosophic ideas in Russia is extremely great. His *direct* influence was not significant; nevertheless, when Circles of 'Wisdom-Lovers' were formed in Moscow and St. Petersburg in the 1820's […], they all acknowledged Vellanski as the leader of Russian Schellingianism" (Zenkovsky 1953, 1: 120). The Circles of "Wisdom-Lovers" (i.e. Philosophers, or in Russian—*Liubomudry*) mentioned above sprang up in the early 1820s, and they were the first philosophical groups in Russia. The facts that the *Liubomudry* had to meet secretly and that their circles existed only for a few years and had to be closed at the end of 1825 in the aftermath of the Decembrist uprising are indicative of the fragile status of philosophy in Russia throughout the 1820s.

The more famous Moscow Circle included Prince Vladimir F. Odoevskii (Russia's first musicologist and a major prose writer), Dmitrii Venevitinov (a talented lyric poet who died at the age of 21), Ivan Kireevsky (the future Slavophile), and other scions of Moscow aristocracy (Zenkovsky 1953, 1: 130–170). The social background of the *Liubomudry* explains why their teacher Vellanski's influence on the development of Russian philosophical thought and