

DISCUSSION

I

NEW TRENDS IN RUSSIAN PHILOSOPHY

According to historian of philosophy Assen Ignatow there is an interesting new trend in Russian philosophy. Though Marxism-Leninism is still dominant, a few new schools of thought have appeared on the philosophical scene. Who may have thought, though, that Western political philosophies (like Popperism or Habermas/Luhmann's Critique of the postmodern state) would make headway sees himself proved wrong. The major new philosophy is, according to Ignatow, the Russian philosophy of the 1920ies and 30ies - *Russian personalism*, the thought of Solowjow, Berdjajew, Schestow, Bulgakow, Frank, Losskij. Since 1985 about 40 works by these original Russian thinkers have been re-published.

Western philosophy of the enlightenment kind, especially Western individualism and the spirit of capitalism had always been alien to Russian thought. Western influence started with Hegel and some of Schelling's ideas, which paved the way to Marxism and from there to Leninism. Russian personalism was the main reaction against it. It was immensely practical, trying to do justice to the situation of man in an imperfect world.

In what follows we will give a short introduction into what Russian personalism was - and is. We will also undertake to point out what makes it different from contemporary Western thought - and why it should be better adapted to contemporary Russian needs and demands than anything that could ever come from the West.

The re-discovered Russian thinkers are not in favour of the *bourgeoisie*. They have little understanding of capitalist ways. Berdyaev e.g. claims that communism was successful because the political order

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it succeeded was degenerate. Communism become possible, because the Christianity it succeeded was not authentic.

Nor is Berdyaev in favour of Western style democracy. Western-style democracy, he says, helps the power-hungry to achieve their aim. According to him, freedom is not a social category, but an ontological one. In the social sense, freedom means that the powerful can have their way. In the ontological sense, freedom means that everyone can realize him-or herself as a person.

World-famous writer A. Solshenizyn, too, claims that Western democracy's merits are purely negative: it helps to avoid tyranny. What is immensely more important is the respect for the human person. Solshenizyn advocates, therefore, a small-space democracy, a democracy of the village so to speak, a democracy which does justice to the human person without reducing him or her to the status of a 'citizen'. Solshenizyn, unfortunately, does not say how such a state is going to work.

According to Berdyaev, only a community which enables egos to become persons is a community worthy of its name. Berdyaev's community is, then, the direct opposite of what the modern state seems to be. Personalistic communitarianism is based on the Existence of the creative and free individual who realizes his or her nature.

Aim and goal of personalistic communitarianism is "communitarian community", a society based on "love" which alone delivers the framework within which egos can become *persons*.

Soloviov's main idea was that the good is identical with truth, and that each human being has access to the true-and-good by his or her very nature. His argument may remind Chinese readers of Meng-tzu's argument in favour of the good and human openness to the knowledge of it.

It is crucial to get to know the good-and-true in its completeness because incomplete knowledge of it may lead to inadequate philosophies of life, such as there are:

- pessimism in the Schopenhauerian bourgeois sense
- blind activism

-moral amorphism or agnosticism

-aestheticism (Nietzsche).

All these erroneous attitudes stem from the lack of capability or will (!) to perceive and live the true-and-good.

That the good exists and that human beings have access to it (whether they want to or not) can be evidenced in a contemplation of man's emotional life.

-Each and every human being knows the feeling of shame.

-Each and every human being knows the feeling of compassion.

Soloviov quotes from Isaac of Syria:

"Compassion is the burning of man's heart for whatever there is, humans, birds, demons, and everything that has been created. Whenever man is mindful of them and looks at them, his eyes will flow over with tears. The strong and overwhelming pity which fills his or her heart and the great suffering contracts his heart and he will not be able to bear any harm or sorrow happening to any of those creatures".

-Each and every human being is familiar with the feeling of awe.

Compassion means for the individual, that he or she has an individual obligation to feed the hungry etc. If the number of the needy outnumbers my individual capacity to help, then this fact cannot mean that my obligation becomes nil. There is a solidaric obligation to help.

The Renaissance of Russian Personalism. A Challenge for Western Individualism.

Should Russian Personalism become a paradigm for Russian philosophy in the near future, there is no reason for the West to rejoice. Nor is the End of History near. Russian Personalism will in any case challenge and critique Western individualism and bourgeois capitalism - the ingredients of what E. Mounier called 'le desordre etabli' (established dis-order). Russian Personalism will challenge Western individualism at least on three levels:

(1) because it tries to give history a direction, a goal, an aim. Western individualism does not give history a goal, a direction, an

aim. Everything is the way it presents itself to us. There is no hope, no faith, no charity. Nor is there person-hood.

(2) because it tries to give dignity to the human *person*. There is no theory of the human person at present in the West. There are theories of the psyche, of the citizen, of the subject of economic conditions, of the believer. But there is no theory of the person *qua* person that has any influence on decision-making.

(3) because it favours solidarity. The Russian personalist thinker do not want to discuss individual rights. Nor does he want to discuss which form of government is best. There will always be injustices. If humans, however, become aware of their person-hood, and the person-hood of whoever lives with them, then they will be able to live complete lives anywhere. Solidarity has two aspects, then: on the one hand, it is a necessary condition for human survival. On the other hand, it is a great chance for humankind-the condition for the possibility of becoming one-self.

From what has been said it seems to be obvious that Russian Personalism - should it become a major philosophical trend - will be incommensurate with Western individualism. It will pose major challenges to it. But then, shouldn't it be challenged?

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