

A Century of Separation A Note from the Editor

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Russian Philosophy has long been studied and admired in countries of what may broadly be termed the West. Translations into English, German, or French, of authors like Semyon Frank, Nikolai Berdayev, and Vladimir Solovyov, and of writers like Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Mikhail Bulgakov, are readily available these days. It is only natural that the works of these figures should have attracted the interest of Christian thinkers, who are able to see in them an excellent example of reflection being not only inspired by faith but also applied to areas rarely at the focal point of theology—such as, for instance, proposals for organizing societies on the basis of personal ties, as advocated by Frank. Moreover, thinkers who have grown up in a Christian environment may find in their texts an important example of how faith can serve as an inspirational source of ideas that carry a significant appeal for non-believers, too. In this issue of *Forum Philosophicum*, we offer our readers some papers in which ideas of this kind, such as the kenotic theory of freedom of Berdayev, are discussed by scholars, and various influences in Russian philosophy are traced back to their antecedent influences.

Still, our main reason for devoting an entire issue of *Forum Philosophicum* to Russian philosophy has come from a quite different direction. We wanted to give contemporary Russian authors an opportunity to express their views in a way that, when placed alongside the above, would help to reflect the distinctive characteristics of their approach to philosophy. In so doing, we were seizing the opportunity to respond to the concerns voiced by our Russian colleagues during a conference previously held in Cracow at Ignatianum on the 27th and 28th of June, 2013, entitled “The Reception of Russian Thought in Europe.” Russian scholars gathered at this event were frequently heard complaining about their not having been properly understood in the West. Moreover, they were not just claiming that West-

ern admiration for Russian philosophy has been accompanied by certain misunderstandings. Rather, they went further, suggesting that Western thinkers have so far failed to grasp how Russian philosophers perceive reality.

Our invitation to Russian authors, as well as authors who write on Russian philosophy, was extended with the hope that our editorial team might serve as a useful intermediary in rendering what they wanted to say with only a bare minimum of distortion. And indeed, while working on the texts accepted for the issue, it became clear to us just how sizeable the linguistic barrier still is between the Russian and Western worlds. To a certain extent this barrier marks the boundary between the styles of thinking appropriate to analytical languages on the one hand, and to inflectional ones on the other. In the latter, as is certainly the case with Russian, it is possible to utter various facets of a very complex issue in a single sentence, and to perceive this issue, in this way, as one single whole. Yet we were also able to see just how much still needs to be done to overcome those linguistic problems that have their roots in Russia's isolation during the communist era.

Our work on the issue led us to surmise that the complaint of our Russian colleagues has its roots in yet another kind of rupture between Russia and the West that has emerged as a consequence of communist-era isolation. It is precisely in this period that many new hermeneutical methods were developed: not only in the West, but also in those countries of the Soviet bloc not incorporated into the Soviet Union itself. Philosophers became fascinated by logical and structural analyses. It was hard to avoid being influenced by at least one or other of the major new explanatory paradigms, whether it be that proposed by analytical philosophy, or that drawn from philosophical hermeneutics, or one of those rooted in the new approaches to the study of human nature developed by psychologists, linguists, evolutionary biology, and neuroscience. Naturally, Marxism also generated, in the West, a hermeneutical paradigm. This paradigm, while still alive, is mainly visible in the fruits of its application, which before the collapse of the Soviet Union had already been shaped by the incorporation of Marxist elements, rather than by direct evolution. Amongst these were the American cultural criticism, and Habermas's theory of communicative action. All those developments resulted in philosophers having to pay even more attention than in earlier periods to their methods. This, in combination with the fact that philosophy in the West has interacted a lot with the humanities and sciences, and accompanied by the pressure of meeting the formal standards of the hard sciences in competing for "research" money,

has led to philosophy being practiced nowadays in a much more scholarly and less intuitive manner than that in which it was still being pursued just a hundred years ago.

In this issue of *Forum Philosophicum*, we offer our readers an insight into the very different conditions of philosophical life that obtained in Soviet Russia in the second half of the 20th century. It includes a historical paper by SVETLANA M. KLIMOVA and ELENA S. MOLOSTOVA on the practical application of Marxism in the service of “atheization.” We offer this with the intention that readers treat it as testimony and source material that pertains to the subjects debated by Russian intellectuals of that era. The paper gives a rare glimpse of the ways in which, in the Soviet period, Marxism was turned into a seemingly objectively verifiable world-view, supported by scientific facts and, as such, capable of replacing religion. The paper is based on materials drawn from the archives of the former Institute of Scientific Atheism of the Academy of Social Sciences of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In those records, otherwise scarcely accessible to the English-speaking public, one encounters not just the propaganda materials of the Ministry of Truth, but also a reflection of the difficulties faced by both its high-level officials and its low-level functionaries, including their own uncertainties and the wrangles that went on between them. The materials in question exhibit a peculiarly Soviet entanglement of science and philosophy, so very different from the Western entanglements of that same second half of the last century.

This text is preceded by a new essay by MAXIM KANTOR, the renowned contemporary Russian intellectual. His paintings have been shown at numerous solo exhibitions: amongst others, at the Biennale di Venezia, the State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, the Städel Museum in Frankfurt, the Akademie der Kunst in Berlin, the University of Notre Dame Snite Museum of Art, the Musée du Montparnasse in Paris, and the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. He has spent two years as Artist in Residence at the Political Research Department at Oxford University. He has delivered a series of lectures at the Notre Dame Institute for Advanced Study, on subjects ranging from painting to the public role of the intellectual. He is also an acclaimed author of fiction. His *Uchebnik risovanya*, a novel disguised, as its Russian title claims, as a “drawing textbook,” earned him the Russian National Literature Award in 2006. This book, whose themes are continued in *V tu storonu* [“À contre-pied”, lit. “That Way”], issued in 2009, offers a strong critique of both avant-garde art and the milieu of Russian avant-garde artists.

We publish his essay with the intention that our readers get a first-hand experience of the ways in which philosophy is practiced in Russia nowadays and of the subjects that concern intellectuals there in this, one of the most critical of moments for the future of their country. We would encourage readers to pay attention to Kantor's view of the relationship between the arts and the modes of living adopted by societies. Along with this, we hope that they become familiarized with a style of arguing in which authorities are adduced as facts of culture rather than materials to be analyzed. References to artists and thinkers do not focus on exploring their actual intentions and inspirations, but on summarizing the effect of their work on cultural developments within Western civilization. For this reason we did not ask the author to provide detailed citations for his claims about various authorities. Our interventions, in this respect, were limited to translating the passages quoted by him directly from their original languages. We focused much more on rendering accurately the author's style, his intentions, and his expression, which is more intuitive in character than the typical scholarly approaches found in the West, as well as being to a large degree organized with reference to the goal of uncovering broad historical patterns. We leave it to our readers to arrive at their own judgment as to the nature and significance of his writing, which we present on an "as is" basis: both as an example of contemporary Russian philosophical writing, and as putting forward an important claim made from the perspective of an artist able to view our concerns from a position of greater distance than we may ever perhaps aspire to occupy ourselves. At the very least, we trust that our work on his paper—and, indeed, on the entire issue—will help to shed some light on this one, single century of separation between the Russian and Western intellectual worlds.