Apostates from the Intelligentsia: Personality, Culture, and the Defense of Absolute Values in the Philosophical Thought of Petr Struve, Semën Frank, Nikolai Berdiaev, and Sergei Bulgakov, 1902 to 1918

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Introduction: Four Exiles

Writing in the spring of 1918 from the various Moscow residences among which he moved to conceal his illegal presence,¹ Petr Struve declared the Bolshevik revolution “a national bankruptcy and a worldwide disgrace.” He attributed this catastrophe to two root causes: the impact of World War I on the people and “the perverted ideological education the Russian intelligentsia received during the course of almost all of the nineteenth century.”² His longtime friend Semën Frank lamented “the general weakness in Russia of the spiritual principles that protect and strengthen the general culture and state unity of the nation” in the face of “a nihilism which is direct, completely blind, and therefore reckless.”³ For Nikolai Berdiaev, the revolution revealed “demons which for a long time have possessed the Russian people.”⁴ Sergei Bulgakov, perhaps more judiciously, penned a dialogue that considered explanations for the war ranging from the backlash of militarism to the break between Church and people but expressed anguish as deep as that of his comrades.⁵ In these contributions to a symposium⁶ entitled Out of the Depths (Iz Glubiny), the four men fluctuated between assessing the revolution’s historical causes and decrying it as a metaphysical disaster. Unsurprisingly, these strident critiques of the revolution, which came off the presses in August 1918 just as the new government declared a

⁵ Bulgakov, “At the Feast of the Gods,” in Depths, 65-118.
⁶ “Symposium” as used here is a standard term for a collection of essays submitted on a particular topic for joint publication, somewhat similar in form to the “thick journals” (regularly circulated works containing several hundred pages worth of either literature or non-fiction essays) that served as a mechanism for intellectual transmission in prerevolutionary Russia, but assembled on a one-time basis for the discussion of a particular theme.
“Red Terror” against supposed class and other enemies following an attempt on Lenin’s life, never reached the Russian public during their authors’ lifetimes. As for the four authors, Struve fled Moscow and made a harrowing escape across the Finnish border in December 1918. Frank, Berdiaev, and Bulgakov managed to stay in Russia until 1922, when all three were arrested and deported from the country upon pain of death. None ever returned to his native land.

In their words and in their persons, these four men represented a collision between the radical political tradition of Russia’s revolutionary intelligentsia – one that was utilitarian, materialist, and united in its commitment to transforming life through an act of destruction – and the cultural impulses towards creation and spirituality which developed in Russia at the dawn of the 20th century. The ideological transformation they underwent as a result reflected broader changes, social and political as well as purely intellectual, that affected the country as a whole. Yet their conflict with the revolutionary tradition borne of an earlier age was not as inevitable as it might appear. A sense of apocalyptic expectation pervaded the work of the Silver Age (c. 1900-1917) literati, and some, such as the poet Alexander Blok, who saw it as a “duty … to listen to the grandiose music of the future that fills the air, without watching for the single strident false notes in the august roar and ringing of the world’s orchestra,” greeted the Revolution with a sense of inevitability and even interest. In these four contributors to Iz Glubiny, however, intellectual revolt against the mechanistic categories of 19th-century thought...
led to a simultaneous challenge of the political visions based on these categories. All four men demanded that politics recognize a spiritual understanding of man; all believed that the positivist  

idol of collective humanity, understood as a conglomeration of purely material organisms, must be replaced by the concept of the human being as personally connected to, conscious of and rooted in a transcendental realm. In their understanding, this realm was the source of absolute values that lent man his worth, commanded his allegiance, and found expression in his creative activity. Their insistence on respect for these values and their human bearers, though articulated differently by each over the years between 1902 and 1918, set all four on a course that resulted in their opposition to and eventual expulsion from the Soviet state.

The four men’s lamentations in 1918 that the intelligentsia had effectively led the country to ruin were all the more personal because each of them had begun their public lives as members of that group. Their social backgrounds were diverse: Berdiaev was the son of a member of the landed gentry, Struve of a retired civil servant of German background, Frank of a Jewish doctor in Moscow, and Bulgakov of a rural Orthodox priest. However, their experiences converged as a result of their interest in radical politics. All were involved with Marxist revolutionary circles, though their Marxism was of a revisionist form and they increasingly began to question the

12A note on terminology: this paper is written largely in laymen’s vocabulary and by “transcendental realm” indicates merely some higher moral or spiritual domain – as distinct from the material, empirical realm accessible to the natural sciences – which serves as a basis for objectively valuable ethical norms and absolute ideals. Distinctions, for instance, between metaphysics as spiritual ontology (i.e. the soul is a substance, and absolute values stem from a higher domain of Being) and belief in a transcendental, vaguely Kantian “intelligible realm,” while philosophically interesting, are not particularly relevant for the present purpose, as both equally allow for the defense of moral ideals autonomous from empirical reality and assign the human person critical importance as the crossroads between the material world and the domain of absolute values. (Philip Swoboda, The Philosophical Thought of S.L. Frank, 1902-1915: A Study of the Metaphysical Impulse in Early Twentieth-Century Russia [Ph.D. Diss, Columbia University, 1992] pp. 347-377 makes this distinction between Frank (a transcendentalist) and his more ontologically-oriented counterparts until roughly 1908, but it could also distinguish some of the essays in Problems of Idealism, which bandy about the term metaphysics but tend to rely on Kantian ideas, from the later, more spiritualist works discussed elsewhere in this thesis.)

13 Lowrie, Renegades Prophet, 14-30; Pipes, Liberal on the Left, 3-10; Boobbyer, Frank, 1-4, Evtuhov, Cross and the Sickle, 21-23. Frank’s family appears to have been relatively unaffected by the widespread social and legal discrimination against Jews in Russia during this period.
philosophical premises of materialism. In 1902 they joined with a number of academic philosophers in a symposium called *Problems of Idealism*, which criticized as philosophically inadequate the supposedly scientific approaches to life and ethics that had been popular among the radical intelligentsia since the 1860s. The authors of *Problems* focused on the intelligentsia’s materialism, which led its members to categorically deny the possibility of a spiritual element to life; their utilitarianism, according to which they saw moral worth as synonymous with conduciveness to the people’s happiness; and its positivism, the insistence that all aspects of human life and existence could be understood by scientific methods. In contrast, the symposium’s contributors insisted that morality represented an autonomous aspect of life and knowledge, outside the empirical realm accessible to scientific analysis.

Despite their growing differences with the radical intelligentsia, the former Marxists remained opponents of the Russian autocracy, and when revolution broke out in 1905 they saw the chance of a new dawn for the country. In the Manifesto of October 17, 1905, Tsar Nicholas II agreed to convene Russia’s first elected national assembly, and two members of the “Marxist-to-idealist” tendency, Struve and Bulgakov, participated in the newly created Duma. Yet the storm of violence fueled by peasant rebellion and workers’ uprisings on the one hand, retaliation by the government and the reactionary mobs known as the Black Hundreds on the other, raged unabated even after the opening of Russia’s first Duma. Meanwhile the left-leaning majority of Duma delegates, unable to decide whether they were legislators prepared to negotiate or still radical oppositionists determined to undermine the government, repeatedly clashed with the

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14 This term originated with a collection of essays published by Bulgakov in 1903 entitled “From Marxism to Idealism” (*Ot Marxisma k idealizmu*).
15 These were loosely organized groups of right-wing extremists which had made an appearance at least as early as 1903 (Sergei Pushkarev, *The Emergence of Modern Russia* [New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963], 232). Often enjoying the tacit assistance or intentional ignorance of the authorities, they perpetrated numerous, large-scale violent assaults against suspected revolutionaries, striking workers, and others throughout the course of the 1905-1907 revolution; they were particularly known for carrying out vicious pogroms against Jews.
tsarist bureaucracy. On June 3, 1907 Prime Minister Stolypin (a tsarist appointee) dissolved the Duma for the second time, and its electoral rules were rewritten to ensure a permanent conservative majority, ending the last hopes for a government in which the left would command a share of power commensurate with its popular support.

The violence of the 1905 revolution and seeming triumph of reaction produced a keen sense of disappointment in nearly all corners of progressive society, including among the four ex-Marxists. Bulgakov and Struve left their parliamentary positions. In 1909, all four submitted articles to a second symposium, *Vekhi (Signposts)*, which sparked a firestorm of criticism. The symposium condemned the intelligentsia for its indifference to truth and morality, as well as its willingness to advance what it supposed to be the people’s cause by any means necessary, without regard for the cost to living human beings. Accepting the intelligentsia’s traditional sense of responsibility for the nation’s fate, the collection lay the bloodshed of the revolution at their door and urged them to turn away from revolutionary maximalism and attend to personal spiritual development; this, they believed, held the key to resolving the perceived national crisis. Apparently having touched a nerve, *Vekhi* was almost universally condemned by contemporaries ranging from the Bolsheviks to the moderate Constitutional Democrats (Kadets).

Over the years following the publication of *Vekhi*, these four contributors moved in different directions, deepening divisions that had first become apparent in the political openness of the revolutionary years. Struve and Frank on the one hand and Berdiaev and Bulgakov on the other published with rival journals (the neo-Kantian *Logos* and the religious-philosophical *Put’*)

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17 This has also been translated as “Landmarks.” In addition to the essays of the four men cited above, it included contributions from Mikhail Gershenzon, A.S. Izgoev, and Bogdan Kistiakovskii.
that frequently found themselves at odds.\textsuperscript{18} The three who were or became philosophers by trade (Frank, Berdiaev, and Bulgakov) published major works that outlined fundamentally different approaches to understanding the world. Even the two thinkers who are most often classed together, Berdiaev and Bulgakov, offered extraordinarily different interpretations of what their shared faith should mean, the former calling for a radical transformation of life led by men of genius and the latter attaching religious significance to man’s everyday activity. Each of their visions, however, represented a continuation of the philosophical project first announced in Problems of Idealism: the effort to escape the stifling mechanism and determinism of 19\textsuperscript{th}-
century rationalistic philosophy and deal with the multidimensionality of life.

In 1918, after the Bolshevik Revolution brought about the ultimate triumph of the principles condemned in Vekhi, the three philosophers and their political colleague Struve joined in Out of the Depths to issue a final lament regarding the condition of the intelligentsia and of the country, as well as a hesitatingly hopeful call for the crisis of the revolution to be followed by a rediscovery of spiritual values. The essays of 1918 are on the whole more conservative tracts than their predecessors, and certainly more religious. As in 1909, however, they argued that the nihilistic denial of absolute values could only lead to the triumph of evil; the slogans of Russia’s self-selected saviors shaded off into senseless violence at the level of practice.

Previous discussions of the four thinkers as a group have largely centered on their participation in Vekhi.\textsuperscript{19} The symposium has been taken by a number of scholars\textsuperscript{20} as the expression of a Russian political philosophy that represented an alternative to the shared


\textsuperscript{19} The exception is Nicolas Zernov, The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 131-164, which focuses on their eventual embrace of Christianity.

assumptions of the maximalist, atheist, and positivist Russian intelligentsia. More recently historians, most notably Aileen Kelly, have taken issue with this assessment and highlighted divisions among the contributors, particularly the four here in question. Kelly argues that because Bulgakov and Berdiaev’s views were by 1909 shaped by a dogmatic Orthodoxy that posed claims just as sweeping and emphatic as those of the intelligentsia, only Struve and Frank represented a genuinely new direction for Russian thought.21 In terms of political and social views, she is right to identify a division between the two camps, with Struve and Frank rather more tolerant of mundane, “bourgeois” existence (though when one moves beyond their attitudes towards Western humanism one quickly finds that Bulgakov and Berdiaev differed at least as much from one another as from the liberals.) And there is certainly a heavy dose of messianism in Berdiaev’s thought, though Bulgakov, in his pure philosophy at least, demonstrated a far more measured and realistic approach to the limitations of human existence. However, Kelly overstates her case by charging that only in this regard did the Vekhi group represent a true break with their intelligentsia heritage. In fact, there was another critical challenge to the intelligentsia presented in the three symposia, one shared by all four thinkers.

This challenge was their assertion of absolute values – absolute truth, goodness, and beauty – as transcendent entities personally accessible to and commanding the devotion of every human being. Faced with the difficulty expressed in Problems of Idealism – “we seek absolute principles … and we are answered with the indication that everything in the world is relative and conditional”22 – they responded with a call for faith in absolutes existing in a domain outside and above that relative, conditional world. They opposed what they viewed as the intelligentsia’s

misguided “practice of according absolute significance to earthly, human interests” with a faith in transcendent values that could never be fully identified with any event, person, or class in the material world; in other words, with the conviction that neither the quest to transform the state structure, nor the interests of the proletariat, nor the decrees of any dictator could alter the absolute principles of goodness, truth, and beauty or negate the individual’s moral obligation to these supreme values. Such absolute ideals were not always readily translatable into simple universal principles such as Kant’s categorical imperative or the utilitarian pleasure-calculations of their philosophical foes; in some cases these thinkers intentionally emphasized the uniqueness of each individual’s unique striving to understand the transcendent and realize the absolute values contained therein. Nonetheless, they shared a conviction that each person’s first allegiance should be to the eternal, transcendent values with which he was intimately connected, rather than to passing material or political needs. This conviction endowed the individual person with inherent value due to his position at the crossroads of mortal and transcendental realms, thus rendering impossible his reduction to a means for the realization of a sociopolitical end. At the same time, it dictated the proper objectives of human endeavor, thus preventing the same person from disregarding or distorting his understanding of truth, right, and beauty in the name of subjective political interests.

The assertion of absolute spiritual values which transcended the imperatives of material well-being was an obvious break from a tradition that treated man as matter, but, contrary to the

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24 In addition to the obvious case of Berdiaev (on which see below part III.1), this also appears to have been true of Frank’s thought at certain points. The latter tendency is suggested by his arguments against dogmatic religion in 1905-1906 (II.1) and emphasis on a personal, supra-rational cognizance of the spiritual (III.1), but for a more extensive exposition see Swoboda, *Philosophical Thought*, 452-471.
accusations of their critics, it was less a Tolstoyan call for retreat into oneself\textsuperscript{25} than a plea for individuals (particularly members of the intelligentsia) to be guided by the ideal in their actions in this world. In this regard it was distinct from many of the other spiritualist currents present in early 20\textsuperscript{th}-century Russia, which, as Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal and Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak note, tended to be “indifferent or hostile to this world,” and thus inattentive of or characterized only by “irrationalism, emotional maximalism, negation” in their attitude towards practical social realities.\textsuperscript{26} Berdiaev’s thought (in this regard setting him apart from the other three subjects of this study) at points showed strong affinities with the latter tendencies, which make him the outlier in this thesis for reasons that transcend his and Bulgakov’s political differences with Frank and Struve. Nonetheless, ultimately concern with the transcendent as not merely a realm for spiritual exploration but a source of moral worth gave the philosophical outlook of the four men who had begun their lives as members of the political intelligentsia a distinct flavor, particularly in its relation to their former comrades.

An emphasis on transcendentally grounded, autonomous, and absolute values constitutes a common theme through the chronology of their philosophical evolution. In the philosophical essays of *Problems of Idealism* (1902), they broke with decades of intelligentsia tradition which held that morality, if it existed at all, was fundamentally rooted in the question of material well-being, pleasure or pain. Instead, they asserted the autonomy of an independent domain of moral values and the freedom of the human being to act on these values. During the cultural and political upheaval of 1902-1907, they sought to defend these principles, particularly as embodied in cultural creation, and the person’s freedom to act upon them from autocratic and, increasingly,

\textsuperscript{25} In the period following the publication of his great novels, Tolstoy began preaching a form of Christian social philosophy that entailed political passivity, on which see below p. 30.

also revolutionary forces which threatened to encroach upon this freedom. Disillusioned by the revolution, in *Vekhi* (1909) they turned their full attention to the legacy of the revolutionary intelligentsia and attacked what they saw as a worldview which denied and distorted the human person and the higher values he was obliged to realize in the name of a destructive political ideal. In the aftermath of *Vekhi’s* publication, Bulgakov, Berdiaev, and Frank produced philosophical visions which solidified their claims for the legitimacy of man’s spiritual experience, and thus for his ability to know and act in accordance with absolute values. Finally, in their last rhetorical sally against the newly triumphant revolutionary intelligentsia (*Out of the Depths*, 1918), all four criticized the Bolsheviks’ disregard for the manifestation of spiritual values in living persons, national culture, and religious faith, obscured or scorned amidst an elemental frenzy of destruction and the quest to unmake the old social and political order. In each of those cases, a shared belief in transcendental values underlay the search for a philosophical vision which would be creative, rather than destructive, and recognize the independent worth of life in its personal, cultural, and spiritual dimensions rather than denying it in theory in the name of philosophical positivism or in practice in the name of political maximalism.

The philosophical evolution of the four ex-Marxists is of general interest for two main reasons. First, it illustrates a broader transformation in Russia’s social and intellectual climate between the 1890s and the revolution of 1917, which among other aspects entailed intellectual diversification, a growing emphasis on the creative impulse, and a change in the role of religious faith. Secondly, in the case of these four renegades from Marxism, though not for Russia as a whole, these new idealist and spiritualist currents provided the platform for a strikingly prescient critique of the intellectual tendency that made political utility the arbiter of all moral questions and denied the rights of the human conscience to its independent judgment and pursuit of truth,
goodness, and beauty unless politically justified, a tendency better known in its political incarnation as totalitarianism. This thesis is not intended to argue that all four men were consistent friends of liberal democracy; though the theoretical foundation here described is eminently compatible with liberalism, as the case of Struve illustrates, the two were not always joined in practice. Several among the four writers would undoubtedly have been rivals in a free society; in fact, during the years in which they lived in something close to such a society, this is precisely what happened. Nor is it intended to supply a comprehensive overview of each individual’s positive political and philosophical ideas (a subject that could occupy several books in each case, some of which have already been written), though these will obviously be discussed. Rather, using the three symposia as guideposts, it seeks to examine the four men’s break with the radical intelligentsia tradition; and to explore the ways in which their shared faith in man as the bearer of spiritual tasks and possessor of absolute worth provided a platform to oppose the repercussions of the statement “all is permitted.” It is my contention that this faith lay at the root of their common hostility towards social forces, whether tsarist or revolutionary, which rendered it impossible for man to live according to the convictions of his conscience.
Part I: The Intelligentsia and its Discontents

[Marxism’s] representatives, who have experienced and brought about the transition to metaphysics, are not, as we have already shown, carving out a completely new channel of thought. They will, however, bring to the idealist course of Russian thought a new current, new thought and attitudes. They are not arriving with empty hands or, more correctly, with empty souls. Their convictions are the fruit of a struggle ... not only with opponents, but also with itself, a struggle capable of producing firm convictions and yet of giving them a special tone of tolerance, a tone testifying not to languor or indifference of the spirit, but to a living and joyous faith in the force of truth and strength of the good.

-P.B. Struve, “Towards Characterization of Our Philosophical Development,” in Problems of Idealism (1902)²⁷

With the publication of Problems of Idealism in 1902, Petr Struve, Semën Frank, Nikolai Berdiaev, and Sergei Bulgakov rejected historical materialism in favor of a philosophical perspective that had for decades borne the taint of reaction in the eyes of Russia’s revolutionary intelligentsia. In the 1860s, a group of prominent radical intellectuals had declared their disgust with the vagaries of idealist metaphysics and proclaimed their adherence to the scientific outlook – scientific in both its materialism, according to which man was of a kind with the natural world, and its positivism, according to which human relations could be analyzed by the methods of the natural sciences. Along with this worldview came a purportedly scientific system of ethics: utilitarianism, which, by positing the empirically ascertainable greatest happiness of the greatest number as the goal of morality, agreed remarkably well with both materialist philosophy and socialist politics. While these principles exerted a powerful influence on Russia’s progressive intellectuals over the following decades, by the latter years of the 19th century voices from outside the revolutionary intelligentsia began to articulate their doubts regarding materialism’s rejection of autonomous moral ideals. When the four onetime Marxists declared their philosophical allegiance to the latter, they assiduously clarified that they had no intention of breaking with progressive politics. The mechanistic, deterministic categories of 19th-century

²⁷ Petr Struve (writing under the pseudonym P.G.), “Toward Characterization of Our Philosophical Development,” in Problems ed. Poole, 156.
rationalism, they believed, were simply inadequate to address man’s immediate consciousness of moral ideals and of his own freedom. However, in their declaration of moral autonomy – and in their consequent reclassification of the human being as a free spiritual entity rather than an object of scientific study or input in pleasure-pain calculations – lay the seed of their deeper break with the radical intelligentsia over the following years.

1. The Revolutionary Legacy

Latter-day analysts have spilled nearly as much ink attempting to determine the nature of the pre-revolutionary Russian intelligentsia as its more tormented members expended during their lifetimes attempting to clarify their calling. While some use the term to describe all civic-minded independent intellectuals, a few dating its origin back to the time of Catherine the Great (1762-1796), others use it more narrowly to indicate a self-identified group of radicals holding beliefs that became current only in the 1860s (when the term intelligentsia itself first came into use in Russian28), including socialism, materialism, and support for violent revolution.29 The criticisms enumerated in Problems, Vekhi, and Depths were clearly directed at the latter group, the ideological descendants of the “men of the sixties”; for this reason, the following chapters

29 To name just a few, Richard Pipes (Russia Under the Old Regime, 250-251) identifies “broad” and “narrow” views of the intelligentsia, the former meaning “that portion of the educated class which enjoys public prominence” and the latter referring specifically to the radicals of the 1870s who themselves claimed the term as theirs alone Malia (“What Is,” 2) rejects the narrow view on the grounds that the “Fathers” of the 1840s and later non-revolutionary intellectuals bore the same intelligentsia hallmark of extreme dedication to ideology as did their revolutionary counterparts, but counts the reformers of Catherine’s era and the Decembrists as only a “proto-intelligentsia.” Stuart Ramsay Tompkins (The Russian Intelligentsia: Makers of the Revolutionary State [Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957], 245-246) prefers the narrow view on the ground that the radical intellectuals in the time after the Crimean War (1853-1856) had a unique and distinct sense of their own identity. Boris Elkin (“The Russian Intelligentsia on the Eve of the Revolution,” in Russian Intelligentsia ed. Pipes, 32) defines the intelligentsia broadly as “that part (the larger one) of the educated class, whose distinguishing characteristic was its aspiration to overcome the stagnation of the existing Russian system of government and secure a change of regime, and thus unsurprisingly comes to the conclusion that its purportedly radicalism was not so intense as has been argued by others. Dmitrij Tschizewskij (Russian Intellectual History (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1978) identifies objective intellectual independence (i.e. non-reliance on the state) and a subjective belief that one “represented the true interests of the Russian people as criteria for membership. Billington (Icon and the Axe, 388) argues that the 1860s marked “the emergence of the intelligentsia as a self-conscious and distinct social group.”
will use the term “intelligentsia” primarily in this sense. However, the tradition which attracted
the vituperation of the Vekhi group was a complex one, and the various characteristics they
lambasted had their roots in different thinkers and movements. For this reason, the character of
the intelligentsia is most easily treated in a brief history of its evolution.

The intelligentsia’s growth was intrinsically linked with both criticism of tsarist Russia’s
oppressive sociopolitical system and the circulation of Western political and philosophical
ideas.30 Both these tendencies fueled a sense of estrangement;31 its members’ education set them
apart from the majority of the country’s population, which most saw as mired in poverty and
oppression. The practical social standing of this extremely small educated elite32 in Russia’s
otherwise strictly hierarchical society was also unclear. In this atmosphere of uncertainty,
reinforced by the autocratic regime’s periodic persecutions, a sense of obligation to serve the
people, particularly by bringing about drastic social change, became the predominant passion.
The philosophical underpinnings of these reformist impulses changed over time; while the first
intelligentsia circles (kruzhoks) of the 1840s combined social polemic with Hegelian
metaphysics, in the 1860s and afterwards the intelligentsia fell overwhelmingly under the
influence of materialist ontology and utilitarian ethics. Faith in the scientific comprehensibility
of human affairs became linked to the conviction that society could be rationally reorganized to
overcome injustice, which remained a foundational principle amidst the sometimes confusing
mix of heroic injunctions and deterministic proclamations, denials of principle and insistence on

30 This meant the autocratic political regime in some cases and only the system of landownership that allowed for
manifold abuses against the peasants, who in 1858 comprised 48 million of the country’s 60 million inhabitants, in
others (many of these were, however, state peasants rather than serfs in the technical sense of the term. Pipes, Old
Regime, 144).
31 Malia describes them in part as a particular breed of “‘alienated’ intellectuals,” vaguely akin to those in
America “formerly emigrated to Paris and its Left Bank and got ‘lost’” but suffering from a much more serious form
of this condition due to Russia’s social circumstances (Malia, “What Is,” 3-4).
32 As late as 1853, there was a combined total of fewer than three thousands students in all Russian universities.
(Franco Venturi, Roots of Revolution, trans. Francis Haskell [New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1960], 221).
obligation, calls for the liberation of the personality and demands for revolutionary dictatorship that characterized the various intelligentsia factions of the following decades.

While in the late eighteenth century a few isolated voices among the elite began questioning the conditions of Russian life, the Decembrist revolt of 1825 marked the first high-profile clash between the autocracy and educated elites seeking liberalization. The regime’s harsh suppression of this attempted coup, which entailed five executions along with eighty-eight sentences of hard labor and eighteen of exile, had a profound impact on the generation of intellectuals that came of age in the 1830’s and 1840’s. The influential writer and publicist Alexander Herzen wrote that upon hearing of the autocracy’s reaction, “a new world was revealed to me which became more and more the center of my moral existence … though I had no understanding, or only a very dim one, of what it all meant, I felt that I was not on the same side as the grape-shot and victory, prisons and chains.” More broadly, resentment of the state’s post-Decembrand crackdown on potentially subversive elements persuaded a number of politically conscious young nobles to turn down state service in favor of the university. At the same time, the writings of the German idealist philosophers (Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel) made their way into Russia and captured the attention of these new students, who were unsurprisingly

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33 The reign of Catherine the Great, during which the nation’s “enlightened” despot began introducing selected Western Europeans whose reception occasionally grew out of her control, was marked by the intercession of a few isolated reformers such as Nikolai Novikov and Alexander Radischev (particularly following Catherine’s abolition of mandatory state service for the gentry in 1762, which allowed them a new level of independence – not to mention free time). The former was a satirist who criticized the social indifferentism, ignorance, and general lack of moral scruples among Russia’s aristocratic elite, while the latter held more radical views, even warning of the danger of a revolution, opposed serfdom, and showed sympathies for the materialism of the late Enlightenment in France. For more on reformers in this period see Pipes, Old Regime, 255-259; Billington, Icon and the Axe, 233-252; Tschizewskij, Russian Intellectual History, 172-182.
34 In which a group of army officers, aiming to prevent the succession of the conservative Nicholas soon to be Tsar Nicholas I) to the throne following the death of Tsar Alexander I in 1825, staged an attempted coup d’etat in 1825. Most hoped only to establish a constitutional monarchy, although a few held more radical views (on which see Billington, Icon and the Axe, 264-268).
37 Russia’s system of civilian higher education, previously limited to two institutions, had undergone a major expansion at the opening of the 19th century, thus providing new opportunities for these disillusioned sons of the gentry (Malia, “What Is,” 13).
tempted by the notion of an “Absolute Idea” as the foundation of the universe.\textsuperscript{38} While idealism had some appeal as a basis for progressive thought,\textsuperscript{39} there can be no doubt that members of these circles took ideas seriously in their own right; as Herzen stated, “every insignificant pamphlet published in Berlin or other provincial or district towns of German philosophy was ordered and read to tatters and smudges, and the leaves fell out in a few days, if only there was a mention of Hegel in it.” The literary and social critic Vissarion Belinski even for a time abandoned political activity because he interpreted Hegel’s statement “all that is real is rational” as dictating conservatism (by implying that the existing social and political order must, simply by merit of its existence, have a rational justification), although he eventually recanted when his social passions overcame his understanding of the historical dialectic.\textsuperscript{40} For members of the “generation” of the 1840’s, – particularly Herzen, who became the publisher of the opposition journals \textit{Polar Star} and \textit{Bell} after his emigration to London – philosophical disputations went hand in hand with a slow but determined effort to rouse public opinion in favor of social reform.

However, the generation of intellectuals who came to prominence during the 1860s (the major reforms which were enacted by Tsar Alexander II during this same period notwithstanding) was far more committed to social radicalism than its predecessors and fiercely rejected many of the ideas that had inspired the generation of the 1840s to boot. The new generation of intellectuals differed markedly from the previous one in social origins; while the latter had consisted mainly of members of the gentry, many of the new intellectuals came from a diverse assortment of lower-class backgrounds that earned them the term \textit{raznochintsy}, or

\textsuperscript{39} In particular, the concept of an underlying ideal reality which drives history forward gave liberals a reason to keep up their confidence despite the seeming practical impossibility of reform under the reign of the repressive Nicholas I (Pipes, \textit{Old Regime}, 260; Billington, \textit{Icon and the Axe}, 327-328).
\textsuperscript{40} Herzen, \textit{My Past and Thoughts}, 232, 235-239.
“people of no estate in particular.” Leaders of this group sought to correct what they saw as the older generation’s tendency to waste time on high-minded talk and sentimental philosophy at the expense of practical work. Where the previous group, sometimes described as “Fathers” had challenged Russia’s social and political system, the “Sons” – among whom the most prominent figures were Nikolai Chernyshevsky, Dmitri Pisarev, and Nikolai Dobroliubov – earned the appellation “nihilists” for their broader rejection of existing moral and cultural values. While the “Fathers” eagerly delved into idealist philosophy, the “Sons” contemptuously rejected anything that smacked of metaphysics in favor of a purely materialistic outlook, on which basis they attacked not merely Hegel’s Idea but the ideals of everyday life. Dobroliubov, for instance, while denying charges of “crude materialism,” warned that

> We admire all the arts and say that the strains of Verdi’s operas and Kalam’s landscapes attune us to something lofty, pure, and ideal. As a matter of fact, all this perhaps merely conceals the pleasant satisfaction felt by the organs of hearing and vision and perhaps even a desire to drive off ennui … We are ashamed to see things as they really are; we always try to beautify, ennoble them … Who has not adorned in the rosy colors of idealism the ordinary and very intelligible desire for a woman? And finally, how many educated people … have spoken confidently and sometimes even with rapture about Homer and Shakespeare, perhaps about Beethoven, and Raphael and his Madonna, and yet, in their heart of hearts, have not understood what they were talking about?

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41 Pipes, _Old Regime, 261-262_; Malia, “What Is,” 5, 12. This distinction is of course somewhat imprecise, since there were still members of the gentry among the “Sons” and a few individuals of common background, such as Belinsky, among the “Fathers”; likewise, some of the younger generation, such as Chernyshevsky, studied idealist philosophy in their youth, and some of the older generation became increasingly convinced by materialism as they aged. Nonetheless the proportional shift in both the intelligentsia’s class background and its majority views was sufficient to affect its character (Malia, “What Is,” 6-7, 11-12).


43 These terms originated in Ivan Turgenev’s 1862 novel _Fathers and Sons_. Turgenev, himself a member of the older “generation,” drew a controversial portrait of the new “nihilist” type in the person of a medical student named Bazarov, who disdained the polite manners, small-scale reforms, and philosophical “romanticism” of the liberal aristocrats; declared that there was not an institution existing in Russian life that did not merit destruction and disdained the prospect of constructive work because “the ground has to be cleared first”; and scorned enjoyment of the arts on the grounds that “a good chemist is twenty times as useful as any poet.” Turgenev, _Fathers and Sons_, trans. Ralph E. Matlaw (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1966, pp. 42; 39; 19). While the volume raised a stir among some members of the new generation who felt themselves literarily ill-used, the prominent “nihilist” Dmitri Pisarev, though disavowing some of Bazarov’s more extreme features, called it “a true, deeply felt picture of contemporary life.” (Pisarev, “Bazarov,” reproduced in _Fathers and Sons_ trans. Matlaw, 209).

44 On the somewhat specious grounds that his advanced understanding of physiology, which led him to view body and soul and inseparable parts of an integral whole unified by the activity of the brain rather than seeing the soul itself as a particular form of matter, unlike the medieval scholastics (Nikolai Dobroliubov, “The Organic Development of Man in Connection with His Mental and Spiritual Activities,” in Russian Intellectual History: An Anthology, ed. Marc Raeff [New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc.: 1966], 271).

Pisarev, equally skeptical of the notion of “pure” art, argued that “literature should be directed towards one single target: it should bend every effort to emancipate the person from all the trammels imposed on him by the timidity of his own thoughts, by caste prejudices, the authority of tradition, by any striving towards a common ideal.” While disdaining ideals, the “Sons” had a deep faith in the methods of the natural sciences, which they were confident could be fruitfully applied to social questions; according to Chernyshevsky, “the natural sciences have already developed to such an extent that they provide material for the exact solution of moral problems too.” The key to that solution lay in a utilitarian calculus of pleasures and pains, so that “good is he who does good to others, bad is he who is bad to others.” Forced to combine this seemingly altruistic precept with the utilitarian premise that people act in pursuit of their own pleasure, he arrived at a moral system that paradoxically denied moral responsibility:

A man is good when, in order to obtain pleasure for himself, he must give pleasure to others. A man is bad when in order to obtain pleasure for himself he is obliged to cause unpleasantness for others. Here, human nature cannot be blamed for one thing or praised for the other; everything depends on circumstances, relationships [institutions]. ... Under certain circumstances a man becomes good, under others, he becomes bad.  

Pisarev rejected the notion of universally applicable moral standards altogether and declared that if people “obeyed only their feelings, without creating artificial concepts of ideals and duty, or interfering in the affairs of others, then life on earth would be far pleasanter than it is today.” For both, the pursuit of individual self-interest was easily reconciled with the common good in a properly organized society. Pisarev declared that “the new people arrange their life so that their individual interests in no way contradict the real interests of society”;

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pronounced that nations and classes could view their interests as divergent from those of man in general only through a delusion.\textsuperscript{50} Since social ills thus stemmed from an improper organization of society rather than either human nature or a legitimate clash of interests, social reorganization would immediately and drastically improve the lot of men: “A suitable organization of work,” Pisarev declared, “can and must bring happiness to mankind.”\textsuperscript{51} For Chernyshevsky, if shortages of food and drink among the masses could be rectified, “at least nine tenths of all that is bad in human society would quickly disappear.”\textsuperscript{52} The destruction of existing social forms to permit the development of new and more rational forms of life was thus of the utmost importance. In Pisarev’s view, “that which can be smashed should be smashed: that which withstands the blow is fit, that which can be dashed to smithereens is trash.”\textsuperscript{53} The “vast apocalyptic assumption” that a future society of equality and justice would spring up following the downfall of the old order was one of the uniting principles of the various populist successor movements of the late 19th century,\textsuperscript{54} and one that certainly carried over into Russian Marxism as well.

While the materialists succeeded in demolishing the intellectual respectability of idealism in Russia for several decades, precise interpretations of their philosophical and political legacy varied. Most radicals until the 1880s shared a populist social outlook, meaning they focused on the interests of the peasant masses and generally expressed the hope that capitalist industrialization could be preempted by an early revolution that would preserve the traditional peasant commune as the basis for a new, distinctly Russian form of modernity. However, beyond

\textsuperscript{50} Chernyshevsky, “Anthropological Principle,” Selected Philosophical Essays, 125, 128.
\textsuperscript{51} Pisarev, “Thinking Proletariat,” 633.
\textsuperscript{53} The quotation, from Pisarev’s “Nineteenth Century Scholasticism,” is reproduced in Peter C. Pozersky, The Nihilist Imagination: Dmitri Pisarev and the Cultural Origins of Russian Radicalism (New York: Peter Lang, 2003) 37 and in numerous other locations, but for reasons that can only be guessed Soviet editors abridged the version of the essay that appeared in Selected Philosophical, Social and Political Essays in such a manner that it was excluded.
\textsuperscript{54} Isaiah Berlin, Introduction to Venturi, Roots of Revolution, xiii.
the basic thread of a “feeling for the common people,” this overall ideological direction produced a number of contrasting trends. In the theoretical sphere, many were attracted to the positivism of French sociologist Auguste Comte, who insisted that human relations operated according to the same laws as the natural world and could be understood by the same methods; in his view the advent of such understanding represented the final stage in human development. On the other hand, leading populist theorists N.K. Mikhailovsky and P. Lavrov seized on a later-day deviation in Comte’s thought to develop a “subjective sociology” according to which the intrusion of man’s subjective feelings into the social (as distinct from the natural) sciences was not merely a regrettable inevitability, as many others believed, but actually desirable.

In the political arena, the relationship between the elite and the masses marked another critical area of disagreement. The “nihilist” circles around Pisarev emphasized the role of the educated elite as bearers of scientific knowledge, while leaders of the “going to the people” movement of the early 1870s urged educated youth to abandon academics and submerge themselves in the peasant population to become “the concentrator of the energies and the force of the people.” Underground revolutionary circles, including broad-based groups such as the

55 Kindersley notes this divergence and argues that it is more difficult to reach a “monistic” understanding of populist ideology than is the case with Marxism (Richard Kindersley, The First Russian Revisionists [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962], 6). Pipes, not notably fond of Kindersley’s analysis on other points, similarly argues that “there never was any ‘Populist’ movement with a consistent theory and strategy” (Liberal on the Left, 30).
56 Pipes, Liberal on the Left, 30-31. Not all advocates of the scientific outlook were, however, in agreement with positivism in this strict sense of the word; Chernyshhevsky for one dismissed it as “idiotic,” and Tkachev used economic materialism as a weapon against positivism (Venturi, Roots of Revolution, 185, 392-397).
57 Pipes, Liberal on the Left, 32-33. Struve in both his Marxist and his idealist incarnations attacked this school for its failure to distinguish between the realms of prescription and analysis, as Mikhailovsky instead sought a single integral concept that would unite truth as verity (the Russian istina) with truth as justice (the Russian spravedlivost’; the Russian term pravda unites both meanings). See for instance Struve’s essay in Problems of Idealism, which discusses Mikhailovsky at length.
58 Venturi, Roots of Revolution, 327.
59 The quotation is from an 1869 appeal by Mikhail Bakunin, as quoted in Tompkins, Makers of the Revolutionary State, 109. The movement proved largely unsuccessful, as participants generally met with difficulty in gaining the peasants’ trust and sometimes found themselves report to the police (see Tompkins, 109-112, and Venturi, Roots of Revolution, 504-506). While some populists responded to this setback with a turn to the more top-down methods indicated above, others developed a sense of resignation and opted to give up agitation in favor of “going to the people” this time as students rather than teachers (Pipes, Old Regime, 274).
populist *Naradnaya Volya* (People’s Will, f. 1878) and smaller conspiratorial circles sometimes attached to universities,³⁶ combined the idea of forward-thinking elites as all-important with that of sacrifice for the good of the people. Petr Tkachev expected the revolution to be led by an elite vanguard whose “distinctive badge lies in the fact that all their activity, their whole way of life is dominated by one ambition, one passionate idea: to make the majority of men happy and to invite as many as possible to the banquet of life.”⁶¹ Sergei Nechaev’s “Catechism of a Revolutionary” (likely written in collaboration with Mikhail Bakunin) declared that:

> The revolutionary – is a doomed man. He has neither his own interests nor affairs, nor feelings, nor attachments, nor property, nor even name. Everything in him is absorbed by a single, exclusive interest, by a total concept, a total passion – revolution. … He has sundered any connection with the civil order and with the entire educated world and with all the laws, properties, conventions, and morality of this world. … Everything that facilitates the victory of the revolution is moral to him. Everything that hinders it is immoral and criminal. … All tender, effeminizing feelings of kinship, friendship, love, gratitude, and even of honor itself must be suppressed in him by a total cold passion for the revolutionary cause. … Striving cold-bloodedly and tirelessly toward this goal, he must always be ready to perish himself and to destroy with his own hands everything that hinders its realization.

Contrary to the “new men” of Pisarev and Dobroliubov, Nechaev’s revolutionary “knows only one science – the science of destruction.”⁶² Revolutionary activity held a powerful attraction for many students alienated by the somewhat stolid character of most official university programs during this period⁶³ and their own periodic struggles with unsympathetic faculty and administrators, which could at times lead to arrest.⁶⁴ Although most students were not official members of conspiratorial circles, beginning with the influx of the *raznochintsy* into the

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³⁶ Some of these groups appear to have been quite active; the “Circle of Kazan Students at Moscow University,” for instance, became involved with a plot organized by Polish rebels to incite peasant revolt by issuing a false proclamation in which the tsar would purportedly promise his subjects land and liberalization, leading to its members’ arrest in 1863. (Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, 309-315; Venturi provides a detailed examination of other small-scale revolutionary populist circles as well.)

⁶¹ Quoted in Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, 408.


⁶³ On the efforts of government-appointed administrators to quash any potentially subversive teachings, particularly in the domain of philosophy, see below p. 33.

universities in the 1860s a powerful student culture developed that emphasized fraternity, opposition to authority, support for democracy and socialism, and the idea of education as a form of character-building in preparation for revolutionary activity.

On March 1, 1881, revolutionary terrorism enjoyed its greatest success with, ironically enough, the assassination of the reform-minded tsar Alexander II. The result was not a successful revolution but a renewed wave of repression which succeeded in crushing or forcing into exile many leading Populists. While the radicals regrouped in the 1890s, Populism faced a new challenger for their ideological loyalties: the “scientific socialism” of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. The founder of Russian Social Democracy, Georgi Plekhanov, emphasized the rational character of this new doctrine as opposed to the “utopian” socialism of his rivals. Historical materialism, with its insistence that the features of society “depend just as little on the will and consciousness of men as the characteristics of the geographical environment,” seemed to fit poorly with the traditional revolutionary emphasis on the ability of the educated elite to bring about fundamental changes to society. Plekhanov, however, argued that these contradictions could be reconciled since (as Engels had suggested), once man arrives at the “realization of the causes of his enslavement by economic necessity,” he will bring about “a new and final triumph of consciousness over necessity, of reason over blind law.” This view left room for the thinking

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65 Following the lifting of restrictions by Tsar Alexander I upon his accession in 1855.
66 On the student movement see Susan K. Morrissey, Heralds of Revolution: Russian Students and the Mythologies of Radicalism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). While her focus is on the period after the student strikes of 1899, she dates its origin back to Alexander’s educational reforms and discusses its development in pp. 20-33.
67 Berlin, Introduction to Venturi, xxvi-xxvii.
68 Social Democracy at this point referred to the platform of radical parties explicitly based on Marxist doctrine, and should not be confused with the more moderate views of parties bearing this name on the late 20th and 21st century European left.
70 Aileen Kelly describes this problem and the various responses to it, particularly among the Bolsheviks, whose emphasis on the role of the elite revolutionary vanguard left more room to develop a heroic role for the individual than more doctrinaire forms of Marxism, in “A Bolshevik Philosophy,” in Toward Another Shore: Russian Thinkers between Necessity and Chance (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 155-200.
individual: “I am a worm while I am ignorant, retorts the dialectical materialist: but I am a god when I know.” For anyone already persuaded by the materialist, hyper-scientific credo of the 1860s, Marxism had an obvious appeal. After years of tsarist repression with no revolution in sight, Marxists could claim with “scientific” certainty that progressive forces would eventually triumph. Their ready-made, rationalist explanation for the workings of society gave them an intellectual advantage over their populist counterparts, especially in the eyes of the growing numbers of students entering the revolutionary ranks. Meanwhile, although the industrial working class remained extremely small even in 1917, the abrupt and sometimes ugly takeoff of industrialization in Russia at the end of the century lent new credence to a political philosophy centered on the industrial proletariat rather than the peasant commune.

II. Marxism and Morality

It was thus a mixed brew of deterministic philosophy and heroic injunctions that P.B. Struve (1889), S.N. Bulgakov (1890), S.L. Frank (1894) and N.A. Berdiaev (1894) found among radical circles when they first entered the university as students. All four men, along with many of their contemporaries, had developed an interest in radical political philosophies as youths. In his later recollections, Struve described a mood among Russian educated youth during the period in which he grew up that recalls Herzen’s depiction of the atmosphere following the suppression of the Decembrists: the young people were “wounded and pained” by the reaction that followed

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71 Plekhanov, 659-660.
72 Indeed, according to Pipes the introduction of Marxism coincided with shifting attitudes among radical universities students, from contempt for academic learning as such to a belief that it could be put to good use in the service of the revolution (Liberal on the Left, 68-69). Morrissey also points to a change in student culture during this period, but describes it mainly as a revitalization which coincided with increased emphasis on the social as opposed to the natural sciences. Interestingly with regard to several of the subjects of this paper, she identifies not only Marx but also Nietzsche as an increasingly powerful influence on the student generation of the 1890s (Heralds of Revolution 27, 32-33).
73 On the appeal of Marxism see Berlin, Introduction to Venturi xxvii; Billington, Icon and the Axe, 460-462; Kindersley, Russian Revisionists, 111; Struve, Liberal on the Left, 123-124.
74 Pipes, Liberal on the Left, 65; Boobbyer, Frank, 11; Lowrie, Rebellious Prophet, 31; Evtuhov, Cross and the Sickle, 28.
Alexander’s assassination. Appalled by the restrictiveness of the autocracy, Struve was absorbed by a “dominant and all-absorbing passion” for freedom.75 Bulgakov, “a proud and independent boy who genuinely loved truth and freedom,” was repelled by the atmosphere of “tradition and compulsion” at the theological school he attended as a youth and succumbed to the influence of what he later described as a “gloomy revolutionary nihilism.”76 Berdiaev, inspired by his own passion for freedom to break with the aristocratic society into which he was born, found Marxism particularly attractive on the theoretical level.77 It met “a distinctly higher intellectual and cultural standard” than populism; it offered an “appreciation for the moving forces below the surface of history,” “consciousness of the historic hour,” and “universalism,” all of which stood in contrast to the “unimpressive idyllism” of populist ideologies that “seemed provincial and narrow-minded in comparison.”78 Frank was similarly inspired by the breadth of Marxist theory, while Struve saw in it a means to reconcile what he saw as the twin passions of the Russian intelligentsia for “political freedom and social equality.”79

All, however, were less than perfectly comfortable with this promising new philosophy of liberation. A liberal “by passion and conviction” and a Social Democrat “by conviction only,” Struve’s disposition starkly differed from that of most Marxists who saw political freedom as merely an intermediary step to a higher goal.80 Bulgakov, having found himself stifled by the traditional milieu of his youth, was hardly able to pursue greater independence amongst the revolutionary intelligentsia; he found himself “follow[ing] the herd of the intelligentsia” in taking up a subject, law, in which he had no real interest, and a philosophical outlook, Marxism,

76 Bulgakov, “Autobiographical Notes,” 4-5.
77 Berdiaev, Dream and Reality, 50.
78 Berdiaev, Dream and Reality, 117.
79 Boobbyer, Frank, 9; Struve, “Contacts and Conflicts,” 575-577.
80 Struve, “Contacts and Conflicts,” 584-585.
“which suited me about as well as a saddle fits a cow.” Berdiaev, who claimed never to have been a “thoroughgoing materialist,” found his concept of “a rising of the spirit, of freedom and meaning against the deadly weight, the slavery and meaninglessness of the world” at odds with the mundane concerns of ordinary Marxists, whom he charged with a “dislike of freedom and their betrayal of man’s personality.” The contemplative Frank, with his passion for ideas, was hopelessly at odds with his revolutionary cohorts’ emphasis on action and haphazard treatment of philosophical questions. In general, their personal philosophical interests and (particularly in the cases of Struve and Berdiaev) passion for individual freedom seems to have been a source of discomfort as they moved through revolutionary circles.

Nonetheless, through most of the 1890s they remained engaged in Marxist polemic, at which Struve enjoyed such success that he became, in Berdiaev’s recollection, “the doyen of the intelligentsia at the time”; female attendees at his economic lectures were known to swoon from excitement. (Berdiaev himself attracted rather more negative attention in the form of what seems to have been a relatively lenient three year sentence of exile; Frank spent only a week in prison.) While their discomfort was initially insufficient to convince them to break with Marxism, however, it did prevent them from accepting Marx’s doctrine as an unassailable body of dogma rather than a theory subject to revision. According to some accounts they were among the leaders of a “Legal Marxist” revisionist group (so called because its members published their

81 Bulgakov, “Autobiographical Notes,” 4-5. Bulgakov also studied political economy, and the latter comprised the subject matter of his dissertation (Evtuhov, Cross and the Sickle, 28-36).
82 Berdiaev, Dream and Reality, 79; Kindersley endorses this position, noting that Berdiaev’s Marxist views were “expressed mainly in his contempt for the bourgeoisie and a reiterated belief in the historic mission of the proletariat” (Russian Revisionists, 144).
83 Berdiaev, Dream and Reality, 108.
84 Swoboda, Philosophical Thought, 172-173.
85 Berdiaev, Dream and Reality, 132.
86 Pipes, Liberal on the Left, 149.
87 Lowrie, Rebellious Prophet, 50-67.
88 Boobbyer, Frank, 18-19.
articles in legal outlets rather than restricting themselves to underground journals); while this term is problematic, they were at any rate linked by their critical approach to Marxist philosophy, influenced by the German movement known as neo-Kantianism. The revival of Kantian epistemological and ethical criticism served as a basis from which to critique Marx’s understanding of knowledge and helped to raise the question of autonomous moral values.

By the end of the 19th century, the four men’s efforts to sort out the inner contradictions of Marxist philosophy had led them close to disavowing materialism altogether. In 1900, Berdiaev published a philosophical treatise on *Subjectivism and Individualism in Social Philosophy* (for which Struve authored a largely laudatory prefix) which gives something of a flavor of the four revisionists’ peculiar mix of Marx and Kant, and foreshadows the main themes of their subsequent break with Marxism. Citing critical philosophy as his primary ally, Berdiaev attempted to work out a philosophical system that could provide “a suitable place for our subjectivism,” in contrast to both Mikhailovsky’s subjective sociology (which came under

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89 The existence of a “Legal Marxist” movement as such is the subject of some debate. The phrase originated as a term of abuse from the group’s rivals, particularly Lenin, but Richard Kindersley (Russian Revisionists) also uses it to identify deviation in Russian Marxism whose representatives included the four subjects of this paper and Mikhail Tugan-Baranovsky, while Richard Pipes (Liberal on the Left, 123-124) insists that there were only legal publications by Marxists, and no group of Legal Marxists as such. Curiously, Pipes’ main object of study appears to disagree with this assessment (Struve, “Contacts and Conflicts,” 586 identifies “legal Marxism” as “a new theory of Russian social and, above all, economic development.”). Elsewhere (e.g. in Aileen Kelly, “A Bolshevik Philosophy?”, 257-258) the same group is described simply as a neo-Kantian revisionist strain within Russian Marxism, which may avoid the problematic implications to which Pipes objects. Berdiaev in his autobiography actually claims to have been “rather suspicious” of “legal Marxists” in the technical sense of the word for their excessive tendency towards “professional circumlocution” (Berdiaev, Dream and Reality, 114), but is regularly counted among the group due to his philosophical orientation, which is at any rate of greater relevance to the topic at hand.

90 A German philosophical movement of the latter half of the 19th and earlier 20th century which sought to return to the foundations of Kant’s philosophy, in contrast to both materialism and the sweeping ontological claims of the absolute idealists (Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel). It is mainly known for its examination of the conditions of knowledge, although some of its less arcane representatives also wrestled (without a notable common conclusion) with the problems of value and freedom. Thomas E. Willey (Back to Kant: The Revival of Kantianism in German Social and Historical Thought [Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978]) discusses the neo-Kantians at length but mainly in connection with the evolution of liberal politics in Germany; Swoboda, Philosophical Thought, 55-67, on the other hand, depicts them as primarily engaged in a quest to make philosophy “the guardian of the purity of scientific knowledge” (56).

explicit attack in the text) and orthodox Marxism (which did not). He sought to avoid both the stifling of moral impulses and the pollution of scientific cognition by subjective bias by insisting on the autonomy of truth and morality and assigning independent, objective significance to each.

While peppered with references to “the progressive class” and its historical role, his essay maintained that ultimately, “truth cannot really be a class concept,” though in certain historical circumstances it may “become the monopoly, as it were, of some class.”92 He insisted that “we recognize the existence of an objective truth,” which, following the neo-Kantian philosopher Alois Riehl, he grounded in the concept of a “transcendental logical consciousness,” meaning the categories of rational cognition which are the same for every conscious being.93 Since transcendental cognition was distinct from concrete, psychological cognition, then pace Mikhailovsky, determining truth could not mean following subjective inclinations: “[e]very time psychological subjectivism … come[s] into conflict with logical objectivism, with the universally-obligatory norms of thought, the result is a lie and a falsehood.” Use of one’s subjective impulses, though “obligatory in life,” was prohibited in cognition. Yet since human beings are not purely logical entities, it is impossible to fully rid cognition of psychological interference. Here Berdiaev drew on Marxist teleology to bridge the gap between objective truth and human perception thereof: thinkers allied with “the progressive class” would be psychologically inclined to grasp the objective truth, since “the historical process is their ally.”94

Subjectivism still had a place, but its role lay in the creation of an ideal which would be utilized in the “moral evaluation” of social phenomena, not in factual analysis. Yet his association of man’s subjective faculties with moral assessment did not actually mean that Berdiaev viewed moral norms as purely arbitrary, emotive, or, in a word, subjective. Rather,

Berdiaev broke with classical Marxism by declaring the need for an “objective-ethical” basis for social ideals, in addition to the traditional Marxist justifications that theirs was correct due to being “objectively necessary” and “subjectively desirable for a definite social class.” In other words, Berdiaev sought an independent foundation for ought as distinct from is. The utilitarian concept of pains and pleasures did not provide such a foundation: “all attempts to deduce an empirical concept of good and evil from non-ethical elements, for instance, from the constantly recurring experiences of satisfaction and suffering, results in a fiasco.” The criterion of morality, like that of objective truth, was rather “given a priori to our transcendental consciousness,” and consisted in the (clearly Kantian, although Berdiaev did not directly reference Kant) “idea of man and mankind as ends in themselves.” Also like truth, morality was revealed gradually over the course of history, and the greatest “coincidence of the individual and the universal” (i.e. of the actual human consciousness and the transcendental consciousness) was to be found in the progressive class. Berdiaev linked his understanding of truth and morality to an inherent human need: “every person denying the absolute nature of the good and the moral purpose in life, must sense this vacuum. The demand for idealism is eternal.”

In addition to seeking objective grounds for truth and for morality, Berdiaev questioned Marxist determinism on Kantian grounds, contrasting the “epistemological category” of necessity, pertaining to the “cognizing subject,” with the “psychological category” of freedom, which pertained to the “acting subject.” In other words, in his rational analysis of the world, man thinks in terms of causality; this leaves no room for the concept of freedom, since everything that happens must be determined by some cause. The acting subject, on the other hand, experiences

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freedom to determine his actions. The individual himself was determined by “universal forces,” yet this did not alter his basic psychological experience of freedom. However, while his argument through this point followed the Kantian dualism of freedom and necessity, Berdiaev’s view of freedom, like his view of the transcendental consciousness, ultimately remained tied to his embrace of the theory of progress. Thus freedom, while in one sense an element of the human condition, was also a “goal”; “moral freedom is inseparably bound up with social freedom, regardless of what the reactionaries may say, who simultaneously preach indeterminism and violation of the human personality.” This passage illustrates Berdiaev’s attempt, later mimicked by his ideological fellow-travelers, to prove that the association of materialism with progress and of idealism with despotism was incorrect. Rather, it was the philosophy that made room for “psychic causes” in human affairs that would genuinely impel its followers towards progress, service to the common good, and the liberation of the people.

On the whole, despite its commitment to Marxist social ideals, Berdiaev’s book with its insistence on objective standards of truth and morality coincidentally congruent with, rather than inherently derived from, the interests of the working class hinted at the impending break between these questioning Marxists and the utilitarian traditions of the revolutionary intelligentsia. In its emphasis on an “objective-ethical” basis for moral norms and determined, if somewhat confused effort to prove that men have the freedom to act on these norms, it raises two critical and

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98 This concept of the subject as actor rather than merely thinker remained a critical point not only in Berdiaev’s efforts to develop an idealist framework for understanding the human condition, but also those of Bulgakov and Frank. It is also an important break between their views and those of Kant and his latter-day interpreters, facilitated here by Berdiaev’s rather optimistic view of human history: “man’s kingdom should be realized only in the actual world of phenomena and not in the intellectually-projected world as proposed by Kant and the neo-kantians” (Berdiaev, “Subjectivism,” 241).

99 Berdiaev, 237-238.

100 Meaning, as the term would suggest, the understanding of history as a process of constant improvement in the condition of mankind. Berdiaev remained emphatically faithful to this view at this point, arguing that “the historical process is the liberation of man” (Berdiaev, “Subjectivism,” 240).

recurring themes of the erstwhile “Legal Marxists’” subsequent thought.

III. The Rebirth of Idealism

The philosophical questioning of the four Marxists did not take place in an ideological vacuum. Since the beginning, the radical and rationalist revolutionary tradition had had its opponents. In the 1840s and 50s, a loose group of nationalist intellectuals known as the Slavophiles (among whom the most prominent were Aleksei Khomiakov, Konstantin and Ivan Askakov, and Ivan and Petr Kireevskii) argued against the alleged desire of “Westernizers” such as Herzen and Belinsky to import foreign intellectual and social forms, instead emphasizing religious faith as a grounds for national unity and calling for a more organic process of development that would draw on Russian tradition.  

Russia’s great literary figures raised the ire of the political intelligentsia, many of whom objected to the depiction of their nihilist outlook in Ivan Turgenev’s 1862 novel *Fathers and Sons*; this work was relatively neutral as compared to their portrayals in novels such as *Crime and Punishment* (1866) and *The Possessed* (1872) by the more conservative, Christian Dostoevsky, who juxtaposed the dangers of nihilism with the redemptive power of faith. Lev Tolstoy enjoyed influence not mainly through his own novels, but later in life as the exponent of a heterodox Christian social philosophy which emphasized renunciation – of luxury, of political activity, of forceful resistance to evil, and even of the artistic creativity to which he had devoted his early life – in favor of a quest for purity and moral self-perfection. Despite such notable voices, however, it is difficult to identify a coherent ideological alternative to political radicalism and philosophical materialism between the Westernizer-Slavophile controversy and the dawn of the 20th century. By the close of the 19th

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102 This opposition, while indicative of a general difference in philosophical tone, can however be overemphasized; the “Westernizer” Herzen, for instance, was a passionate advocate of the traditional peasant commune, while the Slavophiles themselves were strongly influenced by Western concepts, merely in their Romantic rather than their rationalist incarnation. See Nicholas Riasanovsky, *Russia and the West in the Teachings of the Slavophiles* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952], particularly pp. 152-156, 165-174.

103 See above, note 43.
century, several signs pointed to an impending change in this condition. Even as Marxism challenged Populism for political supremacy and Tolstoy won converts, other new intellectual currents attempted to reincorporate forms of thought that had been ruled off-limits by the generation of the 1860s, and thereby lay the foundation for a coherent challenge to positivism and materialism. Among these were the religious philosophy of Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900) and the growth of liberal idealism in academic circles, particularly surrounding the Moscow Psychological Society. Small but growing centers of liberalism in politics and idealism in philosophy constituted early signs of a shift in the social and ideological climate that had helped give rise to the radicalism of the mid-19th-century intelligentsia.

Not unlike the four subjects of this paper, Soloviev fell strongly under the influence of materialism and positivism in his youth before renouncing them in favor of religion (by way of a succession of Western European philosophies). Much of his work centered on the basic idea of All-Unity, according to which the universe is both distinct from and contained within God:

The eternal God forever realizes himself in realizing His content, i.e. in realizing all. That ‘all’, in contradistinction to the living God as absolutely One, is plurality – but plurality as the content of the absolute unity, as dominated by unity, as reduced to unity.

Plurality reduced to unity is a whole. A real whole is a living organism. God as a Being that has realized its content, as a unity containing all plurality, is a living organism.

Man was thus organically linked to God, but as a result of the Fall had also become alienated from him. It was the “common and universal task” of humanity to regain a more complete


\[106\] Men were also united with each other in the “pan-human organism” of Sofia, which served a number of different functions in Soloviev’s philosophy, including as “the ideal, perfect humanity eternally contained in the integral divine Being or Christ” and as the eternal, passive counterpart to God whose existence is necessary so God may
unity with the divine, a feat which was made possible by the incarnation of Christ but which men could (and indeed were obliged to) work towards by transforming the world in accordance with the ideal. While the Russian Orthodox Church had traditionally confined its attention to ritual and remained subservient to the state in political affairs, Soloviev’s insistence on embodying the ideal in life led to a more activist form of Christianity. Believers were charged with “realizing Christian principles in the collective life of mankind and transforming all our social institutions and relations in the spirit of the higher truth,” which meant they must develop “Christian politics.”

While this view earned Soloviev considerable trouble from the authorities, he was also a powerful voice in opposition to the leftist materialism that he had favored in his youth. In stark contrast to Pisarev, Chernyshevsky, and Dobroliubov, he argued that the ideal guided every aspect of human consciousness: “the will strives towards it as the high good, thought is determined by it as the absolute truth, and it is partly sensed and partly divined by our feelings and imagination as beauty.”

Two themes of Soloviev’s philosophy are of particular importance in assessing his influence among the four rogue Marxists: his vision of man as standing at the doorway between the material and transcendental realms, serving as a “connecting link between the divine and the natural world,” and his belief that creative activity could realize the metaphysical ideals of truth, goodness, and beauty in the material world.

have an other upon which to act (though Sophia herself is in another sense united with God). See “The Divine Basis” in Anthology, ed. Frank, 40-42.


108 Soloviev’s own political views shifted over the course of his life, from an initial call for a Christian theocracy as a partial realization of the Kingdom of God on earth to an eventual disillusionment with this ideal (following the famine of 1891) and acceptance that political liberalization represented, at least for the immediate future, the best means available to realize Christian ideals in Russian society; his leftward turn, revealed in his 1891 lecture “On the Collapse of the Medieval Worldview,” helped to somewhat lessen the traditional perception of Christianity in Russia as the handmaiden of reaction but earned him the stern disapproval of the government (Poole, Psychological Society, 47-54).


While the somewhat misleadingly named Moscow Psychological Society claimed Soloviev as a member, a form of neo-idealist philosophy distinct from dogmatic religious belief was more popular among its members. The Society, established in 1885, was in fact the first professional forum for philosophical discussion in Russia. Despite (or rather because of) the allure of at least certain philosophical works to the radical intelligentsia, the development of formal philosophical study had been stifled by the government’s decision to ban the discipline from universities until 1863.\(^{111}\) In addition to its somewhat unusual decision to prioritize the thorough investigation of philosophy over the publication of polemics, the Society rejected the discipline’s reduction to the role of handmaiden to the natural sciences.\(^{112}\) Leading member Nikolai Grot (who became chairman in 1888) explained that scientific knowledge could never render philosophy irrelevant, for “science gives man the means of fulfilling his will’s designs as best and fully as possible. But it does not say toward what he should direct this will.”\(^{113}\) The idealist current in the Society derived its conception of metaphysical reality from the existence of man’s ethical intuitions. Its representatives attacked the positivist denial of the category “what ought to be” as distinct from “what is”; they saw moral impulses as consciousness of a real, metaphysically existing moral imperative. From the existence of this moral consciousness and of the free will necessary to obey it, they also inferred the ontological reality of the person as an autonomous, non-determined entity. This latter characteristic of the idealists’ views helped them to link their philosophical arguments to the development of political liberalism in Russia.\(^{114}\)

Originally restricted to a few moderate intellectuals such as Boris Chicherin who rejected

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\(^{111}\) Rosenthal and Bohachevsky-Chomiak, Introduction to Revolution of the Spirit, 6; Billington, Icon and the Axe, 210; and Poole, Psychological Society, 54 all seem to agree on the 1863 end date but, interestingly enough, date the beginning of philosophy’s exclusion from the Russian curriculum to 1826, 1848, and 1850 respectively. They do seem to agree that there were continuing restrictions on its practice until 1889.

\(^{112}\) Poole, Psychological Society, 1, 54.


\(^{114}\) Poole, Psychological Society, esp. pp. 38-44, 54-58, 65-66, 140-142.
the radical turn in political thought during the 1860s, liberal theories proved relatively popular in the *zemstva*, the organs of local self-government established by Alexander II in 1864. Among deputies and the professionals - doctors, teachers, statisticians and so forth - who entered into the service of these civic organs, choosing small-scale practical activity over revolutionary agitation, political platforms based on the rule of law and representative government enjoyed rather more success than in the student *kruzhoks*. As representative institutions with responsibility for the public welfare, they carried out what was “‘liberal work’ in its very essence, and the zemstvos could not help being liberal.”

Standing (or moving) outside the radical orthodoxy of the intelligentsia, by the close of the 19th century several groups of intellectuals were also drawn to the liberal banner; these included both the eventual defectors from Marxism and such figures as future Kadet leader P.N. Miliukov who had never subscribed to the tenets of either Marxism or populism. The rise of these figures, the growing intellectual “acceptability” of liberalism, and the opportunities for small-scale practical work through the zemstvo all illustrate that Russia’s socioeconomic evolution was beginning to weaken the intelligentsia’s identity as a distinct, “alienated” social group whose only option aside from retreat (through abstract philosophical theorizing or submersion in the people) was a radical overthrow of the system.

While a number of the intellectuals who entered the liberal camp retained the positivist outlook characteristic of their radical counterparts, Struve, who had arrived at both an idealist

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115 Paul Miliukov, *Russia and Its Crisis* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1906), 299. Fischer (*Russian Liberalism: From Gentry to Intelligentsia* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958]) describes this activity as “small deeds” liberalism, though of course to a large extent this simply means that the participants were doing their jobs by attempting to improve public services, education, or general living conditions for their constituents.


119 This is true, for instance, of Miliukov, who remained a leading figure in liberal circles long after Struve’s retreat from the Kadet party.
philosophical position and a liberal political stance by around 1900, sought to bring the two currents of thought closer together. In 1901, together with the liberal idealist professor P.I. Novgorodtsev and his cohorts in the Moscow Psychological Society, he began planning on a collection of philosophical essays that would outline the new idealist perspective.

Struve initially intended the symposium to center on the subject of freedom of conscience, which Randall Poole suggests he may have believed would prove particularly alluring for religious-minded members of the zemstvo circles. (It is also a subject that seems to have legitimately occupied a key position in Struve’s thought, as he later cited the battle for freedom of conscience as the historical root of liberalism.) As the list of contributors for the planned symposium changed so too did the topic, and the symposium, which was published as *Problems of Idealism* in 1902, instead offered a wide-ranging idealist critique of positivism and materialism. However, the initial intended focus of the symposium perfectly foreshadows one critical point about the Russian idealists’ road to liberalism; their political philosophy was rooted primarily not in the notion of competing practical interests but of the need for a moral government that would best enable individuals to live moral lives.

By the time Struve and his collaborator Novgorodtsev (who served as the official editor of the volume) were ready to collect articles for their project, S.N. Bulgakov, S.L. Frank, and N.A. Berdiaev had grown sufficiently dissatisfied with the precepts of dialectical materialism to join the list of contributors. United by a broad desire to reorient ethics away from the prevalent pseudo-scientific utilitarianism and towards recognition of abstract ideals, their contributions repeated several of the arguments seen earlier in Berdiaev’s essay on subjectivism.

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120 Poole describes Struve’s views as remaining ideologically closest among the former Marxists to the Psychological Society’s mainstream formulation of neo-idealism (*Psychological Society*, 124).
121 Poole, *Psychological Society*, 130-131.
123 All eventually joined the Psychological Society as well, but were not among its more involved members (Poole, *Psychological Society*), 4.
including its insistence on freedom of the will and an independent (i.e. non-empirical) ground for morality. Three general precepts of the “realist” tradition came under attack. First was the assumption that all aspects of life could be understood through the methods of the natural sciences, which meant all human actions were seen as subject to a universal chain of causality. Second was the consequent determinism that originated with the 1860s “scientific” worldview and reached its apotheosis in Plekhanov’s formulation of Marxism. (As noted above, this perspective was itself at odds with other aspects of the intelligentsia heritage and the subject of wider frustration in Marxist circles during the early 20th century.) Third and most important was the utilitarian assumption, overwhelmingly shared by radical intellectuals, that the maximization of human happiness, to be effected through an improvement in the material and social position of the masses, was the only legitimate basis of moral judgment.

Struve, Bulgakov, and Berdiaev all began their essays with the primary intuition that there is a dimension to human consciousness irreducible to scientific understanding, which even their positivist opponents were unable to fully silence. Struve and Berdiaev both treated this problem in terms of a distinction between man’s empirical observations and his moral sentiments, between “is” and “ought.” The category of “ought,” Struve argued, had been placed in a false position of dependence on that of “is” by “the monstrous idea of scientific ethics,” which sought to derive normative claims from empirical reality.124 This confusion had led to the repression of a “metaphysical need” which thus intruded into supposedly scientific systems, overtly through the “subjective sociology” of Struve’s old nemesis Mikhailovsky and covertly in the “naïve dogmatic materialism” of orthodox Marxism. A more intellectually honest philosophy had to address the question of “ought” in its own right, rather than “within the limits of positive

science and in its terms.”

Berdiaev made a similar point in maintaining that “human consciousness has two different, parallel sides: a cognitive-theoretical side, directed to the natural necessity of experience (“what is”); and a moral-ethical side, directed to the normative necessity or lawfulness of the good (“what ought to be”).” Even those who claimed to deny the existence of “ought” as an independent category could not help betraying themselves with the occasional “protest against one or another manifestation of ‘what is.’”

Bulgakov focused more on religion and metaphysics than on ethics in the strict sense. *Pace* the claims of Comtean positivism, he argued, the development of positive science filled a different function than did religion or metaphysics and thus could quench “neither the spirit’s religious need and the sphere of ideas and feelings corresponding to it, nor the metaphysical requirements of reason and the speculation answering them.” Positive science could examine “only fragments of a reality that widens constantly before the eyes of the scientist.” Yet the inadequacies of positive science could not eliminate man’s yearning for “an integral idea of the world,” for answers to

questions about our world as a whole, about its substance, about whether it has some meaning or rational end, about whether our life and deeds have any value, about the nature of good and evil, and so on and so forth. In short, we ask and cannot but ask not only how, but also what, why; and for what.

Bulgakov contended that such questions so inevitably arise in the human mind and spirit that positivist thinkers covertly gave their own answers by claiming to know that there is no God and no free will, on the one hand, and by substituting a new “religion of humanity” or “religion of socialism” on the other. In contrast to the insistence of his older collaborators on morality as

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127 According to this view human history progressed through three broad stages of understanding: first the theological, which was to be replaced by the metaphysical (i.e. idealist but not dogmatically religious) and finally the scientific (positivist).
128 Sergei Bulgakov, “Basic Problems of the Theory of Progress,” in *Problems of Idealism*, ed. Poole 85-88. Randall Poole describes the turn made by these three thinkers from proposing the existence of an unscientific side to human
metaphysically based, Frank restrained himself to a somewhat humbler claim; he accepted that “genetically,” moral feelings arose from the demands of social welfare, but believed it is necessary to differentiate between this causal origin and the “subjective end and internal motive” of a feeling, which “determine its moral significance.”

Although somewhat different from the other authors’ postulate of morality as an independent metaphysical category, Frank’s insistence on a subjective understanding of moral sentiments posed similar problems for those who wished to address (or dismiss) ethical questions purely on the basis of scientific causality.

The first three authors, however, attributed greater significance to the independent category of morality; following Kant, they argued that morality and man’s ability to act in accordance with its commands represented a way out of the stifling determinism prescribed by pure materialism. Bulgakov insisted that the very existence of the category ‘ought’ “necessarily supposes the possibility of moral wanting, the possibility of choice, and consequently it is inconceivable without free will”; this problem could be resolved either by Kant’s method of “juxtapos[ing] empirical necessity and intelligible freedom” or through the efforts of his successors “toward overcoming this dualism and showing the final triumph of freedom.” He himself showed a marked preference for the latter, in the form of a teleological understanding of history as “the revelation of the absolute,” which in his mind was “a synonym for freedom.” In this regard his understanding of freedom differed from that of his counterparts, for his religious convictions required him to reconcile human freedom with divine omnipotence: “God lets men, who have particular passions and interests, do as they please, and what results is the

consciousness to noting that materialist thinkers had in fact actually indulged its curiosity under the cover of science as the “contraband critique.” See the Introduction to Problems, 35, 40.

129 Semën Frank, “Friedrich Nietzsche and the Ethics of ‘Love of the Distant,’” in Problems of Idealism, ed. Poole, 217. The “genetic” origin of his morality, in his view, can be understood in utilitarian terms, but he argues that idealism still offers a better understanding of moral sentiments when their bearer subjectively perceives these feelings as the desire to serve an ideal rather than the desire to further human welfare. This distinction between an external (biological) and an inward-looking-out approach to human psychology is similar to that which serves as the premise for Frank’s 1917 work Man’s Soul.
accomplishment of *his* intentions.” The individual could at least partially make God’s plan his own by following “conscience, the moral law, the categorical imperative, the absolute character of which Kant established beyond any doubt.” His understanding of freedom thus incorporated Kantian ethics, but drew heavily on teleology as opposed to Kantian dualism.¹³⁰

Struve’s defense of free will more closely followed the Kantian route. In our scientific understanding, causality left no room for free will: “the whole world of ‘what is’ is necessary: it could not and cannot be other than it was, is, and will be.” However, “being itself, as such, always remains for us unknown and unexplained.” This fact could be understood in terms of “the unknowability of ‘final’ causes.” (It also clearly echoed Kant’s distinction between the phenomenal and noumenal, i.e. the perceptible impressions of a thing vs. the thing-in-itself.) Given this unknowability, one could not reasonably exclude the possibility of a “break in this chain [causation],” of “uncaused or creative being.” In fact, the notion of the person as “autonomous in its activity, a spontaneous principle, creative from itself” in the process of “bringing about ‘what ought to be’” was “a metaphysics to which the spirit is drawn both by immediate consciousness of its own creative function and by critical reflection.”¹³¹ Berdiaev’s argument drew upon both the metaphysical connotations of morality and the concept that the “cognitive activity” of consciousness is directed towards necessity while its “purely moral activity” is directed toward freedom. Our decision to act according to “ethical norms” rather than “contingent empirical motives,” which in his view meant the determination of our behavior by the “spiritual I” rather than the “empirical I,” allowed us true freedom: that of “the internal spiritual creativity of the human person.” Berdiaev thus views freedom in intentional contrast to

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¹³¹ Struve, “Our Philosophical Development,” 147-150.
its definition in classical liberal theory, which treats it as “only the absence of constraint.”

Despite methodological differences, all three thinkers thus drew on morality, on mankind’s effort to realize the _ought_, in their defense of free will, and notably both Struve and Berdiaev emphasized creativity in connection with morality.

In addition to positing that moral norms differed in form from empirical perception, at least three of these thinkers insisted that they did (or could) include content other than human happiness: in particular, this meant personal striving towards absolute values. Frank, who appears to have been much more interested in refuting the populist morality that demands the justification of all activity in terms of service to the people than in challenging scientific determinism, focused almost exclusively on this point, which he clarified using Nietzsche’s distinction between “love of one’s neighbor” and “love of things and phantoms.”

“Love of things and phantoms” described the longing for “abstract moral goods that possess internal value,” such as “truth, justice, beauty, harmony, honor.” While technically maintaining that both “love of one’s neighbor” (i.e. utilitarianism) and “love of things and phantoms” were valid moral systems, either of which might prevail in a given epoch depending upon the character of the time, Frank’s sympathies were clearly with the latter. He suggested that while feelings of compassion for abstract humanity possess “little ground in people’s innate instincts,” our consciousness of abstract moral values is “more deeply rooted, more instinctive, and stronger.”

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132 Berdiaev, “Ethical Problem,” 165-166; 187-188. These two concepts – the basic importance of freedom and its identification as a quality of the spirit as opposed to stifling, constraining matter – remained critical features of Berdiaev’s philosophy for the remainder of his life; in his 1950 autobiography, Berdiaev wrote of a “war for freedom which I have waged all my life” and declared that “spirit is freedom, and freedom is spirit” (Berdiaev, *Dream and Reality*, 48, 56).

133 In Frank’s reading, “love of one’s neighbor” in the first sense refers to actions that are motivated by immediate compassion for those around us (e.g., “Dostoevsky’s famous idea that all human progress is not worth one tear from a child” [quoted in Frank, “Nietzsche,” 201-202]), “love of the distant” to those driven by more remote goals. However, the two can be combined when one’s moral system is premised on the welfare of abstract humanity, rather than the people one immediately encounters in one’s life – this situation describes the utilitarian ethic, where love of one’s neighbor supplies the content of love of the distant. “Love of things and phantoms” is a form of “love of the distant” dedicated to an ultimate goal distinct from human happiness (Frank, “Nietzsche,” 212-214).

The latter were thus preferable to Frank as a basis for moral evaluation, for he stressed (still following his reading of Nietzsche) that obedience to moral norms was most valuable when it occurred not through external compulsion but as “easy, free, and disinterested adherence to the path indicated by a compelling inner voice,” which “will leave a joyous impression of harmony between an act and the internal nature of the actor.” In contrast to the calls for self-renunciation so characteristic among populists and many of their Marxist successors, he thus emphasized the importance of creating “morally integral natures.”

Bulgakov and Berdiaev also offered extensive critiques of utilitarian morality. While Frank presented idealism and utilitarianism as competing moral systems, if with an obvious preference for the former, his two co-contributors rejected the validity of human happiness as a goal of ethics altogether, with a vigor that foreshadows their continuing suspicion of humanism in social philosophy. They pointed to the difficulty of quantitatively tallying happiness to determine the greater good, suggested that at times suffering may be morally necessary, and argued that utilitarians were wrong to endow happiness itself with an independent moral content when it could only be understood as the consequence of some particular state or activity. Thus for Bulgakov, “the only happiness that is moral is that which is incidental to, not an intended concomitant of, moral activity in service to the good.” Berdiaev offered an interesting challenge to the descriptive premises as well as the normative validity of utilitarian morality. While utilitarians claim that people’s actions are always motivated by the desire for pleasure,

Psychology definitely teaches that we strive not towards pleasure – that would be a completely empty aspiration – but toward various objects having a certain content. If I go to a concert to hear music, then the object of my desire is not pleasure, but music; pleasure is only the consequence. If

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135 Frank, “Nietzsche,” 221-223.
136 Bulgakov, “Theory of Progress,” 100; Berdiaev, “Ethical Problem,” 166-167. Bulgakov clarifies this point to note that compassion and “striving to ease or eliminate the suffering of other people” was indeed a moral virtue, but certain forms of suffering (for instance, “that which is rooted in the immoral strivings of a given person”) did not deserve such a response.
I work on scholarly research, then the object of my desire is knowledge, not pleasure. Human life is made of desires and aspirations directed toward any number of objects … an organic link exists between what we want, and what we are by our nature.138

Berdiaev also echoed Frank in his argument (similarly made with thanks to Nietzsche) that morality must flow from an individual’s inner spirit rather than external demands upon that person: “What is morally valuable in a human being is determined not by the approval or condemnation of other people, not by the good of society, not by the external world in general, but by accordance with one’s own internal moral nature, by the relation to one’s own God.”139 While altruistic (including utilitarian) systems were based on the premise that the other had greater moral significance than the “I,” morality ought in fact support the “self-determination and infinite development” of that “I,” which is the only “bearer of the spiritual principle” in the material world. Acts of self-sacrifice might have moral value, but only insofar as they themselves were “ways of moral self-realization” for the actor.140

In lieu of what they saw as the flawed doctrine of utilitarianism, these three thinkers thus postulated an alternative morality centered on moral self-realization. In Bulgakov’s terms, “the free development of the person,” which he viewed as “an expression in different words of the basic idea behind Kant’s ethics,” should serve as “the ideal of social evolution.” The person’s worthiness to serve as a social ideal, however, was fundamentally linked to his role as “a bearer of absolute tasks, endowed with a definite moral nature and capabilities.”141 In another piece

138 Berdiaev, “Ethical Problem,” 166.
139 Berdiaev, “Ethical Problem,” 172. In this regard Berdiaev also makes a rather novel attempt to reconcile Christian morality and its fierce critic Nietzsche on the grounds that Christianity had first “understood the moral problem as an internal problem” [183]. His effort to reconcile these two seemingly irreconcilable moral doctrines foreshadows his later work Meaning of the Creative Act (1916), which follows Nietzsche in suggesting the advent of a new, heroically creative type of man who would remake the world but assigns this development theological meaning.
141 Bulgakov, “Theory of Progress,” 104-105; 111-112. He acknowledged that this ideal had been at the center of some more “elevated” forms of the theory of progress, but urged that it be acknowledged openly and based on an ethical conception of the human person rather than inserted as a surreptitious “borrowing from metaphysics” in a worldview that claimed to deny the validity of ideals.
written around the same time, Bulgakov clarified that “human life has no absolute meaning or value in itself alone, but only beyond and above itself; it acquires meaning and value not through some feature of its empirical or biological facticity, but as something which serves a higher ideal principle, a substantive good.” In his view, the possibility of free and willing service to moral ideals was thus the necessary precondition of meaning in life.  

In formulating his set of ideal prescriptions Frank once again turns to Nietzsche (or rather, to his own moralized reading of that philosopher). He urges adherence to a moral system that would treat “the development of our moral nature… the achievement of ever higher levels of spiritual development” as ends rather than means, and notes with approval what he believes is Nietzsche’s concept of a spiritual aristocracy that will serve as a vanguard in “the heroic struggle for the ideal of independence of the spirit, an ideal that sums up, as it were, respect for all spiritual goods and love for all the sacred rights of the human person.” Unlike the other contributors, who have by this point come to endorse metaphysics, he cites with seeming approval the fact that Nietzsche’s ideals are not of metaphysical origin but merely “creations of the human spirit.” Berdiaev for his part incorporates both Kantian and Nietzschean ideals. Like his counterparts, he declares that the goal of morality should be “not the empirical happiness of people, but their ideal moral perfection.” Similarly to Bulgakov, he argued that the absolute value of each human being derived “not in his contingent empirical content, but as a bearer of a higher spiritual principle.” Berdiaev’s moral ideal could be phrased in Kantian terms: “a human being is an end in itself, who from the moral point of view cannot be treated as a means; all people, moreover, are morally equal in value”; but it also entailed a Nietzschean transformative project for a “spiritual aristocratization of the

142 Bulgakov, “The Economic Ideal,” in Sergei Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology, ed. Rowan Williams (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 40.
143 Frank, “Nietzsche,” 229, 233-234.
human soul” to be led by men of genius. Struve avoided concrete discussion of his own ideals in his *Problems* essay, but elsewhere declared that “absolute good consists in that man … freely contains in himself and creates absolute truth and absolute beauty,” thus suggesting a similar focus on the development of the individual as the bearer of absolute values. Despite their differences in tone, varying degrees of infatuation with the seemingly contradictory teachings of Kant and Nietzsche, and even (in Frank’s case) differences on the question of metaphysics itself, all four thus ended up with a vision of free, personal moral development in accordance with absolute values at the center of their ethical visions.

*Problems of Idealism* thus attacked the reduction of human life to mechanism and reasserted the ideal of life as inherently free and meaningful as a result of each person’s direct cognizance and pursuit of ideal values, as opposed to merely as a function of social utility. Despite their break with the “realist” tradition, the former Marxists hastened to clarify that this new outlook itself represented a powerful platform for the defense of freedom in politics as well. Bulgakov argued that the moral law, though absolute, could be “realized only through concrete goals, in concrete life,” in the execution of the “historical task” of one’s era, and, for his contemporaries, “in the hearts of people devoting themselves to helping the proletariat in its struggle for human dignity, in the hearts of people capable of living and dying for the cause of freedom.” Far from undermining progressivism, idealism was the answer to the “crisis” of Marxism stemming from the erosion of utopian hopes. Frank followed his idealist premises to a classically liberal conclusion when he argued that while utilitarianism leaves little ground for claiming moral rights – that is, “a subjective interest, the subject’s defense of which is not only

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144 Berdiaev, “Ethical Problem,” 167, 170, 177, 184.
145 Struve, Predislovia (Prefix) to Berdiaev, *Subjectivizm i individualizm v obshestvennoi filosofii* (St. Petersburg: Elektricheskaia tipografia, 1901), lxiii.
permitted, but positively *prescribed* by the moral law" (emphasis in original) – the morality of “love of phantoms,” by enshrining concepts such as “truth, justice, human dignity, independence” as moral values, also created a moral right to these things. Hence the Russian intelligentsia’s “belief in the necessity of renouncing their own human rights in the interests of the good of the popular masses” was hopelessly misguided. Such claims should be viewed as a matter of “sacred and inalienable rights” rather than “subjective tastes and personal interests.”

Berdiaev argued that the champions of man’s spiritual progress must also be the champions of his social progress, for “economic development and legal protections for freedom and equality” were necessary in order to allow the “unfolding [of spiritual culture] in the empirical history of humanity.” Like Frank, he arrived at a liberal insistence on “the principle of *inalienable* person rights.” For Berdiaev, idealism was not merely one possible progressive philosophy but the only true progressive philosophy. Utilitarian systems which placed happiness above “the idea of personhood [lichenst’] and its development toward perfection” were “deeply reactionary doctrines,” and progressives held them only through a misunderstanding. Likewise, those who combine “avowal of the unconditional value of the human spirit, on the one hand, and justification of oppression, exploitation, and violation of the elementary rights of man, on the others” were guilty of a grave error. Idealism would present a “much stronger” challenge to reaction than did materialism, for the very concept “ought” was “a revolutionary idea, a symbol of revolt against reality in the name of an ideal.”

Struve applauded Soloviev for illustrating that “philosophical idealism and state positivism are incompatible in spirit.”

Though not in *Problems*, he reached political conclusions broadly similar to those of Berdiaev and Frank: “the

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150 Struve, “Our Philosophical Development,” 153. According to state positivism, the legal norms of the state are valid merely because the state has chosen to impose them and they cannot be questioned in the name of an abstract moral ideal.
recognition of individuality, freedom, and equality as necessary conditions for the realization in man of the absolute good.\textsuperscript{151} In short, enshrining the individual’s quest to realize absolute values at the center of one’s philosophical vision went hand in hand with the demand for political and economic conditions which rendered personal moral development possible. In 1902, for all its philosophical failings, Russia’s radical left still represented the greatest hope for the establishment of such conditions in the eyes of the four ex-Marxists.

And indeed, in accordance with its authors’ proclamations, although the symposium’s break with accepted progressive ideology provoked some theoretical debate and a volume of rebuttal essays entitled \textit{Essays on the Realist Worldview},\textsuperscript{152} it did not cause a decisive rupture between its participants and the radical left as a whole. Berdiaev, though increasingly “considered a traitor to Marxism” for his forays into idealist metaphysics, participated in negotiations between a liberal group under Struve’s leadership and the Social Democrats.\textsuperscript{153} While the relations between these groups became increasingly tense, due in no small part to personal differences between Lenin and Struve (who later declared that he found the “most striking feature” of the Bolshevik leader to be “cruelty in that most general philosophical sense in which it can be opposed to gentleness and tolerance for men and for everything human”),\textsuperscript{154} Struve continued to pursue a general policy of cooperation with the left, enjoying relative success with regard to members of the (Populist) Socialist-Revolutionary Party.\textsuperscript{155} Even while working out the ramification of their new metaphysical beliefs, the four men continued to aim for

\textsuperscript{151} Struve, “Predislovie,” lxiii.

\textsuperscript{152} See Poole, Introduction to \textit{Problems}, 41. Contributors included the three leaders of the Nietzschean “empirocriticist” movement within Bolshevism, Bazarov, Bogdanov, and Lunacharsky.

\textsuperscript{153} Berdiaev, \textit{Dream and Reality}, 133, 135.

\textsuperscript{154} Struve, “Contacts and Conflicts,” 592; see part II of this document for an exhaustive account of Struve’s break with the Social Democrats.

\textsuperscript{155} Pipes, \textit{Liberal on the Left}, 274-279; 313-337.
social and political change, and thus greeted with hope the sequence of events that promised an unprecedented transformation of Russian politics two and a half years later.
Part II: Dawn and Disillusion

... [T]he intelligentsia gave the revolution all its ideological baggage and its whole spiritual arsenal, along with its front-line fighters, skirmishers, agitators, and propagandists. It gave spiritual expression to the instinctive desires of the masses and fired them with its own enthusiasm – in short, it was the nerves and brain of the gigantic body of the revolution. In this sense the revolution is the intelligentsia’s spiritual offspring and, consequently, the history of the revolution is history’s verdict on the intelligentsia.

-S.N. Bulgakov, “Heroism and Asceticism,” in Vekhi, 1909\(^\text{156}\)

The period between the publication of Problems of Idealism in 1902 and Vekhi in 1909 was one of rapid cultural change and violent political upheaval. At the dawn of the 20\(^{\text{th}}\) century, the cracks which had emerged by the late 1890s in the radical-materialist monopoly over the Russian intelligentsia were widening. Spiritual and artistic currents which starkly defied utilitarian demands for practicality began to flourish, the liberal movement born among the zemstva increasingly gained strength, and the Russian Orthodox Church, long dismissed as a bulwark of autocracy by left-leaning intellectuals, suddenly aroused new interest among the educated elite. In 1905, a sudden, widespread, and largely uncoordinated outbreak of revolutionary violence shook the very foundations of Russia’s imperial edifice; in October of that year, the conservative tsar Nicholas II issued his first capitulations to the liberal demands he had bluntly dismissed as “senseless dreams” ten years earlier.\(^\text{157}\) This explosive atmosphere of cultural and political transformation gave Frank, Berdiaev, Bulgakov, and Struve solid reason to hope that their old aspirations for a freer political system and their new ones for the spiritual rejuvenation of the intelligentsia would be realized together. In this regard they sought to translate moral principles into practice by defending the freedom of the person, as the bearer of spiritual values, and the rights of culture, as their expression. The political opening of 1905 also


\(^{157}\) On Nicholas II’s “senseless dreams” speech of 1895, in which the newly installed tsar reproached liberals who had the audacity to hope for “the participation of zemstvo representatives in domestic government” and pledged to “safeguard the principle of autocracy as firmly and as steadfastly as did my unforgettable late father,” see Pipes, Liberal on the Left, 154.
gave an opportunity for reflection on what should take the place of the old materialist philosophy and repressive regime, an area in which divisions amongst the four soon became clear.

Nonetheless, by the time the last tremors of the revolutionary earthquake faded away in 1907, they were once again united by a common experience – that of horror and grief at not only the autocracy’s repression of the revolution, but the manner in which the liberation movement in which all had enthusiastically participated at last took center stage. The result was a symposium, Vekhi, in which the four renegades from Marxism decisively broke not only with the philosophical framework of the revolutionary intelligentsia, but with its fundamental thirst to put an end to evil through the external restructuring of society, and above all its willingness to subordinate the independently valuable in human life to this overriding goal. On the one hand, the revolution caused them to undertake a serious reassessment of their faith in the efficacy of political change. On the other, the ideals they articulated with hope in the heady days of 1905 – ideals which emphasized respect for the human personality as the bearer of absolute values, and respect for cultural creativity as the embodiment of these values – also provided a clear foundation for their subsequent revolt against a revolutionary tradition which blatantly disregarded these principles in the interest of its social and political aims.

1. The Turning Point – Cultural Renaissance and Revolutionary Politics, 1902-1907

The years immediately following the publication of Problems, however, were years of hope. In different ways, each of the former Marxists became deeply involved in the cultural transformation of the time. Struve, temporarily in emigration in Stuttgart, Germany where he was able to escape the eyes of the official censor, occupied himself with editing an underground journal, Osvobozhdenie (“Liberation”) aimed at bringing about the end of the autocracy; in order to maintain a broad front of oppositionists, its pages expressed some ambivalence as to the
question of evolutionary vs. revolutionary methods, though its editor personally preferred the latter. In 1903-4 he played a critical role in the founding of the Union of Liberation, a loose association of liberals and radicals dedicated to “the liquidation of autocracy and the establishment in Russia of a constitutional regime” based on universal suffrage. Back in Russia, Bulgakov and Berdiaev (who also joined the Union but were less involved) became associated with a renaissance of religious and mystical thought and contributed to the journals Novii Put’ (“The New Way”) and Voprosi Zhizni (“Questions of Life,” which they founded jointly after splitting with Novii Put’ in 1904). Frank, who seems to have been torn between a personal desire for contemplation and the demands of political activity (with the latter frequently expressed in the insistent voice of his friend and mentor Struve) spent most of this period in Germany with Struve at the latter’s urging, though during a brief visit to Petersburg between the fall of 1904 and the spring of 1905 he contributed to Novii Put’ and Voprosi Zhizni.

While the revolutionary implications of Struve’s liberation movement are sufficiently clear, the new cultural movements in which Berdiaev and Bulgakov participated were equally transformative in their own sphere. The renewed interest in religious and philosophical questions evident in their journals was illustrative of a broader shift in intellectual climate at the dawn of the 20th century. In the aesthetic sphere, artists and writers rejected the realist conventions that many of their 19th-century predecessors, in accordance with the utilitarian mindset of the intelligentsia, had adopted as a civic duty. Writers and poets such as Alexander Blok, Andrei Bely, and Viacheslav Ivanov, leaders of Russian Symbolism, sought to develop literary forms that would serve as gateways to a higher reality. Nietzsche (as Frank and Berdiaev’s

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158 See for instance Struve, “Liberalizm i t.n. ‘revoluziionnia napravlenia,” Osvozbozhdenie No. 7 (September 18/October 1, 1902), 104-105.  
159 Listov Osvobozhdeniya, as quoted in Pipes, Liberal on the Left, 336.  
160 Lowrie, Rebellious Prophet, 71; Evtuhov, Cross and the Sickle, 87.  
161 Evtuhov, Cross and the Sickle, 82.  
162 Boobbyer, Frank, 33-37; Swoboda, Philosophical Thought, 321-329.
contributions to Problems illustrate) became popular as an extreme antidote to the populist denial of the individual in the name of the people, and themes of identity and personal development grew more important in literary circles as well as for “personalist” neo-idealism. Intellectuals previously preoccupied with a future to be constructed along purely rational lines grew more interested in the past and began to examine the history of both Russian and world culture.  

Not all of this renewed interest in culture, identity, and the transcendent among writers, poets, artists, and amateur philosophers necessarily led to the belief in moral norms characteristic of philosophical neo-idealism, and indeed in some cases it was expressly amoral, but it did raise the profile of religious questions. Beyond the sometimes ambiguous spiritual quests common to all the Symbolist literati, thinkers such as Dmitri Merezhkovsky, who took it upon himself to transform Christianity by shedding its historical aversion to the flesh, set the tone for a new exploration of directly religious themes. Writers and poets grew interested the work of Vladimir Soloviev, in some cases for his Christianity and even more frequently for his mysticism. In an essay on Soloviev’s religious philosophy in his 1903 work From Marxism to Idealism, Bulgakov declared that while humanity was “living in an age of doctrinaire rationalism which has rejected first religion and now philosophy in the name of exact science and free inquiry… there are grounds for thinking that this period too is coming to an end.” In the new philosophical era, man would turn away from his idolization of the relative goods of this life back to their absolute foundation: “in the dim twilight of existence we mistake for the source of

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164 Notably, Merezhkovsky as early as 1892 protested against the self-censorship of Russian literature for reasons of political or social utility, on the grounds that it had limited Russian writers’ ability to express lofty ideas (Rosenthal and Bohachevsky-Chomiak, Introduction to Revolution of the Spirit, 25).

165 Georges Florovsky, Ways of Russian Theology (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1979), 233-248 describes many of the new religious visions of the dawning century, though historically-minded readers will be frustrated by his need to examine the individuals in question from the perspective of the degree to which they are guilty of heresy.
light some objects which merely reflect it better than others.” Following Soloviev, they should instead find their way back to “the true source – the light which is eternal and unfading.”

This flurry of new religious interest led to calls for reform of the institutional Orthodox Church and efforts to reach an understanding between its leaders and the intelligentsia. The latter included the 1901 establishment of the St. Petersburg Religious-Philosophical Society, which in addition to opening dialogue with the intelligentsia sought to find ways to increase the relevance of Christianity to life. Berdiaev, who was among the participants, described these meetings as “a phenomenon unprecedented in Russian life. … Russian men of letters sit next to [members of the higher clergy] and argue over freedom of conscience, over the excommunication of L. Tolstoy, over the relation of Christianity to the flesh, over the relation between the intelligentsia and the Church.” Given the traditional unwillingness of the clergy to tolerate criticism, such gatherings signaled a major change:

We know that we have customarily had to either … behave towards the clergy with servility just as they behaved before the Russian government, or not even consider it possible to be in one room with them; we are not accustomed to thinking that the representatives of our clergy are capable of clear speech … and to us the notion that it was possible to argue with them over topical questions and explain our thoughts in front of them was absurd.

Berdiaev angrily reproached the clergy for its historical submission to the church, which he argued (with some justice) was responsible for the militant atheism or simple disinterest in religion among most of the intelligentsia. Nevertheless, he held out hope that the time was approaching to rectify both of these problems. In his view, the unprecedented willingness of the

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167 Evtuhov, Cross and the Sickle, 54.
168 Florovsky, Ways, 253. As Florovsky notes, this was also an issue that had occupied Soloviev’s attention.
169 Russia’s great novelist, having passed into a phase of heterodox religious teaching late in his life, was expelled from the Orthodox Church in 1902 after verbally tangling with the conservative Over-Procurator of the Holy Synod (Billington, Icon and the Axe, 440).
170 Berdiaev, “Politicheskii smysl religioznogo brozheniia v Rossii,” reproduced in Sub specie aeternitatis (Moscow: Kanon, 2002), 158. With advance apologies to the authors thus rendered, to my readers, and to the finer intricacies of the Russian language, footnotes pointing directly to Russian sources indicate that translations are my own.
clergy to listen to the intelligentsia pronounce “the bitter truth” and the intelligentsia’s newfound interest in speaking this truth was symptomatic of a broader “fermentation” in Russian society, of which the pressure for political change was also a part.

On Berdiaev’s account, the newfound religious interest of the intellectuals reflected the growth in Russian society of needs whose fulfillment demanded the overthrow of the existing social order. Of particular importance for participants in the new religious movements was freedom of conscience, which was a subject of discussion in the Society and which Berdiaev stridently defended as “an absolute value, good in and of itself” and “an inalienable natural right of the human person.” Well aware that this declaration brought him into conflict with the political regime, he firmly declared that “there is no goal on Earth in the name of which it is permissible to encroach upon this right, to alienate it, not the will of the tsar, nor the will of the people.”171 His warning that he would defend freedom of conscience against not only the autocracy but also restriction in the name of the people foreshadows his future criticism of the radical intelligentsia. However, at the moment he was more concerned with the existing evil, for,

On the foundation of autocracy and without rights, not only political and economic activity but any creation whatsoever, whatever cultural work, seemingly innocent in relation to politics, is impossible; spiritual creativity in religion, in science, in literature, and the enlightenment of the people are impossible. Any creative cultural work, however far from politics, demands freedom of conscience, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of unions, demands the independent activity of the person, the free creativity of the human spirit, and therefore assumes a guarantee of the rights of the person.172

His declaration regarding the political nature of apolitical activity under the tsarist regime echoed Struve’s words in an earlier article: “each in itself lawful display of social thought and social action receives the character of, if not an infringement on the integrity of the political order, then at least an anti-government-manifestation.”173 Both men rebelled against a political structure that

172 Berdiaev, “Religioznogo brozhenii,” 159.
173 Struve, “Hedodymannoe i hedoskazannoe,” Osvozbozhdenie No. 11 (November 18/December 1, 1902), 169.
denied not merely democratic participation, but any right to independent thought and meaningful action in society. Perhaps agreeing with Berdiaev’s assessment of the political ramifications of the Religious-Philosophical Society’s discussions, the much-hated Over-Procurator of the Holy Synod (an appointed official charged with overseeing church affairs), Konstantin Pobondonotsev, ordered it shut down less than two full years after its opening. Yet despite the government’s continued and clumsy efforts at suppression, between the growth of an increasingly intransigent student population, the expansion of a severely disenfranchised and dissatisfied working class, a growing Marxist movement, liberal activism in the provinces, and cultural fermentation in the cities, the extent of such uncontrolled activity in imperial Russia was rapidly increasing.

In 1905, what Struve had described as a lack of correspondence between the political order and the cultural life of society boiled over into a decidedly “anti-government manifestation.” While Russia’s literati ventured onto new cultural territory, the government’s foreign and domestic policies brought it ever closer to political disaster. On January 26, 1904, Russian naval forces suffered a surprise attack by a Japanese government disgruntled with Russia’s quest for expansion in the Far East. Most Russian officials expected a quick victory against what they dismissed as a small, backwards power. In this they proved sorely mistaken. Particularly stymied by the difficulty of transporting its military forces to a region far from the country’s settled heartland, Russia suffered a series of defeats. Meanwhile at home, a significant portion of the political opposition, including the more left-leaning members of the

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174 Evtuhov, Cross and the Sickle, 54.
175 On the student movement, which showed itself with particular force in a 25,000-strong strike in 1899, see Morissey, Heralds of Revolution, 44-74.
177 Struve, “Hedodymanoe i hedoskazannoe,” 169.
Union of Liberation, saw the war mainly as a means to hasten the demise of the autocracy.\(^{179}\) Their hopes proved more prescient than those of the government. In November 1904, the Union of Liberation organized a campaign of “private” banquets to gather support for constitutionalism. The campaign, which resulted in a number of political meetings “unprecedented in Russian history,”\(^{180}\) was first in a sequence of events with repercussions far beyond what its moderate organizers had anticipated (or, for the most part, desired). On January 9, 1905, tens of thousands of workers led by the Orthodox priest Georgii Gapon marched peacefully on the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg with a petition calling for the recognition of workers’ and political rights.\(^{181}\) Soldiers guarding the palace fired into the crowd, many of whose members had been singing hymns and carrying portraits of the tsar; one hundred and thirty were killed, and hundreds more wounded.\(^{182}\) The headline in the next issue of *Osvobozhdenie*, under a banner reading “Revolution in Russia,” declared the tsar “the executioner of the people.” Struve, who, it is to be remembered, had been on the evolutionist wing of the liberation movement, declared:

> The people went to him, the people waited for him. The tsar met his people. With whips, sabers, and bullets he answered words of sorrow and trust. On the streets of Petersburg blood was shed and the link between the people and this tsar was forever broken. … Against the terrible crimes committed by the order of the tsar on the streets of Petersburg, all who have a simple human conscience should rise up. … The chronicle of autocratic violence, outrage, and crimes should be ended.\(^{183}\)

In the following months, the people of Russia appeared ready to give their “executioner” his due. A wave of strikes (illegal at the time) began, and participants increasingly invoked political grievances. Professionals organized into “unions” of their own under an umbrella organization (the Union of Unions) that existed primarily for the purpose of bringing down the autocracy. Students protested in Poland; revolutionary peasants attempted to seize control in Georgia.

\(^{181}\) Among other elements, their petition included calls for an eight-hour work day, the right to unionize, and the convocation of a constituent assembly (Ascher 27).
\(^{182}\) Ascher 27.
\(^{183}\) Struve, “Palach naroda,” *Osvozbozhdenie* no. 64 (January 25/January 12, 1905), 233.
leading to the imposition of martial law; peasants and workers in the Baltic region entered into a state of near-civil war with the local aristocracy. Sailors on the battleship Potemkin mutinied. Peasant riots, generally directed against local landlords and involving pillaging of their estates, took place at a rate of over a hundred each month. Authorities made brutal attempts to repress these disorders, flogging participants and burning homes. In August the tsar agreed to the convocation of a mainly consultative Duma with indirect elections and highly limited suffrage, a move which appeased no one. In October, workers in numerous industries followed the railway union into a general strike. On October 17, 1905, Nicholas II at last retreated from the defense of unchecked autocracy to which he had pledged himself ten years earlier. The manifesto which he issued on that day promised his subjects “the inviolable foundations of civic freedom based on the principles of genuine personal inviolability, freedom of conscience, speech, assemblies, and associations”; “to admit in the participation of the Duma … all those classes of the population which presently are completely deprived of voting rights”; and “to establish as an unbreakable rule that no law shall become effective without the confirmation by the state Duma.” Overnight Russia had, on paper at least, become a constitutional monarchy.

Of the four ex-Marxists, two seized the chance to actively participate in the country’s new political institutions. Struve, who according to Richard Pipes’ account burst into the room where his wife was in labor shouting, “Nina! Constitution!” upon hearing news of the October Manifesto, returned to Russia and joined the Constitutional Democratic (Kadet) Party that emerged after the fragmentation of the Union of Liberation in October of 1905. The Kadets were left-leaning democrats, firmly committed to civil and political freedom, including religious

184 Ascher, Revolution of 1905, 41-70.
186 Pipes, Liberal on the Left, 389.
liberty, but also to a slate of social welfare and workers’ protection legislation unusually progressive for a liberal party at that time. In a country not generally associated with a commitment to political liberalism they performed surprisingly well, winning a plurality though not a majority in the first elections to the new Duma. Struve, though unable to take part due to his previous residence abroad, was closely involved with the electoral campaign.

Struve also, with the assistance of Frank, founded a new, now legal journal entitled Poliarnaia Zvezda ("Polar Star"). In its philosophical outlook, the journal strongly reflected the idealist emphasis on the person as the bearer of absolute values and agent of their earthly realization first articulated in Problems of Idealism. (Struve’s affinity with this position was obvious even in his prefix to Berdiaev’s Subjectivism and Individualism; meanwhile Frank had, shortly after his essay on Nietzsche, arrived at a philosophical outlook which, if not metaphysical in the technical sense, at any rate entailed a belief in the transcendentally-grounded objectivity of the values he had merely admired for their subjective appeal in 1902.) The first issue, published in December 1905, announced its intention to elaborate moral and political principles to serve as a guide through the “political storm” that had seized Russia. Frank warned that the Kadets’ lack of philosophical foundation had put them at a disadvantage by giving rise to a belief that “only the extreme socialist parties can be guided by abstract principles” while the liberals

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188 Pipes, Liberal on the Right, 34. The Kadets were assisted in this regard by the decisions of the Social Democratic and Socialist Revolutionary parties to boycott the elections on the grounds that the revolution was incomplete (Ascher 119).
189 The name was borrowed from Herzen’s émigré journal. See Struve, “Ot Redaktsii,” Poliarnaia Zvezda no. 1 (December 15, 1905).
190 On Frank’s “critical idealism,” whose distinctiveness appears to have lain half in the distinction between consciousness and being, half in its creator’s confusion about the meaning of the term “metaphysics,” see Swoboda, Philosophical Thought, 344-401.
191 Struve, “Ot Redaktsii,” Poliarnaia Zvezda no. 1 (December 15, 1905), 3
appeared devoid of “their own faith, their own integral worldview.” Poliarnaia Zvezda took it upon itself to articulate such a faith. Nonetheless, it was an idealist journal in the technical rather than in the colloquial sense of the term; Struve strongly criticized Russia’s new politicians in general for relying on theoretical ideas at the expense of practical ones. As Frank explained, they sought to prevent their political cohorts from losing sight of moral ends in the course of political struggle while all the same remembering that “ideals are not idols.”

While thus eschewing the extreme ideological tendency of rival parties such as the Social Democrats, Poliarnaia Zvezda sought to ensure that politics remained based on a foundation of respect for “the idea of the person, as bearer and creator of spiritual values whose realization in social-historical life forms the content of culture and is the highest and ultimate task of the political structure.” Echoing the Kantian formulations and emphasis on personal creativity found in Problems of Idealism, Frank contended that one could deduce “the eternal and indestructible rights of the person” both by the force of “the inherent moral consciousness which declares that one should always look at man as an end and never only as a means” and through his position as “the living and eternal laboratory of spiritual creativity, as the only real point on earth at which and through which the divine spirit acts.” In other words, man’s unique position as the bridge between transcendental and material realms gave each person objective and inalterable value.

In practice, Frank believed that commitment to the rights of the person constituted a foundation for “liberalism, democracy, and socialism.” Like the Kadet party as a whole, he and Struve supported socialism as a means to guarantee personal freedom in the economic sphere while remaining more firmly committed to civic and political rights than their Marxist

194 Frank, “Politika i idea,” 31.
196 Frank, “Politika i idei,” 21.
counterparts. While the Social Democrats with whom they had initially kept company generally viewed political liberalization as merely a means of historical preparation for the coming proletarian revolution, and while many populists had eschewed the pursuit of civil liberties as an unjustified luxury compared to the needs of the masses, such rights had inherent value according to the person-centered philosophy articulated in *Poliarnaia Zveda*. As Frank insisted,

> Freedom of speech and conscience, freedom of the spoken and written word ... are not simply means for the political struggle ... whatever the form of power, in whoever’s hands it is located and however truly it is guided by the interests of the people’s welfare... it is not entitled to sacrifice to its own ends these inalienable rights of the person.\(^{197}\)

Like Berdiaev, Frank thus emphasized that restrictions on the right to a free conscience and action in accordance with its dictates were no more acceptable on the part of revolutionaries acting in the name of the people than when they came from authorities acting on behalf of Orthodoxy, nationality, and autocracy. Nonetheless, he and his co-editor remained at this point genuinely committed to socialism; Struve, though a staunch individualist, criticized the appropriation of individualism by “defenders of the political and economic supremacy of the bourgeoisie.”\(^{198}\) He instead attempted to square it with socialism by dividing the latter into two types, a “philosophical” or collectivist form according to which “the person is the means, society the goal” and another for which “the goal and crown is the person, society is only a means or an instrument for the realization of the value of the person.”\(^{199}\) He argued that the second form, to which he was clearly sympathetic, had not been thought through to its philosophical foundation, in part due to the fact that its proponents were “steeped in materialism and hedonism” (once again suggesting that only idealism could serve as a genuine basis for liberal politics) but implied that this situation should be rectified.\(^{200}\) As Struve and Frank argued elsewhere, despite their

\(^{197}\) Frank, “Politika i idei,” 27.
\(^{198}\) Struve, “Individualizm i socializm,” *Poliarnaia Zvezda* no. 11 (February 26, 1906), 764.
\(^{199}\) Struve, “Individualizm i socializm,” 761.
\(^{200}\) Struve, “Individualizm i socializm,” 764.
practical inequalities, each human person was equal as a “manifestation of the highest transcendental principle.” Respect for the person in the eyes of 1905’s liberals entailed recognition of this equality through both political and social democracy.

The second defector from Marxism to take up political activity, Sergei Bulgakov, was similarly committed to the fundamental “ideal of the freedom of personality and man’s respect for man,” but attempted to work out a platform that, unlike that articulated in Poliarnaiia Zvezda, would have an explicitly confessional basis. In a September 1905 article in Voprosy Zhizni, he outlined a Christian approach to politics. He roundly criticized the Church for having “disgraced the Christian religion by its allegiance with the prevailing state system” and, like Soloviev before him, argued that in practice atheistic socialists had proved better defenders of Christian principles than most professed Christians. Arguing against both the conservatism of the historical church and monastic withdrawal from worldly affairs, he insisted that:

Like any religion that lays claim to being absolute, Christianity extends its sphere of interests and influence over all realms of life; it determines all human life, according to its own idea, from the first cry to the last breath. For it there is no neutral or indifferent sphere in which it might not be interested or might plow passively, just as there are no boundaries for God…

In his view Christian politics led ideally to a “free theocracy,” which he defined not as the wielding of temporal power by Church leaders but as a social order “alien to any compulsion,” based on “the free union of people through love in the Church.” While such a form of social organization would certainly be ideal from the perspective of freeing the personality to act in accordance with absolute moral principles, Bulgakov believed it could never be realized on Earth given the inherent flaws of human nature. He thus proposed a compromise political order which, in his description, seems to have entailed a curious hybrid of communism and parliamentary

democracy.\footnote{Bulgakov, “Urgent Task,” 147-151. Within a few pages he cited approvingly the concept of a “free union of self-governing communes, a federative union of democratic republics, a worldwide United States” (pages could be written attempting to sort out the contradictions in this clause alone); insisted upon the defense of “the human personality’s natural and sacred rights to freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, freedom of association among people”; and called for a form of economic collectivism that, given his declaration that such an organization of property “introduces the universal obligation of labor (for the able-bodied) and declares war on idlers and parasites,” seems closer to the type of socialism prescribed by Russian Marxists than to the modern social welfare state.} In the short term, he declared that Christians ought support “the practical program of either the Socialist or Constitutional Democratic Party, which are essentially no different” as a form of “gradual transition to collectivism.”\footnote{Bulgakov, “Urgent Task,” 153.} However, he warned against identifying fully with the atheism and “hedonistic socialism” of these mainstream parties, which believed they could establish “heaven on earth.”\footnote{Bulgakov, “Urgent Task,” 158-159.} Instead, Christians should unite in a “Union of Christian Politics” which would work towards “political and economic liberation of the personality.”\footnote{Bulgakov, “Urgent Task,” 163.} In addition to applying Christian teachings while attempting to address social problems, he also emphasized the importance of removing the political constraints which had historically fettered the Church, a subject which he believed to be the first priority of many Christians.\footnote{Bulgakov, “Religia i politika,” Poliarnaia Zvezda no. 2 (December 22, 1905), 124.}

Bulgakov was thus relatively close to Struve and Frank in his immediate political program as well as his ultimate emphasis on the freedom of the personality. All three figures in this regard represent the political extension of the ideal of moral self-development articulated in Problems, though in Bulgakov’s prescription there is greater unresolved tension between this ideal and his clear expectation that such development will occur within an environment of social collectivism. At the time, however, it was Bulgakov’s insistence on a confessional foundation for politics which caused the greatest overt disagreement among the three men. In his call for a Christian political union, he had argued that modern politics was “not solely a question of gaining a vote for one or another party or of attracting a new member into the party organization
but, perhaps above all, of conquering his soul, of making him a man of the faith.”210 In a December 1905 Poliarnaia Zvezda article, he expanded upon this point by noting that religion, when considered not only as religion in the proper sense of the word but also “atheistic religion… the religion of humanity, faith in progress” was an integral part of all contemporary politics. A party like the Kadets that attempted to eschew discussion of ultimate convictions, instead “demanding only the recognition of its program and, like the emperor of Rome, giving space to each cult for its own pantheon,” were at a disadvantage next to ideological parties of both the extreme left and the extreme right. If participants could preach only a practical platform, then “however true, sober, and real their sermons, the stick would be knocked from their hand with the first blow from a sword when next to these practical and sober sermons … the political alcohol of social utopianism makes an appearance.” Furthermore, the disappearance of religion from politics was not desirable even could it be achieved; rather, it would lead only to “unprincipled politics, guided by interests, personal or class.”211 Critically, the type of religious commonality he had in mind necessitated an explicitly Christian political block, not one which could unite atheists and believers of all stripes who happened to share programmatic concerns.

Struve, who permitted the publication of Bulgakov’s article as it addressed an important question despite his personal disagreements, respectfully differed. In his view all politics was indeed based on religious ideas in a broad sense, but this need not be a strictly confessional issue: “Christians and atheists and idealists and positivists may have a common politics, with a common religious root.” While “a link between politics and church or denominational religiosity is a double abuse – of politics in the name of religion and of religion in the name of politics,” politics was indeed inextricably connected to “the deepest, most inner, subjective religiosity.”

210 Bulgakov, “Urgent Task,” 143.
211 Bulgakov, “Religia i politika,” Poliarnaia Zvezda no. 2 (December 22, 1905), 118-122.
Efforts to move beyond this level and directly link church and state “would prove to be either fruitless, or extremely dangerous.” In effect, his differences with Bulgakov reflected conflicting personal beliefs about man’s knowledge of the transcendent. Both Struve and Frank personally remained suspicious of dogmatic religion altogether, as their subsequent articles made quite clear. In his discussion of the evolution of freedom of conscience, Struve declared it fitting that those who first fully introduced the principle of personal autonomy were also the people who “first with full clarity proclaimed the subjectivity of religious experience and rejected religious dogmatism, recognized as against God the idea of any external, objective ordering of religion.” Frank, emphasizing that the root of religious understanding lay in the individual soul, declared the personal conscience to be “the greatest destroyer of any authority and any dogmatism.” In his view, “we do not wish to and cannot believe in words, in formulas, in mystical dogma – regardless of whether they come from Marx or from Augustine, if they are sanctified by the martyrs of the Church or the martyrs of the revolution.” He approved of non-dogmatic religious involvement in politics, which functioned, like his own endeavor through *Poliarnaia Zvezda*, as a means of preventing politicians from becoming “lost in the labyrinth of political technique” and forgetting the ideal goals that had caused them to enter politics in the first place. Dogmatic religious involvement, however, which “rested on the idea of theocracy,” diminished “both the value of religion, which is lively and strong only as personal experience, and the value of culture, which, rooted in the deepest levels of personal consciousness of the sacred, in its external content is multifaceted and comprehensive and cannot be squeezed into

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214 Frank, “O svobodnoi sovesti,” *Poliarnaia Zvezda* no. 6 (January 17, 1906), 417, 419.
any defined … religious form.”215 The two men who did not personally accept organized religion thus naturally sought a guiding political ideal based on immediate moral consciousness rather than on revelation; their counterpart whose personal faith was grounded in Orthodox Christianity, equally naturally, understood his own political ideals in religious terms.

In the event, Struve’s prediction of “fruitlessness” proved more or less accurate with regard to Bulgakov’s search for a Christian politics. Enjoying extremely modest success in his efforts to form a Christian Socialist political party, he published seven issues of a paper (Narod, or “The People”) based on this platform before running out of funds and served a disappointing term in the Duma. The fact that during this time he largely supported the Kadets, though refusing to openly affiliate with them due to their lack of religious identification,216 shows that the severity of his disagreements with Struve and Frank should not be overemphasized. The debate does, however, point out one crucial fact; in their common rejection of nihilism and materialism, the participants in Problems and later Vekhi were not linked by a unifying ideology of their own. At least through 1909, the four men espoused different beliefs regarding man’s knowledge of the absolute that in turn reflected various cultural currents at work during Russia’s Silver Age. Faced with the intellectual rigidity of rationalism and the political rigidity of the autocracy, they joined in a common defense of the intellectual rights of transcendental values, and the social and political rights of the human person as the bearer of these values. As the political order opened into something resembling a free society, their specific programs began to entangle them in the type of debates that one might expect to see in such a society regarding the role of religion in politics, the organization of political parties, even the nature of faith itself, though these involved what were essentially variations on the ideal which had fueled their opposition to the autocracy.

216 Evtuhov, Cross and the Sickle, 109, 124-125. Bulgakov entered the Duma as an independent “close to the KD [Kadet] party” (83).
Berdiaev, whose interest in mysticism after 1902 grew quite possibly at the expense of his political acuity, watched the revolution with one eye on the heavens and became caught up in the apocalyptic mood that marked some circles of the new spiritualist and aesthetic elite of which he had become a part.⁴¹⁷ His social prescriptions thus do not translate particularly well into the ordinary language of political affairs. He suggested that the religious ideal which Bulgakov had dismissed as unattainable on earth, that of society united by love in a free theocracy without state or government at all, might in fact be achieved, that it was possible to erect a social order “subordinating the person only to the will of God.”⁴¹⁸ (His general reluctance to accept authority as a practical necessity, if not a theoretical desirability, in fact set his political views apart from those of Bulgakov generally.)⁴¹⁹ In his view socialists and positivists did not go far enough in their hopes to “reform the world” and could instead aspire to “the transformation of the word, the end of the given world, limited, corrupt, and dead, and its exchange for another world, ‘a new heaven and a new earth.’”⁴²⁰ While the principle of personal freedom and development in accordance towards a transcendent goal certainly still commanded his devotion, his apocalyptic expectations place his ideas in a rather different class from those of the other three.

Berdiaev’s reflections from this period with regard to culture, the sphere of life that clearly occupied more of his attention, are rather more interesting. For him as well as for Struve and Frank, the revolution inspired reflections on the intelligentsia’s hostility towards culture, posing the question of whether in a new political era their former passions for destruction could be turned towards the task of creation. All three emphasized that culture, as the embodiment of

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absolute values, had inherent worth. Just as in politics these values demanded that respect for the person as their bearer, in social life they demanded respect for the products of man’s quest for truth, goodness, and beauty in his daily existence. In the spring of 1905, Berdiaev lamented the historical split, which he dated back to the 1860s, between the intelligentsia (in the narrow sense of political revolutionaries) and cultural elites such as writers, philosophers, and artists in Russia, so that “the creators of good and value and the rejecters of evil and injustice do not know one another.” The latter, he charged, assessed that which should be independently valuable – “the creation of beauty, disinterested knowledge, the search for religious truth” – by a utilitarian standard. They were so preoccupied with “the distribution of old, already elementary ideas” among the people that “the creation of new, higher ideas” appeared almost suspicious in their minds. Berdiaev saw something healthy in the original nihilism of the 1860s insofar as it represented a rebellion against what he described as the earlier “nihilism” of the old regime. However, it had left the legacy of an unhealthy attitude towards culture on the part of their intellectual descendents, who in Berdiaev’s view “imbibed scorn for culture, for literature, for art, philosophy, religion, for beauty in life, for the depth and breadth of experience” with their mother’s milk.221 He expressed hope that the “unconscious religiosity of the best part of the Russian intelligentsia” would surface and foster a healthier attitude towards culture, but the future was uncertain and depended “not only on social and political liberation, but on the still more radical liberation from the yoke of … positivism.”222

Frank in December 1905 expressed similar concerns, though where Berdiaev suggested that the intelligentsia’s hostility to culture was linked to a fundamental “asceticism” inherited

222 Berdiaev, “Kultura i politika,” 320.
from its religious past, Frank placed greater stress upon the political situation. The bureaucratic censorship, “not being able to kill the living spirit, nonetheless prevented it from living a full and spacious life.” Meanwhile “this living spirit, breathing the stale atmosphere of slavery and silence and using all its strength” to combat the autocracy, imposed “an internal censor” upon itself. The result was a spiritual “state of war,” during which “literature, science, art, philosophy, religion were needed only insofar as they were political weapons of war; all ideas and spiritual needs, widening the person’s horizon… were deemed unnecessary luxuries and hindrances.” The intelligentsia’s battle-ready mindset should change with the times: while narrow utilitarianism had been sufficient for the work of destruction, the country now faced “a creative struggle,” calling for “cultural creativity” and spiritual freedom. Elsewhere Struve and Frank opposed humanism, defined as “idealism, belief in absolute values, combined with faith in humanity and its creative task on earth,” to utilitarianism and asceticism, both of which they charged “narrow the spiritual content of human life.” They emphasized the importance of culture as the realization of “eternal ideals – truth, good, beauty, and holiness,” which exist in the human consciousness, on earth through “scientific, artistic, moral, and religious creativity.” This understanding of culture allowed no room for sectarian prejudice, for the notion that art or literature was only acceptable if it served the people’s cause: “any thought, if it is deep and original, any work of art, if it is beautiful, any moral exertion, if it is true and creative, any search for truth, beauty, and justice (pravda) creates culture.” It also reinforced the sanctity of the

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224 Frank, “Politika i idei,” 18-19.
225 Struve and Frank, “Ocherki Filosofii Kulturi” pt.1, Poliarnaia Zvezda no. 2 (December 22, 1905), 113, 115. Notably, this article diverged from Berdiaev’s in calling for Russians to become “citizens of the European world and participants in its culture,” whereas Berdiaev had dismissed the latter as bourgeois and hoped Russia’s cultural development would have results “still unknown in Europe” (Struve and Frank, “Ocherki” pt. 1, 115-116; Berdiaev, “Kultura i politika,” 322).
human person, since this “embodiment of ideals in reality … can be accomplished only by crossing through that point of being at which the ideal world crosses the real world … that point is the personal consciousness, the spiritual life of the thinking and acting person.” Since culture thus was rooted “in the depths of personal consciousness” through the individual’s connection with the transcendent, cultural creation demanded personal liberty.\textsuperscript{228} In short, both culture, as the earthly reflection of “the inextinguishable flame of the highest truth” and the person through his “internal, imminent link with absolute holiness” derived ultimate worth from their inherent connection with absolute values, rendering a utilitarian attitude towards either impermissible.\textsuperscript{229}

In addition to further justifying their political program, Struve and Frank’s article in defense of culture led to a relatively positive outlook on Russia’s cultural future. If the narrowness of the intelligentsia’s outlook was a consequence of political repression and the struggle against it, and if personal freedom was the primary precondition for cultural creation, the overthrow of the autocracy ought to signal a new dawn for Russian culture. Berdiaev, returning to the subject of culture and the intelligentsia around the same time, offered a more pessimistic take. While Frank and Struve urged respect for culture and for the person, he warned that leaders of the revolution respected neither. Particularly irritated by an essay in which the Marxist novelist Maxim Gorky had charged proponents of the new spiritualism with

\textsuperscript{228} Struve and Frank, “Ocherki” pt. 2, 171.
\textsuperscript{229} Struve and Frank, “Ocherki” pt. 2, 172. Philip Swoboda reads this essay in an entirely different manner, arguing that its use of religious (in his view, Christian) vocabulary was merely a device “to invest ‘culture’ with an aura of ‘holiness’” and that in its authors’ view “there were no ‘absolutes’ other than those which humanity had ‘created’” (Swoboda, Philosophical Thought, 567-570). With due respect to Swoboda’s philosophically rigorous study of Frank’s pre-revolutionary thought, however, this writer finds his assessment, unless solely intended to address the question of spiritual ontology, somewhat bizarre, as it is rather difficult to see how values that are purely the product of human creation could be either absolute, eternal, or a “reflection of the inextinguishable flame of the highest truth.” A reading according to which culture embodies transcendental absolutes, which are however irreducible to dogma and realized on earth in a multifaceted manner through human creativity, fits better not only with the language of the text but with Struve’s acceptance (as early as 1902) of metaphysics and Frank’s references, within this article and elsewhere, to the human person as a unique interface between spiritual and material realms.
meshanstvo,\textsuperscript{230} he once again inveighed against the intelligentsia’s historical denial of Russian culture but now began to suspect that in the revolution itself one could detect “not only a just uprising against social injustice, but also an unjust malice against culture, against all noble and eternal values.” While contending that “nihilism in the Russian revolution is the child of the nihilism of our historical past, the nihilism of the Russian autocracy,”\textsuperscript{231} he also linked it to the intelligentsia’s denial of absolute principles. Gorky, for instance, “in the name of man…. allows every kind of inhumanity, barbarity, spiritual and physical, every outrage upon cultural values, upon great things, upon noble names and ideas.” Such behavior could be expected, for proponents of the religion of humanity respected no absolute law that might limit the violence they perpetrated against living men in the interests of humanity’s future: “The religion of man, only of man, renouncing absolute and eternal values, always leads to man being viewed only as a means. The absolute value of the human person can be recognized only through the religion of values that stand above man.”\textsuperscript{232} Against such preachers of barbarity and their followers, those truly interested in Russia’s freedom must be prepared to “shake off the chains of any violence, even if they come from Mr. Lenin.” Free reign for cultural creativity could be purchased “only by that route which recognizes the freedom and rights of the person as absolute values, and on which the person with the noble content of his spirit cannot be turned into only a means.”\textsuperscript{233}

Berdiaev’s growing concern with the course of the revolution, though on this occasion catalyzed by Gorky’s impudence, also reflected changing events. Struve, too, grew increasingly uneasy as the revolution raged on despite the promulgation of the October Manifesto. In the first

\textsuperscript{230} The nearest English translation of this delightful term would be “bourgeois philistinism”; Berdiaev, generally among the more committed, not to say fanatical, foes of that phenomenon, was predictably outraged to see individuals of his own philosophical persuasion charged with such a crime.  
\textsuperscript{231} Berdiaev, “Revoliuzia i kultura,” in Sub Specie Aeternitatas, 421, 420; originally printed in Poliarnaia Zvezda no. 2 (December 22, 1905).  
\textsuperscript{232} Berdiaev, “Revoliuzia,” 422-423.  
\textsuperscript{233} Berdiaev, “Revoliuzia,” 426.
issue of *Poliarnaia Zvezda* he had been careful to emphasize that the journal, though strongly in favor of social justice and individual liberty, opposed the increasing violence of the ongoing revolution: “We are the declared enemies, enemies by reason, conscience, and feeling of any violence, whether it comes from power or from anarchy.”\(^{234}\) His articles took on a growing tone of concern, directed at both the activities of the revolutionaries and their repression by the bureaucracy, as time went by. In January 1906 he wrote:

> A quasi-uprising in Moscow, a genuine uprising in the Baltic lands, agrarian revolts and workers’ disorders in different areas of Russia, from one side, and from the other side — … shootings and arrests without number or sense — all this is real and at the same time phantasmagoria. When will it end? And how can it end?

He found that “reading the Russian papers has turned into torture for anyone not brutalized and dulled by the genuine boorishness of man.” But he was still convinced that there was meaning in the revolution; “the bureaucracy has morally finished itself off by its crimes… if the electoral slogan of the popular parties is ‘for the people’s Russia against the Russia of the bureaucrats and authorities,’” these parties would be assured triumph. However, this could only be accomplished if the violence ceased; “the revolution now needs order.”\(^{235}\) Claiming that both the intelligentsia and the people suffered from their lack of political experience, he urged the latter to desist from revolutionary tactics and take up “organizational work among the popular masses”;\(^{236}\) effectively, he sought a turn from the work of destruction to that of creation.

Whatever influence Struve may once have enjoyed as “doyen of the intelligentsia,” he had not retained nearly enough for this advice to have the desired effect. The October Manifesto had in fact done little to quell the cycle of revolutionary and reactionary violence. The day after its promulgation reactionary mobs emerged, targeting Jews, *intelligents*, and other suspicious characters; in the following days over six hundred pogroms against Jews shook the country, with

\(^{234}\) Struve, “Ot Redaktsii,” *Poliarnaia Zvezda* no. 1 (December 1905), 3

\(^{235}\) Struve, “Dve Rossii,” *Poliarnaia Zvezda* no. 6 (January 19, 1906), 379-381.

\(^{236}\) Struve, “Zametki publitsista,” *Poliarnaia Zvezda* no. 7 (January 27, 1906), 446.
police looking the other way. From the other side, peasant violence increased, with uprisings now frequently leading to arson rather than mere looting. A series of mutinies shook the army and navy in the waning months of 1905. Workers’ councils, or soviets, the first of which was established in St. Petersburg during the October general strike, came increasingly into conflict with the government, and began (along with the revolutionary press) to call for armed uprisings. In Moscow, the Bolsheviks successfully organized such an uprising, which was suppressed by the government at the cost of over 1,000 lives, most belonging to those who had not been involved in the revolt to begin with. In January and February 1906, the government dispatched military expeditionary forces to put an end to continuing unrest, which they attempted to do through a liberal dispensation of floggings and executions.\textsuperscript{237} Assassinations occurred with increasing frequency throughout the year and into 1907 as both left-wing groups, particularly the Socialist Revolutionary Party, and the right-wing Union of Russian People discovered that political murder was an increasingly convenient way to eliminate their opponents. Ordinary criminality, including robbery and murders – both of which often became blurred with violent rebellion, as looters claimed to be stealing in the name of revolution – was also on the rise.\textsuperscript{238} A second round of peasant disturbance, albeit somewhat less violent than the first, took place in the spring and early summer of 1906; local “peasant republics” were established in some regions. Revolutionary agitators in the military set off another string of mutinies. The government reasserted its authority only through methods (such as a law on field courts-marshal which effectively legitimized summary executions) that amounted to fighting terror by terror.\textsuperscript{239}

Continuing violent insurrection, unsurprisingly, had a pernicious effect on Russia’s

\textsuperscript{237} Ascher, Revolution of 1905, 81-95; 104-109
\textsuperscript{238} Ascher 114-115, 149, 166-168.
\textsuperscript{239} Ascher 141-145; 151-152; 169-171.
parliamentary politics. It provided the government with a perfect excuse for the harassment of political parties and restrictions on civic freedoms, in which activities it was already inclined to energetically engage. *Poliarnaia Zvezda*, for instance, was shuttered for alleged sedition in an article urging liberals to work to deprive the tsar of his powers; it was replaced by a short-lived successor entitled *Kultura i Svoobra* (“Culture and Freedom”) under Frank’s editorship. The Duma suffered problems of its own as deputies found themselves fundamentally at odds with the tsar’s officials on every important issue ranging from the extent of their powers to agrarian reform. After the Duma published an “appeal to the people” which on some readings could be seen as justifying rebellion in the event that it did not get its way on the latter question, the government without warning dissolved the Duma on July 9, 1906, shutting down radical papers and arresting leaders of the radical socialist parties for good measure.

Elections were held for a Second Duma, which, unfortunately for the government, was distinguished primarily by its greater proportion of truly radical (Social Democratic and Socialist Revolutionary) deputies relative to the first. Tensions between deputies and bureaucrats resumed. Longing for a pretext to disband the troublesome body, the government found its excuse with the help of some (likely forged) evidence linking a number of Social Democratic deputies to an anti-government conspiracy; the government demanded the Duma terminate these deputies’ immunity from prosecution, a step the legislature was naturally unwilling to take.

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240 Despite the convocation of a Duma with legislative powers (subject to the tsar’s veto), government ministries remained in the hands of appointed, generally bureaucratic ministers under the Duma Monarchy, leading to a sharp division and persistent hostility between legislature and Government. The tsar’s power to appoint ministers was one of the many (for liberals) disappointing features of the April 1906 Fundamental Laws – effectively a constitution – promulgated to follow up on the October Manifesto (Richard Pipes, A Concise History of the Russian Revolution [New York: Vintage Books, 1995], 45-46).


242 Ascher 132-139, 156-157. A number of Kadet leaders issued a document, the Vyborg Manifesto, calling for popular civil disobedience (nonpayment of taxes and avoidance of military service) in response to this action, a call which proved woefully ineffective.

243 Ascher 183.
Struve, who had been elected as a Kadet deputy to the Second Duma, was among a small delegation that visited the appointed Prime Minister Stolypin at the last possible hour in an effort to persuade him not to once more dissolve the Duma. As the (Kadet) delegation refused to countenance stripping the Social Democrats of their parliamentary immunity, this effort was to no avail. On June 3, 1907, the Second Duma was dissolved and a new electoral law established curtailing the electoral rights of workers, peasants, and members of minority nationalities. The Duma would continue to sit, a fact that in and of itself represented a political transformation unprecedented in Russian history. The left, however, felt it had suffered a defeat.

Though the responsibility of the radical intelligentsia for Russia’s early difficulties with constitutional politics is clear, the extent to which it can be blamed for the violence of the 1905 revolution is subject to debate. Abraham Ascher notes that while Socialist Revolutionaries and Social Democrats were active in the thousands and helped orchestrate several of the armed uprisings of 1905, strikes and peasant revolts sprang up without any assistance from or immediate inspiration by revolutionary agitators. Although professional revolutionaries certainly helped perpetuate the violence of 1905-1907 and were largely responsible for targeted acts of political terrorism, the completeness of Bulgakov’s characterization of the revolution as an “intelligentsia revolution” may be questionable from a practical standpoint. What is not up for questioning is that as the revolution raged on, that which could be smashed was indeed smashed.

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244 Pipes, Liberal on the Right, 60-62.  
245 Ascher 61-62.
2. *Vekhi* and the Revolt Against Politics

The denouement of the 1905 revolution produced a sensation of malaise among those horrified by the bloody two-year cycle of revolt and repression as well as among those on the left who remained convinced that their struggle with the regime had merely come to a pause, not a conclusion.246 In a January 1909 newspaper article, Struve described the post-revolutionary period as a “reactionary epoch,” marked by “fatigue and apathy.”247 Berdiaev, who had so enthusiastically welcomed the revolution at its outbreak, later recalled that in the event it proved to be a time not of freedom but of “moral and spiritual suffocation. The atmosphere of bloody slaughter seemed to hover over one’s mind, and the massacre of many thousands of revolutionaries and workers seemed to kill the last remnants of hope not only in the Tsarist regime but in the revolution itself and in the possibility of any change on this basis.”248 The 1909 symposium *Vekhi*, the second major collection of articles to which Struve, Frank, Berdiaev, and Bulgakov all contributed, fully captured this mood of “torpor, apathy, spiritual malaise and despondency,”249 despite – and perhaps because of – the fact that its authors did not share in the left’s thirst for renewed battle with the regime. The collection, organized by Struve and the apolitical writer Mikhail Gershenzon, instead focused on the radical intelligentsia and offered a critique of its beliefs in a variety of areas – its philosophical precepts and moral attitudes, its political behavior, its relation to religion, law and education. Along with Gershenzon and the four aforementioned writers, it included contributions from two additional liberal figures with

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247 Petr Struve, “Poverkh tekuschego momenta,” Moskovskii Ezhegodnik, no. 2 (January 10), 1.
far-left backgrounds, A.S. Izgoev and Bogdan Kistiakovskii. For the symposium’s contributors, the revolution was a flash point through which “history has pronounced a verdict” on the intelligentsia. Vekhi illustrated the initial frustration of the hope expressed in Poliarnaia Zvezda that “Russia’s political renewal should be accompanied by an internal cultural rebirth,” and a plea for its contributors’ former comrades to abandon their destructive revolutionary activity in favor of this task. Not merely a condemnation from afar, Vekhi urgently called on the intelligentsia to engage in “self-criticism” and carry out a moral housecleaning that would enable it to play a more constructive role in the country’s political and social future.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, critics seized upon the symposium’s targeted criticism of the intelligentsia to paint its authors as the enemies of progress, preachers of “reactionary sermons.” By one count, Vekhi inspired at least a dozen public meetings, six collections of essays, and around 250-300 articles published during 1909-1910 alone; these responses, from all sides of the political spectrum ranging from center to left, were overwhelmingly hostile. Lenin, naturally, declared that by criticizing the intelligentsia’s convictions the idealists had embarked on a “struggle against the ideological principles of the whole world outlook of Russian (and international) democracy.” Yet even the scholarly, liberal Kadet leader Paul Miliukov, while suggesting that Vekhi had tapped into legitimate concerns about the intelligentsia’s

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250 For full background on the contributors see Marshall S. Shatz and Judith E. Zimmerman, Introduction to Vekhi, xi-xvii.
253 The term is used by Bulgakov in “Heroism and Asceticism,” 17, and by Nikolai Berdiaev in “Philosophical Verity and Intelligentsia Truth,” Vekhi, 5.
255 On the reaction to Vekhi, see Nikolai P. Poltoratsky, “The Vekhi Dispute and the Significance of Vekhi,” Canadian Slavonic Papers 9 No. 1 (Spring 1967): 86-106.
“maximalism,”\textsuperscript{257} declared that “the work which [its contributors] do, regardless of their precise intentions, is a harmful and dangerous business.”\textsuperscript{258} If Problems of Idealism provoked some debate in academic circles, its successor became a public \textit{succes de scandale}, so much so that one Bolshevik writer lamented the attention it received – the negativity of much of that attention notwithstanding – as a sign of the baleful times in which he lived.\textsuperscript{259}

The avalanche of criticism directed at \textit{Vekhi} boded poorly for its writers’ chosen task of winning over the intelligentsia to the work of peaceful cultural creation. Nonetheless, it is difficult to believe that the collection would have provoked such a vehement reaction had it failed to hit a nerve. Altered political circumstances since 1902, both in terms of the relaxation of censorship\textsuperscript{260} and the general sense of living in a transitional epoch, undoubtedly played a role in the ferocity of the debate. However, it is also worth noting that \textit{Vekhi}, while generally deemed a less philosophically constructive work than Problems of Idealism,\textsuperscript{261} emphasized a theme far more precious to its opponents than the defects of scientific sociology: that of revolution and the intelligentsia’s role as its self-appointed agents. In this regard, \textit{Vekhi} also represents a substantive shift in the mindset of Struve, Bulgakov, Berdiaev, and Frank, all of whom initially welcomed the events of 1905 with excitement verging on jubilation. In \textit{Vekhi} they no longer merely criticized the logical weakness and spiritual deficiencies of the radicals’ intellectual system, but actively targeted the idol of revolution and sought to dislodge it in favor of higher values. In the

\textsuperscript{257} Generally meaning its determination to employ the most drastic, and often destructive, means possible for the achievement of its political ends.


\textsuperscript{259} V.M. Friche, “Ot Chernyshevskogo k Vekham” (“From Chernyshevsky to Vekhi”) (Moscow: Sovremennye problem, 1910).

\textsuperscript{260} Robert Service describes how slightly relaxed social conditions after the revolution paradoxically helped foster a “culture of opposition,” particularly by widening the political spectrum of the legal press; \textit{A History of Modern Russia} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 18.

\textsuperscript{261} See for instance Randall Poole, Introduction to Problems of Idealism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 51.
name of abstract religious and philosophical ideals, which had long borne – and, to judge by the
response to *Vekhi*, still bore – the taint of reaction and obscurantism among Russia’s left, they
not merely challenged the terms of the Marxists’, populists’, and other revolutionaries’ treatises,
but also the validity of their dream. While most of the contributors\(^\text{262}\) did not preach political
apathy, they attacked the utopian claims of the radicals’ political programs and sought to reverse
the consequent encroachment of political demands upon all other spheres of human activity.

*Problems of Idealism* sought to reassert the division between various modes of intellectual
activity and end the smuggling of faith and subjectivity into supposedly scientific theories as
intellectual “contraband”;\(^\text{263}\) by redirecting religion, philosophy, sociology and so forth to their
proper but separate tasks, its authors believed, they could render each discipline more
intellectually coherent. In *Vekhi*, many of the same authors sought to end the real-life reduction
of religion and philosophy to “contraband” impulses welded onto a political platform, thus
permitting them to realize their true goals and paving the way for a better form of politics at the
same time. Struve, himself the most active of the four men in conventional politics, declared this
most directly when he stated that “the domination of politics over all the non-political aspects of
spiritual life must come to an end”; by the same token, it was necessary to work out new political
forms “based on the idea of a person’s inner improvement rather than the external arrangement
of society.”\(^\text{264}\) *Vekhi* demanded that the intelligentsia, dangerously possessed by its worship of
revolution, limit the scope of its political expectations in the name of nonpolitical values.

The essays in *Vekhi* laid out the ways in which the intelligentsia’s worship of revolution
had distorted the spiritual impulses, philosophical understanding, personal existence, and

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\(^{262}\) With the possible exception of M. Gershenzon, the editor, who with his Tolstoyan leanings differed in mindset
and background from the other contributors.

\(^{263}\) Randall Poole describes this theme in his introduction to *Problems of Idealism*, 35-40.

\(^{264}\) Petr Struve, “The Intelligentsia and Revolution,” in *Vekhi*, 127.
ultimately even political activity of its members. Broadly speaking, Berdiaev wrote on the intelligentsia’s treatment of philosophy (“Philosophical Verity and Intelligentsia Truth”), Bulgakov on its relation to religion (“Heroism and Asceticism”), Struve on its historical role and relation to the state (“The Intelligentsia and Revolution”), and Frank on its ethical precepts (“Nihilism and Moralism”), but there was a great deal of overlap between their contributions. At the center of these arguments emerges the charge that the concept of good as a transcendental absolute – existing on a different level than the temporal world and at best only partially realizable on earth, but personally accessible to and conveying dignity upon each individual human being – had been replaced by the promise of an earthly utopia, thereby reducing all questions of morality and truth to that of political utility. In the preface, Gershenzon declared “the theoretical and practical primacy of spiritual life over the external forms of community” to be the single uniting principle of the volume. Despite points of dissonance and even outright contradiction, Vekhi’s authors shared a belief that the absolute good was knowable through the inner life of each person, not implementable through political change. Their insistence upon personal knowledge of truth and goodness as transcendental values rather than arbitrary terms for the attractive or convenient animated Vekhi’s condemnation of the intelligentsia’s extreme moral and intellectual utilitarianism.

A central element of Vekhi’s challenge to the distortion of life by revolutionary politics was its rejection of the revolution itself as a worthwhile object of worship. The four essays in question concurred in their criticism of the intelligentsia for its acceptance, as an article of faith, of the notion that revolution would bring about the ultimate reign of happiness on earth. The intelligentsia, persuaded of the basis goodness of human nature, was also convinced that “all evil

265 Originally “Filosofskaya istina i intelligentskaya Pravda”; the Russian “pravda” more than the English “truth” carries connotations of right and justice in addition to verity, while “istina” refers more specifically to the latter. 266 Gershenzon, Introduction to Vekhi, xxxvii.
is explained by the external defects of human society”;267 that “human good and evil ultimately depend on historical conditions”;268 that “the problem of human happiness … is a problem of the external organization of society”.269 They were further convinced that these organizational defects could be overcome in one great leap, through the destruction of the old order. They had entirely abandoned any faith in small-scale, personal service to the downtrodden270 and moved on to “the religion of absolute achievement of the people’s happiness,”271 which demanded, through revolution, the immediate realization of this goal “in an absolute and eternal form.”272

They were seized by a “desire to evoke social miracles”;273 they had convinced themselves that “‘progress’ need not be the fruit of human improvement, but could be instead a jackpot to be won at the gambling table of history.”274 “Revolutionism” thus meant both absolute reverence for political change and the determination to bring about such change through a single event of near-cataclysmic proportions. Vekhi’s writers both saw this certainty as ill-founded and believed that its grandeur helped lure the intelligentsia into its utter disregard for all other concerns or values.

Given the incredibly elevated character of the intelligentsia’s expectations from the revolution, it seems natural that the radicals’ attitude towards their political goals assumed something of a religious form. The notion of socialism as a religion had by 1900 become a frequent theme in discussion of the intelligentsia, both in Vekhi and elsewhere.275 Indeed, Anatoly Lunacharsky, member of a renegade faction of Bolsheviks known as empiriocritics,

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268 Struve, “Intelligentsia and Revolution,” 119-120
269 Frank, “Nihilism,” 142.
270 To illustrate this change Frank cites the shift from “going to the people” movement of the 1870s to the prevalence of purely revolutionary radicalism in the 1900s.
271 Frank, “Nihilism,” 140.
272 Frank, “Nihilism,” 142.
274 Struve, “Intelligentsia and Revolution, 125.
275 Struve notes this trend in “Religia i Sotsializm,” Russkaia Mysl’ VIII (August 1909), 153.
had together with the writer Maxim Gorky developed the concept of “God-building” which openly sought to instate a religion of humanity.\textsuperscript{276} Although Lunacharsky was something of an outlier and received no small trouble from more orthodox Bolsheviks for his efforts, \textit{Vekhi’s} contributors saw the idolization of socialism as a broader, if not always so directly stated, trend among the intelligentsia. Frank described the intelligentsia’s belief in revolution as having a “universally blinding, religiously absolute character”;\textsuperscript{277} Bulgakov argued that the intelligentsia’s worldview revolved around “religious credos, infallible methods of saving mankind.”\textsuperscript{278} In “Which Signposts?”, Aileen Kelly points to differing assessments of this intelligentsia “religiosity” as a key point of contrast between Struve and Frank on the one hand, the more conventionally religious Berdiaev and Bulgakov on the other: they disagreed as to “whether the messianic faith that had been the driving force of both the radical movement’s nihilism and its moralism should be abandoned or merely redirected into other channels.”\textsuperscript{279}

There is some truth to this contention, at least with regard to the religious form of the intelligentsia’s views. Of the writers who discussed at length the intelligentsia’s ascetic personal habits, Frank evinced a palpable distaste for their monk-like renunciation of the world, Bulgakov some sympathy. Frank described as “ridiculous, naive, one-sided, and even theoretically and morally wrong” the populist \textit{intelligent’s} desire to atone for “the sin of his former participation in the more cultivated forms of life” by serving the people and tendency, to, “like a monk,” suppress “the vanity of all aspirations toward broader and more distant goals.”\textsuperscript{280} Nor had he

\textsuperscript{276} Kelly, “A Bolshevik Philosophy?”, 273; Rosenthal, Bernice Glatzer, \textit{New Myth, New World} (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2002), 80-83. Read (\textit{Religion, Revolution, and the Russian Intelligentsia}, 88-89) also raises the question of an affinity between these “God-builders” and “God-seekers” such as Berdiaev and Merezhkovsky.

\textsuperscript{277} Frank, “Nihilism,” 152.

\textsuperscript{278} Bulgakov, “Heroism,” 28.


\textsuperscript{280} Frank, “Nihilism,” 141.
much sympathy for the revolutionary’s single-minded sense of mission and consequent “ascetic hatred of everything that hinders, or merely does not aid, the accomplishment of this mission.”

Bulgakov, on the other hand, found something to admire in the revolutionary’s “Puritanism, rigorous morals, a distinctive asceticism, and a general strictness of personal life” and distaste for the “constricted and spiritually earthbound way of life” of the European bourgeoisie.

As for Berdiaev, it is true that he praised the radicals’ “thirst for an integral world-view, for an organic fusion of truth and goodness, of knowledge and faith.” Yet Frank similarly lauded the fact that the intelligentsia has “always sought a faith and tried to subordinate its life to its faith,” (though, in contrast to the intelligentsia’s dogmatism, he believed this faith should be “in accordance with one’s own independently derived concepts and convictions.”) Struve treated the revolutionary’s quasi-religious attitude towards socialism perhaps most severely, declaring that it meant only “credulity without faith, fanaticism without enthusiasm, intolerance without reverence.” On the whole, one can fairly say that Berdiaev and Bulgakov saw more virtue in the radical intelligentsia’s mode of life than their fellow contributors.

Regardless of their disagreement on the religious form of the intelligentsia’s belief system, all four maintained that its irreligious content, the “idolatry of earthly, material well-being,” rendered it distinct from and inferior to genuine religious experience. The tradition which they criticized was, after all, militantly atheistic, dedicated on principle to “the radical negation of every metaphysical system and religious faith.” And while they suspected the
intelligentsia of surreptitiously incorporating religious elements into its anti-religious worldview, they also agreed with Frank that it would be illegitimate to accept as true religion displays of “fanaticism” in the absence of “faith in the real existence of the absolutely valuable.” Its sheer refusal to recognize the transcendent was one major flaw. Struve, in an article published around the same time as *Vekhi*, stridently denied that socialism could be considered a religion in the philosophical sense, which he defined as “the recognition and experience of values outside the limits of personal and social existence, that is, life in the empirical sense of the world.” Yet while convinced that enthusiasm alone, absent this quest for the transcendent, could not legitimately be called religion, he acknowledged that in the “formal-psychological sense” socialism “undoubtedly bears a religious character.” Bulgakov – who spent more time highlighting the revolutionary’s “religious” cast of mind (marked by asceticism, guilt, and self-sacrifice) than any of his colleagues – nonetheless concluded that the mindset of “intelligentsia heroism” differed so from the humble devotion of the Christian believer that to conflate the two would be “blasphemy.” While he believed that positive spiritual impulses could theoretically drive socialist politics, he denounced as purely negative the revolutionaries’ version of socialism and Marxism in particular, in which he believed that “class hatred takes the place of universal human love.” Berdiaev, in a lengthy article on “Socialism as Religion,” outlined numerous ways in which Social Democracy attempted to supersede religion with a “socialist conception and a socialist perception of life,” promising the transformation of existence on this basis, but also

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“Heroism,” 123 (argues that followers of the radicals’ doctrines displayed “interest in religion only insofar as the religious problem involved politics or the propagation of atheism”).

Frank, “Nihilism,” 134.


Bulgakov, “Heroism” 21.


passionately differentiated between the earthly religion of a promised material utopia, and what he deemed the true religion of the eternally good.

This selection of force for the future, this negation of the unconditional significance of the human person and whatever past or eternal good or value, leads to the gradual isolation from the world. To live only for the human in other people, for other times, and for the specter of a temporal future – this is the cruel and unjust bidding of the religion of the coming earthly force.

The latter principle was “opposed to religion, hostile to universal truth.” Thus, there may be a legitimate distinction between the two thinkers who promoted “the notion that the intelligentsia’s outlook was even unconsciously religious” and those who rejected this possibility. However, this should obscure neither their agreement that the intelligentsia regarded socialism with a religious level of enthusiasm nor their common refusal to accept the worldly religion of future prosperity as morally equivalent to reverence for metaphysical absolutes.

In addition, even while promising a miraculous transformation of earthly existence, the intelligentsia was too focused on its dreams of the paradise that would follow the destruction of the existing order to incorporate any truly positive or creative elements among their moral ideals. For generations, the radical left had followed Pisarev’s nihilistic embrace of destruction as a moral principle, a reverence which Vekhi vehemently denounced. They noted that revolution as such “has no independent content and is characterized solely as the negation of what it destroys”; hence it was unsurprising that during the events of 1905, the left’s “creative forces proved far weaker than the destructive ones.” The intelligentsia as a class, Struve argued, was defined more by its negative attitudes towards the government and towards religion than by any positive principle; and several writers noted that even its plans for paradise were focused on

299 Struve, “Intelligentsia,” 118.
the “problem of distribution” rather than that of creation.\textsuperscript{300} This was also Berdiaev’s concern in his work on “Socialism as Religion”: “all of [Social Democracy’s] passion is negative, direct toward the negation of the past. … There is no inspiration or flight in revolutionism; no creative ability to be transported to different worlds and gaze into the distance.”\textsuperscript{301} According to Frank, the basic notion that external social transformation could cure all ills – that is, that “the promotion of human happiness is essentially not a creative or, strictly speaking, a constructive task, but merely a matter of clearing away and removing obstacles” had led to the “metaphysical absolutization of the value of destruction.”\textsuperscript{302} The intelligentsia’s insistence that utopia could be created through the manipulation of external social forms produced an ideology that left no room for the transcendent, and, even in the material world, privileged destructive work over that of creation; destruction became an idol that crowded out positive ideals.

From these woefully mistaken central principles of the intelligentsia belief-system followed, in the eyes of Vekhi’s contributors, further aberrations in its conduct of philosophy. If the intelligentsia’s devotion to political goals had deformed its religious impulses, according to Berdiaev, its fanaticism did equal damage to the secular quest for truth. Berdiaev’s essay lay out with particular force the manner in which the intelligentsia had selectively adopted currents of Western European thought from Nietzsche to neo-Kantianism and, interested only in said currents’ ability to support revolutionary slogans, mutilated them so greatly that their founders “would be astonished to learn how their ponderous thoughts are turned into flimsy pamphlets.”\textsuperscript{303} Sectarian intelligentsia philosophers avoided honestly addressing the problems raised by Western philosophers and instead followed the pattern of Lunacharsky, who “mixed a

\textsuperscript{300} See for instance France, “Nihilism,” 142; Berdiaev, “Philosophical Verity,” 2.
\textsuperscript{301} Berdiaev, “Socialism as Religion,” 125.
\textsuperscript{302} Frank, “Nihilism,” 144.
\textsuperscript{303} Berdiaev, “Philosophical Verity,” 11.
sauce from Marx, Avenarius, and Nietzsche” and used the “piquant” result to win converts for the revolutionary cause. Berdiaev attacked the radicals’ willingness to subordinate the absolute value of truth to the transient criterion of political utility; he lamented that “interest was placed above truth, the human above the divine.” Bulgakov and Frank similarly noted the “superficial assimilation of the latest political and social ideas” and “lack of philosophical reflection and understanding” characteristic of intelligentsia thought; Frank suggested that Marxism, with its materialist explanations of intellectual developments, was chosen as a cornerstone of the revolutionary movement in part because it suited this prejudice against the disinterested pursuit of truth.

The same political prejudice that led to the haphazard adoption of intellectually unsound beliefs also prevented the intelligentsia from addressing the logical implications of even these precepts. The four ex-Marxists argued that the empiricist, materialist, positivist worldview, itself guilty of intellectual shoddiness, in fact if taken seriously provided a poor foundation for the revolutionary socialism it was meant to support. Berdiaev argued that a purely deterministic philosophy was incompatible with the intelligentsia’s calls for a new era of freedom, justice, and brotherhood, and echoed the statement of 19th-century religious philosopher Vladimir Soloviev that “the Russian intelligentsia always reasons according to a strange syllogism: man is descended from the apes, therefore we ought to love one another.” Bulgakov likewise noted the contradiction between historical materialism and the revolutionaries’ fierce faith in their own ability to bring about the dawn of a new era. Frank pointed out that the intelligentsia’s

304 Berdiaev, “Philosophical Verity,” 3, 8, 11.
305 Berdiaev, “Philosophical Verity,” 6-7.
308 Berdiaev, “Philosophical Verity,” 14, 9.
utilitarianism logically led to the pursuit of self-interest rather than to moralistic asceticism;\textsuperscript{310} Struve similarly argued that the revolutionary “denies the world in the name of the world, thereby serving neither the world nor God.”\textsuperscript{311} Yet the intelligentsia, having adopted a set of philosophical precepts that appeared to represent “an instrument for affirming the reign of social justice and for utterly destroying those metaphysical and religious ideas which, the intelligentsia dogmatically assumed, support the reign of evil,”\textsuperscript{312} refused to be bound by logical consistency with these precepts. They were realists who remained “impervious to arguments based on either historical realism or scientific knowledge”;\textsuperscript{313} they were proud of their scientific worldview yet “indignantly reject[ed] both scientific criticism and all pure, disinterested scientific thought”;\textsuperscript{314} they were advocates of “‘positive’ ideas that were in no way authentically positive, ‘scientific’ ideas that lacked any knowledge of life and people, ‘empiricism’ without experience, and ‘rationalism’ without wisdom or even common sense.”\textsuperscript{315}

\textit{Vekhi} thus continued its authors’ longstanding challenge to the supposedly scientific philosophical systems championed by the Russian intelligentsia. However, it also emphasized the consequent defects of its practical attitudes and moral habits. In particular, all four ex-Marxists touched upon the defects of the intelligentsia’s attitude towards human persons. Like philosophy and religion, human beings were denied intrinsic value by intelligentsia radicalism and classified entirely according to revolutionary categories, as either enemies of the revolution, victims to be rescued by the advent of the new order, or all-important facilitators of political change. While one might expect revolutionary ideology to be hard on the first category, \textit{Vekhi} argued that it also offered little genuine respect for the second or third. The intelligentsia’s

\textsuperscript{310} Frank, “Nihilism,” 149.
\textsuperscript{311} Struve, “Intelligentsia and Revolution,” 119.
\textsuperscript{312} Berdiaev, “Philosophical Verity,” 9.
\textsuperscript{313} Bulgakov, “Heroism,” 29.
\textsuperscript{314} Frank, “Nihilism,” 137.
\textsuperscript{315} Struve, “Intelligentsia and Revolution,” 125.
professed love for their fellow men was inauthentic because it was based on the narrow concept of pity rather than an acknowledgement of the equal dignity or, as Berdiaev put it, “recognition of God’s own image in every human being.”

Positivist revolutionary theory, acknowledging as valuable only the possibility of external change, “negates the absolute significance of the personality and its link to the absolute source of existence.” According to Frank, the revolutionary who devotes all his energies to bringing about the apocalyptic transformation of people’s lives through revolution “does not love living people, only his idea, the idea of universal human happiness.”

Bulgakov argued that the intelligent’s faith in his own power meant that “worship of the people” mingled in his soul with “spiritual hauteur,” for “the most ordinary citizen, though is in no way better than his neighbors and sometimes is even worse, no sooner dons the uniform of the intelligent than he begins to treat them with disdain.” Finally, Struve pointed to the silence of revolutionary philosophy with regard to the people’s agency; unconcerned with outlining the personal responsibilities of anyone but the professional agitator or making any effort to educate the populace except through crude sloganeering, it “could scarcely produce an idealistic result once it had filtered down to them.”

While nearly worshipful of “the people” as an aggregate of material needs to be satisfied, “revolutionism” thus made little provision for them as persons with agency and individual value.

Like the masses, the intelligent himself occupied a curious position between pawn and deity according to the revolutionary schema. By participating in a work that promises to bring about utopia, “man puts himself in the place of Providence,” but he simultaneously sacrifices

318 Frank, “Nihilism,” 143.
319 Bulgakov, “Heroism,” 42.
320 Bulgakov, “Heroism,” 32.
his right to development as a man. *Vekhi* (certainly at least in part as a result of its authors’ personal pasts) outlined a plethora of ways in which revolutionary existence quashed the individual personality. A participant in revolutionary circles became isolated from ordinary existence by his work;³²³ he “shuns reality, flees the world, and lives apart from actual, historical everyday life.”³²⁴ Bulgakov, despite his admiration for the revolutionary’s renunciation of luxury, argued that it was never accompanied by the chance for spiritual growth, but by a philosophy that “relentlessly persecutes the personality.”³²⁵ Berdiaev described radical circles as an environment where “knowledge, creation, the higher life of the spirit were persecuted.”³²⁶ And *Vekhi* further suggested that while in principle, such a utilitarian stifling of personal growth at least made the intelligent a rigid follower of his ideals, in practice it often merely meant he became guilty of “heroic hypocrisy.”³²⁷ Struve argued that “the actual practice of self-denial does not necessarily imply recognition of the idea of personal responsibility as a principle governing private and public life”³²⁸ – in other words, the revolutionary might be called to practice strict asceticism, but possessed little in terms of a strict moral code.

This lack of personal *intelligentsia* morality made for a frightening mix when joined together with the lifting of all limitations on means for the pursuit of political change, no matter how destructive. Frank argued that “the non-recognition of absolute, truly binding values, and the cult of the material benefit of the majority, provide justification for the primacy of might over right,” particularly fostering a “monstrous, morally inadmissible inconsistency in regard to terrorism.”³²⁹ The sheer grandeur of the intelligentsia’s expectations regarding the future reign of

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³²³ Bulgakov, “Heroism,” 19.
³²⁴ Frank, “Nihilism,” 150-151.
³²⁵ Bulgakov, “Heroism,” 34.
³²⁶ Berdiaev, “Philosophical Verity,” 2.
³²⁷ Bulgakov, “Heroism,” 32.
³²⁹ Frank, “Nihilism,” 152.
happiness on earth, Bulgakov argued, helped to produce this endorsement of terror, for “maximalist goals lead to maximalist means”; so too did the sacralized character of its members’ political activity: “amorality or, to use the old expression, nihilism, is the necessary consequence of self-worship.” This predicament, according to Frank, made it extraordinarily easy for a revolutionary to slip over the line and “sanction criminality and hooliganism” under “the mantle of ideological commitment and progressive thought.” Even without such lapses, however, the specter of revolutionary maximalism threatened to take an extraordinary toll in human lives; Berdiaev elsewhere makes this point even more sharply than in Vekhi, warning that “like the demon of reaction, who has already accomplished his unprecedented crimes, the demon of revolution now thirsts for blood and human sacrifice.”

Thus marked by a senseless passion for destruction, the bloated political pretensions that had warped the rest of the intelligentsia’s belief system in the end produced a warped, destructive practice of politics itself. Struve – who had long struggled in the Duma against the left bloc’s compulsive hostility towards the government and consequent unwillingness to cooperate in passing beneficial reforms – made this point at some length; he concluded that the intelligentsia’s dedication to revolution, by which “a limited means was turned into an all-embracing end,” had left it with unrealistic expectations regarding the stability of the regime and prevented it from formulating a positive program of education and social reform. Given the opportunity to participate in a national renewal, its members “tacked its short, bookish slogans” on the people’s aspirations instead of attempting to foster among them a coherent sense of civic identity.

331 Frank, “Nihilism,” 153.
332 Berdiaev, “Socialism as Religion,” 126
333 Struve, “Intelligentsia and Revolution,” 127, 123, 119-120.
Bulgakov likewise pointed to political shortsightedness, in particular the left block’s irrational loathing of the Kadets, as an example of the pernicious effects of intelligentsia maximalism.335

Taken together, *Vekhi* was a protest against the mythos of revolution by a group of thinkers who sought to defend the independently valuable against its predations. Despite critics’ accusations that *Vekhi* revealed obliviousness to political circumstances, its authors were far from unaware of the historical background against which the destructive passion they denounced had developed. They charged the autocracy with having “crippled Russian life and fatally goaded the intelligentsia into an exclusive concern with the struggle against political and economic oppression,”336 and cited the “merciless and unremitting pressure applied by the police”337 as a formative influence. Yet they argued that their former colleagues’ single-mindedness would prevent, not enable it to effect the public good in whose name it had been adopted; “evil is not to be vanquished by the distorted assimilation of all kinds of extreme doctrines.”338 And in the aftermath of the revolution, the four critics, particularly Struve and Frank, maintained some hope that the diminishment of the autocracy’s powers would force the intelligentsia towards a change of course or even a full-scale disintegration and reconstitution.339

*Vekhi*’s authors did not clearly outline the new direction they hoped the intelligentsia would take.340 As Gershenzon noted in the preface, its essays were not coordinated to express a

336 Berdiaev, “Philosophical Verity,” 7.
337 Bulgakov, “Heroism,” 19.
338 Berdiaev, “Philosophical Verity,” 12.
340 One noteworthy theme, though lying beyond the main argument of this chapter, is the idea of incorporating the intelligentsia into a broader Russian tradition, including religious thinkers such as Vladimir Soloviev whose work, according to *Vekhi*, addressed universal themes more honestly than revolutionary dogma even while incorporating deeper Russian traditions. Bulgakov and Berdiaev particularly stress this second Russian intellectual heritage, although Struve mentions it as well (Berdiaev, “Philosophical Verity,” 12-14; Struve, “Intelligentsia and Revolution,” 120-12; Bulgakov, “Heroism,” 23); Berdiaev, following an idealist conception of nationalism, suggested its establishment at the root of “a serious philosophical culture, universal and at the same time national” (Berdiaev, “Philosophical Verity,” 14)
single alternate platform but rather shared areas of concern. However, examining these areas of concern reveals a great deal about the profundity of its challenge to radicalism as well as a basic outline of the shared philosophical framework of the four thinkers in question. Although not all were consistent exponents of political liberalism, Judith Zimmerman is partially correct to describe the common thread as an “ethically oriented liberal socialism” insofar as this indicates the central position of moral values to their critique of revolutionism.\textsuperscript{341} All believed that, contrary to the positivist dogma and nihilist faith of their philosophical opponents, there were in fact transcendental absolute values – truth, beauty, goodness, holiness. And while the political ramifications of reverence for God, truth, and human dignity are rather a subject for endless debate than a concrete platform,\textsuperscript{342} its implications for the Russian radical tradition were somewhat clearer. \textit{Vekhi} argued that an acknowledgement of such values was incompatible with what they considered the idolatry of revolution, the “practice of according absolute significance to earthly, human interests, or with a nihilistic, utilitarian worship of the external blessings of life.”\textsuperscript{343} They suggested that the intellectual must be guided by reverence for higher values in his conduct of philosophy, in his relation to his fellow men, in his political activity, in every area of life; and while transcendental absolutes might command as much respect and devotion as the political slogans of the most committed Bolshevik, they could not, like those slogans, promise their devotees an apocalyptic leap into the bold new world of tomorrow. They left the individual


\textsuperscript{342} This problem poses some difficulty for the claims of authors like Zimmerman or Poltoratsky (“The \textit{Vekhi} Dispute and the Significance of \textit{Vekh}.” \textit{Canadian Slavonic Papers} 9 No. 1 (Spring 1967): 86-106), who attempt to locate \textit{Vekhi} and its contributors on a conventional political spectrum.

\textsuperscript{343} Frank, “Nihilism,” 135.
empowered as the possessor of agency, “living, creative energy”\textsuperscript{344} and personal responsibility, yet stripped of his potential as a godlike creator of the ultimate good. He was called to a humbler though still inherently meaningful task, which had an internal as well as an external significance – that of “positive labor on himself” and “personal creation, or, more truly, of personal achievement accomplished in conformity with the will of God.”\textsuperscript{345} His cultural activity must consist of participation in “the multifarious labor of raising collective existence to an objectively higher level”,\textsuperscript{346} in a spiritual as well as a material sense; through gradual activity in which each person’s work played a small role, rather than one fell swoop. In fact, the concept of human limitation in comparison to the absolute was put most forcefully by none other than Bulgakov, who, far from mimicking intelligentsia messianism in other terms, argued that no one, whether the artist, the politician, or the philosopher, can escape the “feeling that his individual powers are inadequate in the face of broadening tasks.”\textsuperscript{347} Moving the absolute outside the temporal world, as \textit{Vekhi} demanded, also meant greater recognition of our limitations, of the partial and hence multifaceted nature of the good on earth. Endowing each individual with the dignity of his contact with the absolute, it ensured each person the possibility to realize it in part through personal development and creative work and made it impossible for him to realize it fully through subordination to a particular program on the other.

Given this fundamental challenge to the intelligentsia’s sense of mission, it is little wonder that \textit{Vekhi} aroused the ire of critics who deemed that it “will carry us not forward, but backward”,\textsuperscript{348} that it was “a veritable torrent of reactionary mud poured on the head of

\textsuperscript{344} Bulgakov, “Heroism,” 34.
\textsuperscript{345} Struve, “Intelligentsia and Revolution,” 127, 119.
\textsuperscript{346} Frank, “Nihilism,” 139.
\textsuperscript{347} Bulgakov, “Heroism,” 35.
\textsuperscript{348} Miliukov 187.
democracy”;349 that its authors should be shamed and cursed for advocating bourgeois “accommodation.”350 Vekhi attacked the distortion of life and thought by revolutionary morality, and was rejected on grounds of its political unsuitability. Perhaps as one might expect, few of those it chastised for disregarding absolute truth, divinity, and personality in the name of politics were prepared to answer a summons, issued in the name of these very same intangibles, to accept a new role as free but limited beings called to gradual, creative work rather than messianic agents on the cusp of bringing about a new era of human existence.

Nonetheless, this understanding of man’s place in the universe represented a starting point for the subsequent thought of the four ex-Marxists with the partial exception of Berdiaev, who came perilously close to proposing an apocalyptic project of his own based on creative genius in lieu of revolution. All, even Berdiaev, placed an emphasis on man’s personal creative ability, inherent worth, and relationship with the absolute that ensured their work would indeed represent a major break with the tradition they had so noisily abandoned. As the memory of 1905 grew more distant, they turned their attention to a positive understanding of the aspects of life they had sought to defend against revolutionary maximalism, and attempted to delve further into the intersection of human existence with the realm of the absolute.

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349 Lenin 129.
350 Friche 6, 75.
Part III: Between Heaven and Earth

Having lost certainty in the potential for creative designs to be realized in actuality and provide the spirit with satisfaction ... people grew cold and became disappointed in the very ideals and moral convictions which give life meaning and purpose. While they grow less trusting, people are at the same time becoming one-dimensional. ... One-dimensional people believe in that “one dimension,” in that slice of life or culture which they study. But to believe in a slice does not mean generally to believe in that sense in which faith is important, deep, determining the condition of the soul. To believe in the statistical method or even in bacteriology does not mean to believe in science (learning) ... to understand its greatness and significance in the life of humanity. ... At the same time, in the spiritual depths of modern man lurks faith in some absolute values, without which life loses meaning and the spirit, deprived of any support ... can only vegetate, but not live and broaden itself.


The intellectual climate of the years between the revolution of 1905 and the revolutions of 1917 was laden with contradictions. Accounts of the period frequently point to a lingering sense of apocalyptic expectation, characterized at various points by writers Alexander Blok and Andrei Bely as the sense of a bomb on the verge of exploding, 352 and to continuing hostility between various political groups. 353 Yet it was also a period in which the processes of increasing social and ideological diversification begun in the previous decade not merely continued but accelerated under the impetus of a broadened sphere for political participation, ongoing industrial development, and agricultural reform. During this period Frank, Bulgakov, and Berdiaev published major works in religious philosophy which were both symptomatic of this broader cultural transformation and illustrative of the intellectual foundation for their criticisms of the radical intelligentsia. Drawing on a broadened understanding of knowledge reflecting the wider European shift away from the positivist rationalism of the 19th century, they sought to justify man’s direct personal connection to and knowledge of the absolute good, as well as the possibility for him to actively realize absolute values in earthly life. This justification, which

352 Bely is cited in Evtuhov Cross and the Sickle, 190; Blok in Pipes, Concise History of the Russian Revolution, 55.
353 Pipes, Concise History of the Russian Revolution, 54-55.
clarifies the basis for their objection to the radical intelligentsia’s instrumental attitude towards living persons and non-political values, entailed a shift away from the supposedly scientific understanding of human nature; man was not determined and material, but spiritual and free. This idea provided the foundation for a creative vision of life, based on those aspects of human existence of which the intelligentsia with its narrow political outlook had allegedly lost sight. Even as the cultural movements of which these works were a part led many Russian elites away from the materialist worldview and revolutionary legacy of the radical intelligentsia, however, a dangerous combination of military catastrophe and political tension pointed the country in the opposite direction. In 1917, strained by three years of brutal war, Russia fell over the brink on which its nervous literati felt it had been hovering throughout the preceding decade. When the dust of war and revolution had settled, the contenders for power most utterly uninterested in the rebirth of spiritualism and unconcerned with its implied constraints on the dominion of the political over human thought, life, and morality stood at the helm of the nation.

1. Escape from Mechanism: The Philosophical Defense of Freedom and Spirituality

Over the decade following Vekhi’s publication, as the legacy of 1905 faded along with the signs of an imminent encore, the symposium’s more philosophically-minded contributors turned away from their struggle with political maximalism to continue the intellectual aspect of the project announced in Problems of Idealism and expressed in several of the new idealists’ calls for the renewal of culture during the 1905 revolution: expanding the realm of human knowledge beyond the categories permitted by materialist and positivist constraints. Frank, Bulgakov, and Berdiaev focused mainly on intellectual pursuits in this period. Frank became an instructor of philosophy at St. Petersburg University, where he penned a master’s dissertation on epistemology titled The Object of Knowledge (1914) and a doctoral dissertation, Man’s Soul
Bulgakov became editor-in-chief of a religious-philosophical publishing house called Put’ (“The Way”), in which Berdiaev also participated. The latter also travelled abroad and produced two major works, *The Philosophy of Freedom* (1911) and *the Meaning of the Creative Act* (1916). Their writings in this period clarified their understanding of man’s knowledge of and relation to the higher reality which served as the basis for their critique of the radical intelligentsia. Struve (who will return to our attention in the following section), though far from bereft of philosophical interest, focused during this period mainly on politics and his own theoretical specialty of economics in addition to what Richard Pipes describes as “important consulting work involving economic intelligence and food supply” for the government following the advent of World War I, and is therefore not considered here.

This section aims to illustrate the theoretical foundations upon which three members of the Marxist-to-idealist current sought to repudiate the coarse determinism of the 1860s and construct a philosophical outlook that emphasized meaning and freedom in human life. Despite the important ideological shifts undergone by all three authors in the intervening years, this was essentially the project first announced in *Problems of Idealism*. A quick comparison between the quotation at the top of this section, from a 1905 article coauthored by Struve and Frank in *Poliarnaya Zvezda*, and the following paragraphs will reveal that the philosophical concerns articulated in 1912-1917 colored these authors’ perspectives well before the publication of *Vekhi*. The same *Poliarnaya Zvezda* article declared that “as impossible as it is to define life, one still understands, or rather feels, what life is.” This theme resonates throughout each of the works described in the following section, but here it is developed in far greater depth by Berdiaev,

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354 Boobbyer, Frank, 80-93.  
357 Struve and Frank, “Ocherki” pt. 1, 110.
Frank, and Bulgakov. For practical reasons,\textsuperscript{358} this section is drawn mainly from three works: Bulgakov’s \textit{Philosophy of Economy}, Berdiaev’s \textit{Meaning of the Creative Act}, and Frank’s \textit{Man’s Soul}. Bulgakov’s work, an examination of the philosophical meaning of economic activity, sought to answer some of the questions posed by his old economic materialism from his new religious perspective; indeed, he described his choice of subject as “the debt of the author’s philosophical conscience in relation to his own past.”\textsuperscript{359} Berdiaev’s book was a far more radical project, less a study than an announcement of the impending transfiguration of areas of human existence – from art to sex to society – through an impending “revelation of creativity” that would signal the dawn of a new metaphysical epoch.\textsuperscript{360} Frank described his work as a project in “philosophical psychology”; it was similar to Bulgakov’s insofar as both were philosophical approaches to domains of life generally relegated to the treatment of the specialized sciences.

Despite serious differences in content, there were important thematic similarities which reveal both the basic philosophical impulses that underlay the break with positivism in 1902 and the relationship of these impulses to a broader European intellectual shift. All three writers sought to bring philosophy back to life, in contrast to the abstractions of positivists who constructed scientific categories around human life and idealists who insisted on understanding human reality solely as the manifestation of an Absolute Idea alike. All made an effort to move away from what they saw as the distortion of the human subject by rationalist philosophy and its followers, from the notion of man in the abstract as a purely rational, generic entity engaged in passive contemplation to that of man as an individual being possessed of spiritual insights into the true nature of reality and able not merely to reflect but also to affect his external

\textsuperscript{358} Regrettably, the author must here confess that her selection of these works was strongly influenced by the availability of English-language translations; she is however pleased to note that they contain thematic similarities which more than justify a comparative examination.

\textsuperscript{359} Bulgakov, \textit{Philosophy of Economy}, 35.

\textsuperscript{360} Berdiaev, \textit{Meaning of the Creative Act}, 320.
environment. They thus shared an emphasis on inner and intuitive knowledge alongside pure rationality; a belief that these forms of knowledge opened the path to a deeper metaphysical reality, with the human being functioning as a kind of bridge between this reality and the material world; and an assurance that man is capable of free and creative action. On a personal level, these reflections illustrate the three men’s search for an outlook on life that would meet the intellectual and spiritual needs unaddressed by positivism and materialism. At the same time, the vision that resulted from that search, one of man as a free being endowed with spiritual value and tasks, rooted in the mortal world but standing at the door of eternity, provides a clear explanation for their objections to the “scientific” revolutionary outlook.

In their concern with recapturing the dimensions of life that had been obscured by 19th-century rationalism, these three works (like the broader rejection of positivism first announced in Problems of Idealism) echoed broader European trends. H. Stuart Hughes outlines how, at the dawn of the 20th century, social scientists of all stripes began to perceive the inadequacy of the positivist understanding of human life. As he explains, social thinkers increasingly confronted “the importance of subjective ‘values’ in human behavior,” which affected both the social scientist’s objects of study and the scientist himself. Their reactions to this problem varied, from Freud’s efforts to conduct a rational study of the irrational in the human psyche, to Bernadetto Croce’s argument that history writers should engage in a process of “imaginative recreation” in addition to pure chronology, to Max Weber’s studies of religion and insistence on the limits of causal explanations of social affairs. The three works here in question illustrate the intersection between Russia’s Silver Age and this broader modern crisis of rationalism. However, if the European social thinkers who found themselves faced with the problem of the

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361 At this point I use the term “metaphysical” advisedly, even with regard to Frank.
362 H. Stuart Hughes, Consciousness and Society (New York: Knopf, 1958), 16, 311, 206
irrational “simply condemned as shallow the postulates of scientific and ethical naturalism” while refusing to advance metaphysical postulates of their own, the three Russian philosophers were confident in the ability of the human consciousness to achieve metaphysical knowledge. While most Western European social scientists found themselves increasingly conscious of the limitations upon human freedom, Bulgakov, Frank, and Berdiaev found in a changed understanding of knowledge a source for freedom’s defense. All at this point personally grounded in the teachings of the Orthodox faith (Frank shed his resistance to dogmatic religion and officially converted in May 1912), they saw the newly rediscovered complexity of human nature not as a threat to the validity of human understanding, but as an expansion of its boundaries. Indeed, a changing view of man and of human knowledge provided them with a foundation from which to theoretically defend man’s consciousness of spiritual values and ability to act in accordance with these values, the same principles on whose behalf they had argued so insistently against the objections of the radical intelligentsia. In essence, they sought to do this by cutting through the 19th-century tendency to rationalize away freedom and meaning in human existence, and bringing philosophy back to life.

Each author expressed a desire to turn the attention of philosophy back to the immediacy of life as opposed to the layers of abstractions and rationalizations built up over the course of the previous century. They argued against the neo-Kantian reduction of philosophy to an understanding of the conditions of knowledge, which, according to Frank, meant that “the

363 Hughes, Consciousness, 31.
364 Hughes, Consciousness, 4.
365 The motives for this decision are unclear. His biographers both raise and then reject the possibility of a careerist motive (converting allowed him to assume a university teaching post), an assessment with which I am inclined to agree given the centrality of spiritual questions to Frank’s life. Swoboda suggests a view of Orthodoxy as an element of Russian culture, of which Frank wished to become a part, as a possible reason for his conversion. He and Bovbber both also point to an affinity for the religious outlook of Christianity, with its immanentism and irrational elements, as opposed to Judaism’s more rigid legalism and emphasis on divine transcendence (Boobbyer, Frank, 72-81; Swoboda, Philosophical Thought, 586-593).
subject as a living human person or soul first became rarefied, i.e., became transformed into the pure abstraction of the ‘gnoseological subject’ ... and then evaporated completely.” His philosophy aimed to address “the living inner integral world of man” which he believed was ignored in both positivist philosophy and empirical psychology. Bulgakov similarly criticized the “fictive epistemological subject” of the neo-Kantians; philosophy itself, in his view, was “a concrete living act, from which the odor of life, the aftertaste of ‘psychologism,’ cannot be removed by any epistemological disinfectant.” Whereas “intellectualists” of all stripes (including both the bolder of Kant’s successors, the metaphysical-system builders, as well as his humbler inheritors who reduced philosophy to the quest for a theory of knowledge) sought to filter life through philosophy, he insisted that “life “cannot be reduced to anything simpler than itself.” Berdiaev similarly warned that “Man precedes philosophy; man is the prerequisite of all philosophic knowledge. This fact not infrequently seems to hamper and shame the philosophers; they would like to derive man from philosophy, and not philosophy from man.”

If critical rationalism offered a poor understanding of human life, scientific empiricism was not much better. For Frank, outward scientific analysis of the “scattered single phenomena of psychic life” was akin to “the dissection of a corpse or the anatomical observation of excretions or dead tissues detached from the living being of the soul and not the real observation of inner, subjective life”; in Bulgakov’s terms, “science deliberately commits a murder of the world and of nature, it studies nature’s corpse, it is the anatomy and mechanics of nature.”

Neither man intended his criticism as a rejection of science; as Bulgakov put it, science is

366 In other words, the subject of the philosophy of knowledge, which examined man primarily with an eye towards the conditions of his logical understanding. This was a particular preoccupation among neo-Kantians.
367 Frank, Man’s Soul, 25, 4.
368 Bulgakov, Philosophy of Economy, 112, 54.
369 Bulgakov, Philosophy, 46.
370 Berdiev, Meaning, 49, 15.
371 Frank, Man’s Soul, 27; Bulgakov, Philosophy of Economy, 183.
“limited, relative, instrumental, but at the same time, as it advances, new shrouds concealing Truth from our eyes progressively fall away, and Truth shines through, if only like a fortune-teller’s mirror.”

All three, however, believed that the natural scientific outlook could not convey a complete understanding of the world, particularly with regard to life. As Berdiaev explained, while it was “indubitable that man needs science,” the problem lay in “carrying the criteria of science over into other spheres of spiritual life quite foreign to science.”

In their efforts to address these shortcomings of scientific philosophy, however, the three thinkers arrived at rather different assessments of philosophy’s proper tasks. Bulgakov took a relatively humble view, insisting that a philosophy which proceeded from life, rather than the other way around, could never pretend to the “closedness, self-sufficiency,” and “absoluteness” of the systems of a Hegel or Fichte. No single philosophical system could uncover the entirety of Truth, which “lies beyond knowledge”, it could only approach the Truth from a particular angle that would allow it a partial understanding. The time in which he lived, one that in his view “believes in wealth even more than it believes in the individual,” inspired him to develop a philosophy centered on the question of economy; but rather than claiming (as a Marxist would) that a philosophy focused on economics would thus reveal the underlying truths of the world, he asserted that since every philosophy would necessarily be shaped by its main subject, then “there can be no single *total* philosophical system like that in which Hegel and the idealists believed… discursive thought, that is philosophy, and to an even greater extent science, is *pluralistic by nature*.” A philosophy which acknowledged the true multidimensionality of life would thus be humble in its aims; it would also seek a middle path in its methods, reflecting the

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fact that life itself was a union of the logical and the alogical.\textsuperscript{377} It should avoid the extremes of both “intellectualism” (as represented by the absolute idealists, positivists, and neo-Kantians) and “anti-intellectualism” (whose exponents in his view included Nietzsche and Bergson). He warned against the latter on the grounds (not without relevance today) that “reason cannot be desecrated by reason itself... the fundamental and inalienable flaw of anti-intellectualism striving to be philosophy, that is, a logical system, is the impossibility of justifying its own existence and goals by its own principles.”\textsuperscript{378}

This warning apparently went unheeded by Berdiaev, who (rather ironically given the subject of his \textit{Vekhi} contribution) not merely denied that positivism and materialism were adequate to address life’s complexities but declared that “the passive, intellectual, abstract ‘truth’ must be sacrificed and by this sacrifice must be purchased victory over a slavish oppression of the spirit.”\textsuperscript{379} Like Bulgakov and Frank, he claimed to be navigating between dead rationalism and a reaction against it that had produced “hostility to thought and word.”\textsuperscript{380} However, his own defense against this reaction is difficult to detect. With loud echoes of Nietzsche (of whom he declared that “whatever is superior to [Nietzsche’s work \textit{Thus Spake] Zarathustra is so by grace from on high}”\textsuperscript{381}; Bernice Glatzer-Rosenthal has aptly termed his views a form of “Nietzschean Christianity”),\textsuperscript{382} he declared that “truth is not a passive reflection of something; truth is rather activity in giving meaning to something.”\textsuperscript{383} He insisted that philosophy was “art rather than science” – a view which meant “creating ideas which resist the given world and necessity and

\textsuperscript{377} Bulgakov, \textit{Philosophy}, 59, 58.  
\textsuperscript{378} Bulgakov, \textit{Philosophy}, 52-53.  
\textsuperscript{379} Berdiaev, \textit{Meaning}, 43.  
\textsuperscript{380} Berdiaev, \textit{Meaning}, 37-38, 15.  
\textsuperscript{381} Berdiaev, \textit{Meaning}, 90.  
\textsuperscript{382} Rosenthal, \textit{New Myth, New World}, 60.  
\textsuperscript{383} Berdiaev, \textit{Meaning}, 126.
The implications of these statements are somewhat contradictory. While his assertion that truth is made rather than discovered seems to lead to a full-scale denial of philosophical objectivity, his claim that philosophy can “penetrate into the ultimate essence of the world” suggest that truth is indeed dependent on an existing reality, but one which is spiritual rather than empirical. This author has found it helpful to examine these statements in light of his 1902 declaration that “what is true” should be identified with the realm of “what ought to be” rather than that of “what is.” This statement suggests an understanding of truth as moral imperative rather than truth as factual assessment; on this interpretation, truth has a transcendental basis in “the ultimate essence of the world,” which provides an objective criterion of right and wrong, but man’s relation to truth consists in creative efforts to realize “what ought to be” in the “given world” rather than in contemplation. While such a reading saves Berdiaev from the charge of complete relativism (of which, given his overwhelming propensity for moral judgment, he is clearly not guilty), such an emphasis on man’s creative relation to the truth at the expense of his contemplative relation raises serious questions regarding how one is to distinguish between action in accordance with this transcendental imperative, and mere caprice or cynicism.

As the man who had lamented the intelligentsia’s elevation of interest above truth might have been expected to know, such a perspective thus posed not a few problems for the concept of

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384 Berdiaev, Meaning, 29. Bulgakov had similarly found it “difficult to refrain from comparing philosophical creativity to art”; however, in his view this clearly did not mean an abandonment of the search for knowledge as given but merely “acknowledging in principle the possibility of a plurality of philosophical paths” (Philosophy, 60). That the neo-idealist Nikolai Grot [generally considered a relatively sober academic philosopher in contrast to the ex-Marxist group with its somewhat justified reputation for philosophical volatility] had made a similar allusion to “aesthetic creativity” in the mind of the philosopher as early as 1886 (Grot, “True Tasks,” 76) sufficiently illustrates that such a suggestion was not in and of itself revolutionary; Berdiaev’s interpretation of it, however, certainly was. 385 Berdiaev, “Ethical Problem,” 164. Similarly in Meaning, Berdiaev linked the genuine truth which was to be “revealed only by the creative activity of the spirit” to Christ’s proclamation that “I am the truth” (Berdiaev, Meaning, 43. The remainder of the Gospel quotation [“the Way and the Life”] is absent in this passage). While this author strongly wishes to avoid theological disputation, she believes that in Berdiaev’s interpretation this analogy similarly hints at an understanding of truth as imperative rather than indicative.
knowledge as the disinterested search for existing truth. Frank, who had by this time firmly shed his youthful sympathy for Nietzsche, explicitly made the connection Berdiaev apparently missed:

Where philosophy openly identifies itself with poetic inspiration, religious faith, or moral preaching, as occurs, for example, in the case of Nietzsche … or in the case of a talented Russian thinker who has recently appeared on the scene, who decisively rejects any connection of philosophy with science and instead identifies philosophy with pure, autonomous creativity analogous to art – there a real philosophical falling into sin occurs.

This “sin” consisted in allowing oneself to lose sight of the fact that “man has not only a right but also an obligation to seek an objective truth that is independent of his desires and dreams”; perspectives such as that of Berdiaev were dangerous insofar as their emphasis “falls not on the concept of truth and its inner features but on the elements of vitality and fruitfulness.” Philosophy, though an “intermediary” between religion and art on the one hand, science on the other, was strictly distinct from the former realms. While Frank’s effort to approach psychic life in its internal essence starkly contrasted with the accepted methods of empirical psychology, he was nonetheless determined that his inquiry take the form of “precise scientific knowledge.”

Like Bulgakov, he warned against allowing the reaction against neo-Kantianism and positivism to lapse into a “naïve romanticism” that risked “distancing man from objective Truth”;

Berdiaev was thus the outlier among his fellow religious philosophers in effectively abandoning rationalism for irrationalism rather than seeking a synthesis between the two.

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386 Frank, Man’s Soul, 9-10. Philip Boobbyer argues that while Frank attempted to incorporate both rational and intuitive knowledge into his views, his “heart was with ‘living’ as opposed to ‘rational’ knowledge” (Boobbyer, Frank, 89) his sympathy was obviously with the latter. I would however suggest that while he emphasized intuition in an effort to recover what he saw as an aspect of knowledge that had gone neglected in the age of rationalism, his methodological differences with Berdiaev illustrate he retained a strong and genuine respect for the role of reason.

387 Frank, Man’s Soul, 7. They apparently had somewhat different definitions of what constituted an excessive reaction against rationalism, as Bulgakov clearly included Bergson among its exemplars while Frank draws heavily on the latter’s work.

388 Further complicating the usual comparison between Berdiaev and Bulgakov, Berdiaev declared that: “creative knowledge, like every creative act, is the self-revelation of a power which cuts and chooses and casts away. Reflection, divided opinion, and doubt are a palised adaptation to the evil multiplicity of the world of necessity.” Bulgakov, too, had remarked upon the “multiplicity” of reality and the necessity for philosophers to select one orientation from among this multiplicity, but he understood this problem as a fundamental limitation of philosophy itself which prevented the construction of absolute systems. For Berdiaev, it was a virtue, “an act of loving choice,
If these authors thus differed in the extent of their claims on behalf of intuitive knowledge, all alike made use of their focus on life in its immediacy – which cast such doubt on social scientific endeavor in the eyes of their Western contemporaries – to resolve their own doubts about the nature of reality. For them, instinctive or spiritual understanding offered a road to meaning in life, a refutation of mechanistic portrayals of existence that denied the vivid reality of life – both the absolute determinism postulated by materialism and the skepticism of external reality produced by idealism. Thus Bulgakov declared that since science relied on methodological fictions in order to analyze the individual dimensions of life in isolation, “only immediate experience is real in life; only naïve realism has the right idea”:

Even were science to succeed in understanding the entire universe as a mechanism moving with clocklike regularity, even were science, with its contingent orienting constructions, to find such a construction most convenient, life in its majestic immediacy would be just as little threatened as a landscape, which does not become less colorful and lovely from being subject to topographical surveys and depicted on maps. 389

Similarly Frank, contrary to the pretentions of empirical psychology to reveal the “true” nature of our psychological experiences, found it “utterly evident that the formless world of our reveries and dreams, passions and strivings, joys and despairs, is with unalterable necessity precisely that which it is, i.e., that which we experience in it.”390 A psychologist will look at a person in love and note “changes of blood circulation, nourishment, or sleep … abrupt changes of states of psychic excitedness and depression; turbulent emotions of pleasant and painful character … the prevalence in his consciousness of images, relating to the loved one and the loved one’s actions, etc.” For the person actually experiencing these feelings, however, such changes are “only symptoms or consequences of his feeling, not the feeling itself. The essence of this feeling consists, roughly, in the living consciousness of the exclusive value of the loved person, in the

selecting the one good from among an evil multiplicity” (Berdiaev, Meaning, 46); the two men thus represented polar opposites in their degree of confidence regarding man’s understanding of the truth.

389 Bulgakov, Philosophy, 163.
390 Frank, Man’s Soul, 60.
esthetic enjoyment of this person, in the experience of the central significance of this person for the life of the one who is in love.”  

391 Berdiaev similarly emphasized man’s immediate knowledge, but in keeping with his general hostility to the material world skipped straight to “metaphysical intuition” rather than explore its mundane counterpart. Philosophy meant man looking inward to his own depths, which would in turn yield the secrets of the universe: “the submergence of the human microcosm in its own depths by means of intimate intuition” led to “immersion in the secret of the macrocosm.”  

Thus, if he refrained from using intuition to verify earthly reality, he nonetheless saw it as the confirmation of a dimension to life which was after all for him perhaps more real: the life of the spirit.

In addition to man’s intuitive capacities, all three authors drew on man’s active rather than purely contemplative nature to overcome philosophical atomism and determinism. Berdiaev declared that philosophy has been “palsied” by “the disease of reflection and dissociation.” The contemplative rationalist, empiricist, or critic was incapable of creativity since “he who stops to reflect or he who doubts cannot be active in the world.”  

393 Frank argued that the mind itself was active rather than reflective; in his view even the lowest levels of psychic life were not mirror reflections of external reality but “pure primordial action,” unconscious “strivings and forces” which cause us to direct ourselves towards one state or another.  

394 Bulgakov (who here drew heavily on the 19th-century German idealist Friedrich Schelling’s philosophy of nature), used the fact of our interaction with reality to wrestle with “solipsistic” doubts about the existence of anything outside the thinking mind. In its “quietistic contemplation,” the Kantian subject remains divided from the objective world as if by a “glass wall,” understanding anything outside of

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391 Frank, Man’s Soul, 27-28.  
392 Berdiaev, Meaning, 52.  
393 Berdiaev, Meaning, 45, 122.  
394 Frank, Man’s Soul, 77, 136-137.
himself only as a “mirrorlike reflection.”395 In action, however, our doubts about the existence of a substance behind that reflection disappear when we affect and are affected by objective reality; “the real coming out of our I into the non-I and, conversely, this non-I’s pressure on the I, the entire practice of mutual interaction of I and non-I, establish the reality of the external world.”396 For each, the inherently active nature of the human person gave life a depth and significance which a philosophy oriented purely towards gnoseology could not hope to grasp.

The final and most important element with which all three thinkers sought to enhance the mechanistic portrait of human existence was spirituality. In this regard all three works echo Soloviev’s notion that man is a “connecting link between the divine and the natural world.”397 For Bulgakov, the non-rational knowledge he had defended as a form of finding immediate meaning in life also held the key to this realization. In 1902 he had defined religion as “a living feeling of the connection the finite and limited self has with what is infinite and higher, an expansion of our feeling for infinity in the aspiration toward an inaccessible perfection.” Religious faith, while it could reach the same conclusion as rational metaphysical speculation, “has its own method of immediately and intuitively receiving the truths it needs.”398 In Philosophy of Economy, he echoed this claim: “Truth reveals itself in miraculous, intuitive ways independent of scientific cognition.”399 Man’s spiritual dimension thus provided a direct access to the Truth that his objective cognition could only apprehend in partial fragments. Through faith, man became aware of his own value as a bearer of spiritual tasks: every human being “embodies in himself the creative idea, contains a given ideal task, exists before time as God’s

395 Bulgakov, Philosophy, 79.
396 Bulgakov, Philosophy, 111. In this view Bulgakov’s own philosophical focus, which captured man in his active interaction with the natural world, held the answer to fears of the nonexistence of external reality: “labour, as the basis of epistemology, thus removes the problem of the existence of the external world” (Bulgakov, Philosophy, 118).
399 Bulgakov, Philosophy, 155.
conception.”⁴⁰⁰ He developed this notion further in *Unfading Light*, where he states that “our eternal essence, our divine genius, is something quite other than our empirical personality, our body, character, and psychology.” Thus “every man is aware of a higher self within himself, a kind of ‘genius’ allotted to each one,” towards which he reaches though “all he does falls short of this, quantitatively and qualitatively.”⁴⁰¹ Once again, man’s spiritual nature was linked to his moral calling to realize certain absolute tasks. Berdiaev, for his part, described man as “a microcosm, the likeness and image of absolute being,” which stood in stark contrast to man as the positivists understood him, “disunited from the cosmos, closed within himself, having lost his connection with the absolute being.”⁴⁰² Through Christ, he argued, “man is a participant in the mystery of the nature of the Holy Trinity and is a mediator between God and the cosmos. … man is not only a natural-mortal being, but a divine-mortal being.”⁴⁰³

Frank provided a uniquely detailed exposition of man’s innate connection to the absolute, which he saw as lying at the root of the human psyche. In his view the soul was comprised of layers, though layers that shade off into a “continuity, fusedness, formless unity” rather than absolutely distinct levels; he likened the soul at one point to “a cone apex downward, into the depths.”⁴⁰⁴ Thus “at its periphery,” the soul “touches and is fused with the objective side of being” (i.e. comes into contact with the empirical world through sense-impressions), the inner “apex” of the soul touches “the pure light of reason.”⁴⁰⁵ At the highest “ideally rational or spiritual” level of the soul, which consists in our consciousness of moral calling, we become

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⁴⁰¹ Bulgakov, “Unfading Light,” 137-140, 147. Here his view of the individual man reaching to uncover his ideal essence is roughly analogous to his concept of humanity as a whole striving to restore the material world to the ideal perfection of the sophic world; also in *Unfading Light*, he describes the earth as “the potentiality for a spiritualized materiality.”
⁴⁰⁴ Frank, *Man’s Soul*, 106, 162.
aware of “an absolute creative principle,” manifested as much in “an artist who is drawn by a powerful call to create images,” “a thinker who feels the need to communicate a truth immediately revealed to him,” “a statesman who is conscious of himself as called to lead people to a goal revealed only to himself” or “a saint who has heard a voice which draws him to a life of holy exploit” as in someone who obeys moral imperatives in the strict sense.406 Through both the “supraindividual and suprapersonal” light of pure reason, “a ray of light as it were in which I participate or which shines in me or through me,”407 and the “absolute creative principle” described above, the human soul was thus innately linked to the domain of absolute truth, goodness, and beauty; and this link relied upon the person’s sense of his moral calling to realize such absolute ideals in life.

Thus armed with an emphasis on intuition, action, and spirituality, the three philosophers alike sought to overcome mechanistic portraits of human life as devoid of a higher meaning and fully determined by external factors. Bulgakov drew on all three aspects of this philosophical shift – immediacy, action, and spirituality – in order to defend free will. Freedom is self-evident in our consciousness of our own individuality: “the persuasions of determinism are powerless before this immediate, living testimony of freedom in our own consciousnesses.”408 It was also revealed in action; scholars, having “acquired a peculiar contemplative, armchair relation to life,” inevitably examined life in scientific categories, which meant “to explain it mechanically, to turn organisms into machines.” A different “relation to life” meant a different understanding of freedom and necessity: “for people of action, in contrast, the world appears plastic and changeable.” 409 Finally, men were necessarily free because “real freedom belongs only to the

406 Frank, Man’s Soul, 166-168.
407 Frank, Man’s Soul, 184.
408 Bulgakov, Philosophy, 200.
409 Bulgakov, Philosophy, 190-191, 183.
spirit, hence to living creatures that are carriers of the spirit, that is, human beings.\footnote{Bulgakov, \textit{Philosophy}, 199-200.} For Frank, the possibility of freedom meant the ability for the higher levels of the soul – both the ultimate consciousness of moral calling and an intermediate “suprasensuous-volitional” level, which allows us to overcome immediate psychic responses in the interests of a more distant goal (everything from “a soldier, advancing in attack” to “a man who calmly tolerates the pain of having a tooth extracted”) – to predominate over our immediate impulses.\footnote{Frank, \textit{Man’s Soul}, 162.} At the lowest level of our psychic life we are subject to “hunger and thirst, heat and cold, stuffiness and freshness, weariness and vitality, psychic suffering and enjoyments” on the body; this condition “leads to that human slavery which has been experienced and is experienced with agonizing acuteness by all those who have striven and who strive to attain free spiritual life, and which materialism and naturalism proclaim as man’s natural state.”\footnote{Frank, \textit{Man’s Soul}, 241-242.} This condition of slavery, however, “can be replaced by a state of real freedom” when the higher levels of the soul overcome the lower.\footnote{Frank, \textit{Man’s Soul}, 262.} Berdiaev defended freedom through a contrast between the methods of science, which developed in response to man’s physical needs and thus served as “a condensed economic description of the given world’s necessity for the purpose of orientation and the reaction of self-preservation,” with those of philosophy, which ought to seek “the liberation of the human spirit from its bondage to necessity.”\footnote{Berdiaev, \textit{Meaning}, 25, 28.} His argument is rather more straightforward (and less convincing) than those of his contemporaries; in his view freedom existed because it \textit{ought} to exist: “there cannot be truth in the idea that the world is merely a meaningless necessity, for the exclusive power of necessity is
the power of darkness in which there is neither truth nor any way to liberation.” His religious convictions stood in firm opposition to such a dark outlook on existence.415

The work of Bulgakov and Berdiaev, focused as they are on action more than cognition, elaborate the particular uses to which they believe man’s creative freedom should be put, and in this regard outline not merely man’s innate connection to and consciousness of absolute values but also his capacity to embody them in life. Creativity was a consistent theme of the Marxist-to-idealist current – from Berdiaev and Frank’s Nietzsche-influenced essays in Problems of Idealism, to Struve’s more cautious defense of the possibility of creativity against determinism, to Vekhi’s castigation of the intelligentsia’s preference for destruction over creation – and figured prominently in Silver Age culture generally.416 Struve and Frank’s 1905 “Outlines of a Philosophy of Culture” championed the concept of culture as the embodiment of “eternal ideals – truth, good, beauty, and holiness” on earth through “scientific, artistic, moral, and religious creativity” and as “the humanization, the subordination of the elements of nature, like the elements of society, to the spirit of the thinking man.”417 Though evidently important to Frank as well given his characterization of the transcendent ground of good as an “absolute creative principle,”418 these themes received more extensive treatment in Berdiaev and Bulgakov’s religious-philosophical works, which incorporate Soloviev’s notion of humanity working to transform the metaphysical essence of a fallen world, and thus materializing on earth the transcendentally rooted good. Randall Poole, who suggests that Berdiaev and Bulgakov lapsed into utopianism following the publication of Problems of Idealism, identifies this “historiosophical speculation about the realization of the absolute in history” as evidence of their

415 Berdiaev, Meaning, 43-44.
416 Evtuhov, Cross and the Sickle, 185.
418 See above p. 107.
shared “eschatological mentality.” However, the “eschatological” ramifications of *Creative Act* belong in a very different category from those of *Economy*.

By attributing metaphysical significance to human labor, Bulgakov’s vision imbued the everyday life of each human being “from the worker to Kant, from the sower to the astronomer,” with absolute meaning. He began with the vision of the mortal realm as “lying in sin’ and living in struggle and disharmony” after “falling away from the sophic world in its complete and absolute harmony” as a consequence of original sin. For this reason, “the ‘organic’ world, the kingdom of life in its various forms, is surrounded by a hostile atmosphere of death, of the deadened and mechanistic, of stifling necessity”; existence is an “unceasing struggle” between life, marked by freedom, and the “deadened, mechanistic” realm of necessity, between the “teleological” and the “mechanical principle.” Human labor is a part of this painful struggle, but also holds the key to restoring the world to fullness through “the expansion of life”; the ultimate end of economy is “the transformation of the entire cosmic mechanism into a potential or actual organism, the transcension of necessity through freedom, mechanism through organism, causality through intentionally – that is, as the *humanization of nature.*” But in Bulgakov’s understanding, this goal was a matter of “eschatology,” lying “beyond history”; within history, man can only work “slowly and gradually” towards its realization. In *Unfading Light* he clarified that economy “does not have an eschatological task transcending the limits of the mortal life of this present age … thus it cannot, within its own proper limits, fulfill or complete itself.”

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419 Poole, *Psychological Society*, 250.
420 Bulgakov, *Philosophy*, 75.
421 Bulgakov, *Philosophy*, 150.
423 Bulgakov, *Philosophy*, 76, 72.
He believes that “the world will be perceptibly transformed into Sophia425 – but not by the creative or self-creative action of men. It will be achieved by the creative act of God.”426 Thus, while human activity must strive towards this goal, its fulfillment remains in the hands of the divine. Furthermore, Bulgakov carefully avoided the claim that human creation is on a level with God’s. In his view, “human creativity is really a re-creation of that which preexists in the metaphysical world.”427 In Unfading Light, Bulgakov did make several statements (in which it is difficult not to see the reverberations of the First World War) that suggest he is moving, albeit hesitantly, closer towards Berdiaev’s perception of a “world crisis” and to see humanity as standing “on the threshold of this new age.” However, in this regard he argued that “only expectations and confused anticipations are possible.”428 Thus, his vision was one which left room for the apocalypse, but keeps it carefully in God’s hands and urged man to turn himself to the task of the slow and imperfect realization of good in the given reality, with all its flaws.

Berdiaev’s text, on the other hand, resonated with the fury of his lifelong rebellion against “the everyday prose of life.”429 He placed far greater emphasis on the fact that the world was not merely fragmented but itself an evil that arose in consequence of the Fall: it is a “phantom ‘world,’ born of our sin” and a “prison” confining “the human spirit.”430 Like Bulgakov, he believed that the fall of man altered the condition of the cosmos, and that

425 In Philosophy of Economy Bulgakov appears to be using this term in three senses; the “world soul,” which is also the soul of collective humanity; divine wisdom, which inspires human creative activity; and the ideal version of the world, which became separated from the physical world during the Fall of Man but continues to exist on a metaphysical plane, so that human creativity is an effort to bring the material world closer in line with the ideal or sophic world. (These definitions are simplified for brevity’s sake.) In Unfading Light he defines Sophia more explicitly as a “frontier, which by definition stands between God and the world, creator and creature… simultaneously united with and divided from both God and creation.” Sophia is an “angel of creation,” “a living being,” and “the eternal object of the divine love,” as a result of which “it becomes pregnant with the totality of all things” (Bulgakov, “The Unfading Light,” excerpted in Sergei Bulgakov: Towards a Russian Political Theology, ed. Rowan Williams [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999], 134-135).
426 Bulgakov, “Unfading Light,” 150, 140.
427 Bulgakov, Philosophy, 145.
428 Bulgakov, Unfading Light, 160-161.
429 Berdiaev, Meaning, 246.
430 Berdiaev, Meaning, 11.
“microcosm” and “macrocosm” must be liberated together: “nature must be humanized, liberated, made alive and inspired by man.” Also like Bulgakov, he saw the world as cut by a dividing line between necessity and freedom, but for him this line ran not between life and non-life but between the necessity of the world and the freedom of the spirit. The material world was altogether evil; the only permissible Christian attitude towards was is that which “ascetically denies ‘the world’ and everything worldly,” and indeed Berdiaev repeatedly castigated the historical church for its compromises with the world. Yet it is hard to imagine the fiery Berdiaev as a preacher of passive withdrawal, and indeed he escaped this difficulty by proclaiming that human activity holds the key to “liberation from ‘the world’ for the creation of a new life.” For him, however, such transcendence is not an eschatological goal to be approached “slowly and gradually” but an imminent fact. In Berdiaev’s view, humanity was living through a “world crisis” involving such diverse phenomena as symbolism in art, socialism and anarchism in politics. In his view the tragedy of culture, according to which “in the sweat of his brow man creates culture but cannot attain what is necessary for his creative nature” – which Bulgakov viewed as the tragedy of human creativity, alterable only by God – was a tragic limitation of the human condition not to be accepted, but to be overcome:

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431 Berdiaev, Meaning, 72-73.
432 Berdiaev, Meaning, 164. This is, incidentally, quite at odds with Bulgakov’s perspective, evident in his effort to ascribe meaning to man’s worldly activity in Philosophy of Economy and stated directly in Unfading Light when he declares that “alone among the world religions, Christianity does not punish the body but glorifies it.” Indeed, on the grounds that the body has its own worth and significance he attacks idealist philosophy and charges that “there is more comfort to be had as the humblest doorkeeper on earth than as a wanderer in the shadowlands of the idealist’s Hades, even vested with the highest dignities.” He attempts to resolve the contradiction between idealism and realism by declaring that “the ideal and the real are distinguishable only in thought, not in actuality … the idea must rather be understood as what causes the fullness of reality.” Although he declares that “economic activity is only tolerated by the gospel; it is reconciled with the gospel in the only way any other aspect of the burdensome existence of this present age is reconciled, and no more than that,” his work is an effort to discover the conditions of this reconciliation while Berdiaev’s aims at its renunciation (Bulgakov, “Unfading Light,” 142-144).
433 Berdiaev, Meaning, 12.
434 Berdiaev, Meaning, 127.
435 “Unfading Light,” 153-159. “The tragedy of art lies in its awareness of its own impotence, in the appalling schism between what is revealed to it of the true splendor of the world and the concrete reality of its deformity and
.... This crisis of creativity is ripening. Creativity in art, in philosophy, in morals, in social life, exceeds the limits of its own sphere, is not to be contained by any classic norm, reveals an impulse toward the transcendental. The creative man today can no longer create science and art in the classic manner, just as he cannot play politics according to classic norms. In everything he strives to go to the limit, to the end, to pass all boundaries. ... the creative upsurge towards another type of being puts an end to the division of culture into a row of separate fields. ... Art is transformed into theurgy, philosophy into theosophy, society into theocracy. The norms of classicism are overthrown, according to which beautiful art, true philosophy and a just social order are supposed to be created.436

Man could aspire to far more than a gradual recovery of primordial unity; the world was hovering on the brink of an apocalyptic transformation, and the creative act held the key to pushing it over. He would soon be able to transform from within every existing aspect of human life, from art to the family to the state – in an “immanent-creative” rather than an “external and nihilistic” fashion, but the changes would be no less revolutionary for that.437 They would have theological significance; with the advent of a new, “third creative Revelation in the Spirit” – which Berdiaev declares “man cannot merely wait for” but must himself carry out438 – humanity would transcend the Old Testament epoch of law and the New Testament epoch of redemption to usher in a new epoch of creativity. Morally, these changes would mean the abrogation of “philosophies of necessity,” which included everything from materialism to classical metaphysics to Kant, in favor of a new “creative morality” which “knows only the individual way, which each must follow for himself and which is unlike any other.”439 Moreover, for Berdiaev human creativity was genuinely creation ex nihilo; he declared that “created being cannot be something finished, something closed within God’s act of creation.”440 Rather, “man is called to create a new and hitherto unknown world through free and daring creativeness, to

ugliness. ... Art must have hidden in its depths a prayer for the transfiguration of the created order, but it is not itself called to the daring enterprise of sophiurgic experiment” (154, 158).
436 Berdiaev, Meaning, 121.
437 Berdiaev, Meaning, 247.
438 Berdiaev, Meaning, 107.
439 Berdiaev, Meaning, 41, 270.
440 Berdiaev, Meaning, 136.
continue God’s creation.” Such a view would have been anathema to Bulgakov, who despite his emphasis on human creativity was exceedingly careful not to usurp the prerogative of God; indeed, in *Unfading Light*, despite finding Berdiaev’s book “talented and interesting,” he charged it with the “immanent deification of man.”

Berdiaev’s emphasis on creativity as applied to knowledge and morality is paradoxical enough that after the publication of *Vekhi* his philosophical position had grown so radical as to make conclusions drawn from his writings prior to 1909 no longer applicable would not be entirely without merit. However, a brief examination of his reaction to the Bolshevik revolution, printed in *Iz Glubiny*, indicates that he had by no means intended to relinquish his right to make moral judgments. His insistence that meaning and truth were at once grounded in a transcendental reality and subjects of human creation is at face (and possibly in fact) self-contradictory; as his autobiography warns, Berdiaev indeed tends to be “unable to expound or demonstrate anything by way of ratiocination,” nor feels the need to do so. Nonetheless, the importance of a transcendental grounding for truth and morality to Berdiaev’s thought keeps him, if barely, within the boundaries of this thesis, which is more concerned with the fact that its subjects asserted absolute values than with the intellectual soundness of their arguments in said values’ defense. His concept of morality as a creative personal calling, though phrased in particularly radical terms, does echo some of the arguments examined above (e.g. in I.III and

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442 Bulgakov, *Svet Hevchenii* (Moscow: Isdatelstvo “Respublika,” 1994, 161). It is entirely beyond my ability to read this text at any length in the original, but I was directed to the reference courtesy of Berdiaev, who, apparently having taken his former colleague’s criticism rather to heart, wrote in his autobiography that Bulgakov “spoke of my defense of creativity as ‘demonic’, ‘titanic’, ‘humanistic’, and nearly akin to anti-Christ” (*Dream and Reality*, 212. I was unfortunately unable to locate these more colorful references, if indeed they exist.)
443 Berdiaev, *Dream and Reality*, 81. Berdiaev (also self-perceptively) explains that his mode of thought is “intuitive and aphoristic rather than discursive and synthetic.”
444 Berdiaev’s subsequent attitude towards *Meaning of the Creative Act* also raises questions; he later declared that *Meaning* “contains in that raw form all my dominant and formative ideas and insights,” but “was written at a time of well-nigh intoxicating ecstasy” and was thus “impulsive, unpremeditated, and unfinished” (Berdiaev, *Dream and Reality*, 210). Notably, he refused to allow the book’s reprinting during his lifetime (Lowrie, *Rebellious Prophet*, 134).
II.1, by Struve and particularly Frank), though none of these share his quite his tendency towards a Promethean understanding of man’s transformative powers.

Its internal contradictions aside, Berdiaev’s book, like the other works examined in this section, illustrates a common effort to construct a philosophical outlook suitable for man as a free, creative, and spiritual being. This effort relied on faith in man’s immediate consciousness of the material world, of the realm of the spirit, and even of his own capacity for action; and the concepts which they defended on this basis (free will, the human person’s connection to and knowledge of a transcendental realm) lay at the heart of the defenses the same thinkers articulated elsewhere – both in the descriptive sense, i.e. arguing they exist, and in the normative sense, i.e. arguing they should be protected – of the human person’s moral consciousness and moral freedom. In 1902, 1905 and 1909, Bulgakov, Berdiaev, and Frank had sought to defend the full breadth of life, those dimensions of personal existence, human culture, and spiritual experience whose value could not be grasped purely in terms of material utility, in practice from political and intellectual movements which sought to constrict their expression. In the following years, they sought to justify the existence and worth of these dimensions in theory.

2. Apocalyptic Premonitions and Cultural Transformation: Russia Between the Revolutions

The philosophical reflections outlined above, in addition to the insights they provide into the mindset of their authors, are also indicative of a continuing shift in Russian intellectual culture during the period in which they were written. These works must be seen against the backdrop of two major historical events, with starkly differing implications for their authors’ country: the fragmentation of the intelligentsia in the narrow sense of the term, and the outbreak of the First World War. In a country that had only recently recovered from a painful military defeat and a bloody revolution, entry into the war in 1914 was bound to heighten the apocalyptic
premonitions which had accompanied the religious renaissance of the dawning century and never quite filtered from the air after 1905. Indeed, one cannot but see the war’s echo in the predictions of world crisis in Berdiaev’s *Meaning* (finished around the time of the war’s beginning) and Bulgakov’s *Unfading Light* (written as the bloodshed dragged on), though in the former case it was certainly the development of a more longstanding tendency towards apocalypticism as well. If the violent political upheaval of 1905-1907 seemed to leave Russia hovering on the brink, a Europe-wide war certainly seemed high on the list of events with the potential to push it (and perhaps the world with it) over.

Yet with regard to the evolution of the Russian intelligentsia, it is particularly striking that not only its four culturally-oriented renegades but the majority of its members were willing to put aside their opposition and offer support to the national government at the outbreak of war. This very fact illustrates that the intellectual landscape which so troubled *Vekhi*’s authors had been rapidly changing as the processes of political moderation, ideological diversification, and a widening of intellectual horizon ran their course. Though the reaction to *Vekhi* illustrated beyond a doubt that in 1909 the radical tradition – the *intelligentsia* in the narrow sense of the term – was still alive and kicking, Aileen Kelly demonstrates that only a few years later many of its members had adopted a more relaxed attitude towards the permissibility

446 See for instance “O Novom Religioznom Soznani,” in *Sub Specie Aeternitatis*; 378-417 (original September 1905).
447 Their ruminations on the world’s end aside, all four members of the Marxist-to-idealistic group supported the war, Struve and Bulgakov (the former mainly on grounds of a practical [if misguided] calculation of the national interest, the latter also on grounds of a perceived contrast between Russian culture and fallen European humanism leading to what he saw as a new “Russian era” in history) particularly forcefully. (On Struve see Pipes, *Liberal on the Right*, 203-210. Boobyer, *Frank*, 97-99 contains an interesting discussion of the contrast between Frank’s and Bulgakov’s views of the war; Frank rejected the interpretation of the war as a clash between absolute good and evil, embodied in national form, suggested by Bulgakov and by his fellow religious philosopher Vladimir Ern. Lowrie, who is on the whole a highly sympathetic biographer, describes Berdiaev’s support for the war as reluctant given the inherent tendency of war to curtail individual freedom [*Rebellious Prophet* 141], though Berdiaev’s declaration in *Meaning of the Creative Act* that “the willingness to sacrifice which we find in war places war above the security of a bourgeois peace” rather calls the sincerity of its author’s alleged reluctance into question [Berdiaev, *Meaning*, 291].) 448 Elkin, “On the Eve of the Revolution,” 43.
of internal criticism and the worth of culture sans utilitarian function. Martin Malia goes so far as to argue that by 1914 extremist intelligentsia circles such as Lenin’s Bolsheviks “were becoming increasingly anachronistic.” According to Berdiaev’s recollections, “after the 1905 revolution the ‘heroic’ period in the history of the Russian intelligentsia came to an end. Their traditional attitude to life and to the world – their asceticism, their narrowness, their moral rigorism and their stuffy political religiosity – was shaken at its roots.” The revolution which had alerted most of Vekhi’s contributors to the dangers of the intelligentsia’s worldview turned out to pose broader challenges to that worldview, beyond the much-reviled words of its apostate critics. While political extremism certainly did not vanish from late imperial Russia after the events of 1905-1907, its near-universal allure among educated elites prior to that year was greatly diminished by the country’s brief experience with revolution in practice.

This intellectual crisis of the old radical intelligentsia was a boon for members of the new cultural tendencies with which the politically-focused utilitarians had been at odds. In Berdiaev’s view, those came of age after 1905 thus entered an intellectual world in which, in contrast to the landscape which had greeted him upon entry to the university in 1894, “much ground had already been won for the rights of spiritual and cultural values.” While a curious assessment given his near-obsession with the radical intelligentsia during the period in question, this analysis is reasonably perceptive in hindsight. New Religious-Philosophical Societies were established in St. Petersburg and Moscow in 1907, in which all four members of the Marxist-to-

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451 Berdiaev, Dream and Reality, 136-137.
452 Berdiaev, Dream and Reality, 136.
453 In addition to his contribution to Vekhi many of the essays in Sub Specie Aeternitatis (1907) focus on this topic, and in 1910 he published another collection on the “Spiritual Crisis of the Intelligentsia” (Dukhovnyi krizis intellektualnosti).
idealistic group took part. In the following years, several noteworthy religious philosophers (for instance Pavel Florensky, who like Bulgakov wrote on the theme of Sophia, and the aggressively nationalistic V.F. Ern) besides the three here in question produced major works. Indeed, Rosenthal and Bohachevsky-Chomiak describe the post-revolutionary period as one in which the new religious seekers of the early 20th century “were moving into the mainstream of Russian cultural life.” Pace the fears that came to the fore in Vekhi, the 1910s were marked by an incredible outburst of literary, artistic, and philosophical creativity, though the new leading cultural trends (which included the artistic avant garde and literary movements such as Futurism) rejected the idealism and Symbolism of the 1900s and disconcerted at least one member of the Marxist-to-idealistic group with their sweeping rejection of conventional standards of beauty.

As in the case of the works described in III.1, much of this cultural explosion was not explicitly directed at the political realm. Catherine Evtuhov notes that the extensive interest in relatively arcane topics during this period, combined with lingering apocalyptic expectations, has been a source of puzzlement for historians, who have ranged from charging the intelligentsia with a desperate “retreat” into mysticism to lauding it for a too-late return to its religious roots; she illustrates how, at least in the case of Bulgakov’s philosophy of economy and religious activities, these seemingly abstract concerns were also a means of engagement with the pressing issues of the day. Philip Swoboda makes a similar point with regard to Frank, though with a slightly different tone in that he apparently views Frank’s own belief in the importance of ideas

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454 Bulgakov participated in the Moscow Society (Evtuhov, Cross and the Sickle, 128), the other three in the St. Petersburg group (Boobbyer, Frank, 73; Swoboda, Philosophical Thought, 548-552).
455 Florovsky, Ways, 272-281.
457 History of Russia 521. Bulgakov in Unfading Light warned against the disappearance of “an exacting canonical discipline” in art (in Williams pp. 157-159).
for politics as a sign of his naiveté. Berdiaev’s subsequent description of his activities suggests a slight variation on this theme. Wary despite spirituality’s recent gains of a possible second revolution which he expected would “entail a supreme and terrible sacrifice of man’s freedom,” he states he “withdrew entirely from politics and devoted myself entirely to the struggle for the spirit in the face of the still prevalent inertia and blindness of the intelligentsia,” while still “from time to time” (as was also the case with Bulgakov and Frank) returning directly to “the social battle.” These characterizations all raise important points. A dual concern for philosophical ideas and for the “social battle,” and a belief that the two could not be fully separated, was a key characteristic of all four men who made the transition from Marxism to idealism and eventually to Christianity, one which set them apart from their more purely aesthetic contemporaries.

However, an approach to philosophy as an indirect means of addressing social questions – whether respectable conviction or tragic foolishness – cannot fully account for the ideological diversification of the 1910s. While Frank, for instance, was quite clearly persuaded of the importance of ideas in politics, had it been his primary goal to develop politically useful ideas he could easily have dedicated himself to the sort of ideological-publicistic work he had done with Struve in Poliarnaia Zvezda. Rather, he chose to explore complex philosophical topics from

459 In his words, the “pathetic and painful” truth of Frank’s philosophical focus after the 1905 revolution lay in the fact that “Frank was sincerely convinced that what happened in the political realm depended entirely on the ideas which animated the elite” (Swoboda, Philosophical Thought, 430).
460 Berdiaev, Dream and Reality, 137.
461 Notably even Berdiaev, despite his habitual disdain for practical affairs, broke with his acquaintances among the cultural “decadents” and departed St. Petersburg in 1907 due to a feeling that, in Lowrie’s words, “the St. Petersburg intelligentsia were busy with unimportant gossip while Rome was burning” (Rebellious Prophet, 109-110). Berdiaev later reflected that “the misfortune of the Russian renascence of the early twentieth century lay in the isolation of its cultural elite from the wider social movements of the time” (Dream and Reality, 153).
462 His concern with the ideological unity of the Kadets in 1905 and his reaction to the revolutions of 1905 and 1918 all amply testify to this. In 1918 he was alone among his colleagues in focusing on the weakness of the moderate liberal parties in resisting Bolshevism, a failure he attributed to the fact that “in Russian liberalism, faith in the value of the spiritual principles of the nation, the state, law, and freedom remains philosophically unexplained and religiously uninspired” (Frank, “De Profundis,” 227). His assessment is quite at odds with most historians’ views of Russian liberalism, which tend to highlight its purely ideological and ethical basis as opposed to the interest-based bourgeois liberalism of Western European nations (see e.g. Fischer, Russian Liberalism).
an academic perspective. If, at least in the cases of these three religious-philosophers, time spent on philosophical reflection did not indicate a complete abstention from practical affairs, it certainly did illustrate increasing cultural specialization, and in this regard the culmination of the trends set into motion by the rapid diversification of Russian society in the 1890s and accelerated by the significant if much-belittled political liberalization of 1905. In 1847, Vissarion Belinski wrote in his famed letter to the novelist Nikolai Gogol:

In [Russian society], fresh forces are on the rise and trying to break through, but, being brutally repressed and unable to find an outlet, cause only despondency, apathy, and gloom. Only in literature, despite our Tatar censorship, is there any life and progress left. … The title of poet, the calling of man of letters have long ago acquired a greater luster in our society than the tinsel glitter of epaulettes and motley uniforms. That is why any so-called liberal tendency is so richly rewarded by general attention in Russia even in the absence of any marked talent, and why great poets so quickly lose their popularity once they decide, sincerely or insincerely, to serve Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationalism.463

In the decade following the revolution of 1905, this situation changed dramatically. As society grew more liberal, the lofty calling of literature was diluted by the collapse of the censorship, which meant not merely freedom for revolutionary publishers, but also an explosion of (frequently politically indifferent) popular literature that caught the attention of a growing reading public and earned the disapproval of moralistically inclined intellectuals.464 Meanwhile, just as the breadth of the educated elite’s intellectual interests expanded beyond the narrow realm permitted by materialism and positivism, the range of its occupations grew widely beyond the old model of the revolutionary intelligent. Glatzer Rosenthal and Bohachevsky-Chomiak note that the mood of disappointment surrounding the 1905 revolution gave many intellectuals reason to search for meaning outside the political sphere, while accelerated economic growth provided

464 Laura Engelstein, The Keys to Happiness: Sex and Modernity in fin-de-siecle Russia (Cornell University Press, 1992), 11, 359-360. Popular commercial literature had been growing even before the revolution, given an increase in both public literacy and commercial activity in the latter half of the 19th century, and consistently (ineffective) ire of intellectuals of various stripes for its allegedly crass, individualistic, and otherwise politically incorrect themes (Jeffrey Brooks, When Russian Learned to Read, [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985]), 295-299.
employment for many of Russia’s long-alienated intellectuals. The politically inclined now had political institutions through which to channel their concerns; others had new opportunity and motive to pursue their genuine interests. In short, social change both enabled the intellectual division of labor initially frustrated by the conditions of the Russian intelligentsia’s development and weakened the exclusive power of private intellectuals as interlocutors with public opinion.

These changes are evident within the “Marxist-to-idealist” group; though none of the three philosophers ceased to monitor or opine upon political events, they were able to devote much of their time to purely philosophical questions in which they were quite simply more interested, while Struve pursued a combination of economic and political work better suited to his own primary interests. For Bulgakov, Berdiaev, and Frank, on a personal level, the philosophical principles elaborated in their works of 1912-1917 – works which outlined a vision of freedom, creativity, and the embodiment of the transcendental good in man and through human activity – also provided the basis for criticism of a revolutionary movement that failed to recognize the absolutely valuable in personal or national life; understanding these works thus helps one understand their authors’ opposition to the revolution. Unlike the same individuals’ essays in *Vekhi* or *Depths*, however, they were not written primarily as preludes or postludes to revolution; they do not suggest primarily political or social goals. Rather, these authors took the advice they themselves had offered in *Vekhi* and turned away from a single-minded focus on politics to engage in a deeper examination of what each saw as independently valuable dimensions of human life – creativity, fruitful intellectual and economic labor, knowledge and spirituality. In the rapidly changing social environment in which they wrote, there was a vastly greater interest in, audience for, and even freedom to discuss such questions than there had been

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466 Like Bulgakov, Struve had taken up the subject of economics during his Marxist phase, but retained a far greater interest in the technical ramifications of the discipline than his theologically inclined counterpart.
a few decades earlier, when interest in such questions would have attracted greater suspicion from the political authorities and the political opposition alike. As a result of this social transformation, the negative predictions of Vekhi’s liberals regarding the intelligentsia’s fate – Struve’s belief that “as economic development proceeds the intelligentsia … will be organically and spontaneously drawn into the existing social structure and distributed among the different structures of society,” Frank’s suggestion that a shift in the intelligentsia’s values “may prove so decisive that it will cease to be an ‘intelligentsia’ in the old, customary Russian sense of the world”467 – appear far more credible from the perspective of 1916 than from that of today.

The negation of any such hopes (or fears) that the radical revolutionaries of the 19th century had faded into irrelevance stepped off a train at St. Petersburg’s Finlyandsky Rail Terminal on April 3, 1917. The factors that brought about the Bolshevik seizure of power seven months after Lenin’s return to Russia from exile in Germany have been discussed ad nauseum by historians and lie beyond the scope of this paper. In brief, thanks in no small part to the incompetence of its leadership, Russia took a battering at the hands of its World War I opponents. The initial mood of patriotism following the outbreak of war quickly shifted to one of frustration, until in November 1916 leaders in the Duma began to accuse the government of treason. In February 1917, as the army disintegrated at the front, a popular rebellion which cost fewer than two hundred lives overturned the authority of the tsar in the imperial capital; in early March a reluctant Duma, having found itself with de facto authority, instated a Provisional Government. On March 2, on the unanimous advice of his military commanders, Russia’s last tsar abdicated his throne; his decision was made public two days later. After eight months attempting to rule over a disintegrating country against the backdrop of continuing military disaster, the provisional government fell to a carefully orchestrated Bolshevik coup in October 467 Struve, “Intelligentsia and Revolution,” 128; Frank, “Ethic of Nihilism,” 155.
1917. The new government quickly eliminated potential rivals for power within the socialist left and took to ruling by decree. A Constituent Assembly, promised by the Provisional Government and initially by the Bolsheviks as well, was elected, convened, and then disbanded as counterrevolutionary. Russia was now entirely in the hands not of the new, relatively integrated elites, but of a group of professional revolutionaries led by a man who predicted that the coming transition from capitalism to communism would be “a period of an unprecedentedly violent class struggle in unprecedentedly acute forms.”

The intersection of the Bolshevik revolution with the increasingly diversified and spiritualized Russian society of the 1910s is a curious matter; the reaction of the non-Bolshevik intelligentsia might best be described as confused, with a general flavor of negativity. Not only Blok, with his eagerness to hear “the grandiose music of the future,” but a number of Russian Symbolists initially hailed the Bolshevik Revolution, some (eagerly) linking it to the Apocalypse; a few (for instance, Andrei Bely and Valerii Briusov) kept their resolve and sought an accord with the new regime, while Vyaschelev Ivanov rapidly changed his mind and ended up a contributor to Iz Glubiny. Other members of the artistic elite were more immediately hostile to the Bolsheviks, who were however able to co-opt a number of these through material incentives. A large number of educated Russians ranging from writers and academics to ordinary white-collar employees initially resisted the October coup with a strike, which eventually proved ineffective; moderate socialists (Mensheviks and SRs) denounced the coup that deprived them of their fair share of power, but could not bring themselves to use force

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468 Pipes, Concise History of the Russian Revolution, 75-165.
472 Service, History of Modern Russia, 95.
against their erstwhile revolutionary comrades.\textsuperscript{473} In a classic case of the revolution devouring its children, those members of the intelligentsia who most loudly insisted that the advent of a repressive dictatorship (even if perhaps somehow rooted in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century revolutionary tradition) could not possibly represent the culmination of \textit{their} aspirations for freedom, equality, and enlightenment were either jailed, killed, or forced to leave a country in which there was no longer room for them.\textsuperscript{474} This process took some time, however, and as the Bolshevik regime sought to consolidate its power, four of its most committed philosophical foes made one final rhetorical effort to take their erstwhile comrades to task for their moral crimes.

\textsuperscript{473} Pipes, \textit{Concise History}, 157-158; 164-165.
\textsuperscript{474} This group included both moderate liberals such as Miliukov and extreme socialists who defied both \textit{Vekhi}’s predictions and the new government’s hopes by rejecting the Bolshevik New Order. See Jane Burbank, \textit{Intelligentsia and Revolution} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 238-255; she notes that while seeing the Bolsheviks unique in their ability to actually seize power, most of the opposition intellectuals featured in her study “agreed that Lenin’s party represented at least a part of the intelligentsia’s own past” (241).
Epilogue: Revolution Revisited

Having committed in fact what Ivan committed in thought, Smerdiakov asks Ivan, “Then you always used to say that all is permitted, so why are you so upset about it now?” This question of Smerdiakov to Ivan is repeated also in the Russian revolution. ... Dostoevsky predicted that Smerdiakov would come to hate Ivan, who had taught him atheism and nihilism. And this is played out in our day between the “people” and the “intelligentsia.”


In the months following the Bolshevik seizure of power, chaos was the order of the day. In the winter of 1917-1918 peasants, workers, and deserting soldiers occupied themselves with pillage while various minority nationalities and even regions of Russia proper declared independence from the central state. As Richard Pipes states, “by the spring of 1918, the largest state in the world had disintegrated into many overlapping entities.”476 It was in this climate of devastation and uncertainty that the four men who had abandoned Marxism at the opening of the century gathered for a final collaboration mourning the direction of their country. Iz Glubiny (Out of the Depths), the final symposium to which all contributed, strongly evokes its contributors’ horror at seeing their country once again plunged into bloodshed and seeming disintegration, but presents less of a targeted or precise argument than either of its predecessors. While Struve and Frank contributed essays similar at least in form to their previous work, Berdiaev chose to analyze the Bolshevik revolution in a conceptual framework provided by Russia’s literary giants, while Bulgakov’s contribution was a dialogue among six fictitious characters representing various strands of anti-Bolshevik opinion (for instance a Westernized Diplomat, a cryptic mystically-inclined Refugee, and a chauvinistic General) among which it can be quite difficult to sort out his own perspective. All four were highly uncertain of the future and

475 In Depths ed. Woehrlin, p. 53. Smerdiakov and Ivan Karamazov are characters in Dostoevsky’s novel The Brothers Karamazov; the former kills their mutual father after absorbing the latter’s nihilistic preaching. While Berdiaev discusses the significance of Dostoevsky’s work for the revolution at some length, Bulgakov also uses the term “Smerdiakovism” to describe the violence of the revolution (“Feast of the Gods,” 91).
476 Pipes, Russian Revolution, 153.
held firmly only to one or a few basic principles, slightly different in each case. Nonetheless, there are overall similarities in terms of tone and themes. The four men expressed dismay at the revolution as the outcome of not only a pernicious intelligentsia mindset, but also its resonance with the baser instincts of the masses. Faced with what they saw as the destructive impulses of class-based internationalism, they emphasized to varying degrees faith as an expression of reverence for the transcendent, national culture as an embodiment of positive values, and respect for the living person as opposed to the idolatry of political forms. Broadly speaking, Frank and Struve (both of whom participated in a “League of Russian Culture” founded by the latter in May 1917, dedicated to preserving of the nation’s “spiritual capital” and to uniting the intelligentsia under the national banner) looked towards a religiously-tinged nationalism and Bulgakov towards a nationally-tinged religion; Berdiaev, though incorporating both national and religious themes, lacked a clear focus of this kind but offered a piercing critique of the repression of the personality in Russia under new and old social orders alike.

The most obvious thread running through all four contributions to *Iz Glubiny* is that of its authors’ shock at the pure scope of the destruction which their country was enduring. Frank declared that if there is any life left in the Russian state, it is “that life of inertia which continues to linger on in a dying person and possibly for some time even in a dead body”, showing his painful disappointment with the failure of the February revolution, he charged that everything which had happened since then was “not an upsurge of creative political forces” but

brought only destruction, plastered our eyes with the muck and dust dredged up from the low places of life, and was topped off with the destructive pandemonium of all the spirits of evil, death, and decay… for the first time, the country became truly free to fulfill its cherished ideals; the best Russian people came to power, and even better, more energetic and ardent people prodded them toward the realization of desired goals. And suddenly, somehow, all this caved in.\(^479\)

\(^{478}\) Frank, “*De Profundis*,” 219.
\(^{479}\) Frank, “*De Profundis*,” 221.
Struve claimed that the revolution had brought Russia to a level of “degradation” beyond that seen in the crises of any other nation; he charged revolutionary socialism with, among other sins, “destruction of the state.”\textsuperscript{480} One of Bulgakov’s \textit{dramatis personae} suggests that “in place of one-sixth of the world, a stinking gaping hole has appeared,” and, with a personal note of anguish, declares that “at night, you doze off and forget everything. But then you wake up and remember, and such a dark anguish descends upon you that you wish for only one thing – to depart this best of all worlds for good, to see nothing, to know nothing, to feel nothing.”\textsuperscript{481} Berdiaev pronounced the revolution to be a situation in which evils long dormant in the Russian soul “tore themselves free and indulged in an orgy” and suggested that “for many it begins to appear that a unified and great Russia was only an apparition, that it never really existed.”\textsuperscript{482} In short, the revolution represented an unmitigated triumph for the principle of destruction which \textit{Vekhi} had urged Russia’s educated elites to abandon in favor of creative tasks.

While \textit{Vekhi} had directed its criticism primarily at the intelligentsia, most of the contributions in \textit{Depths} reveal the sense of a broader national malaise. Berdiaev, who contended that in the revolution one saw an underlying “boorishness” in Russian life which was “not an offspring of the old order” but rather “gave birth to all that was nasty in the old order,” expressed this point most emphatically.\textsuperscript{483} As he noted, the revolution involved not merely the implementation of the intelligentsia’s designs but also the activity of another force – the common people so long idolized by the extreme populism (\textit{narodnichestvo}) whose “illusions,” in his view, had been entirely “shattered” by the barbarity of the revolution.\textsuperscript{484} Even the more practically-minded Struve declared that the problems of the old order were rooted not in political

\textsuperscript{480} Struve, “Historical Meaning,” 203, 215.
\textsuperscript{481} Bulgakov, “Feast of the Gods,” 66.
\textsuperscript{482} Berdiaev, “Specters,” 40, 33.
\textsuperscript{483} Berdiaev, “Specters,” 36.
\textsuperscript{484} Berdiaev, “Specters,” 48.
technicalities but in “but in the temper of the people, or in the entire social environment,” and Frank charged the revolution had demonstrated that “good and evil in national life” depend not on “political forms” but on “the vital moral spirit of the people.” Assessments of the division of responsibility between the intelligentsia and the people varied, with Struve emphasizing the latter and Frank the former. Nonetheless, both saw the revolution as a confused interaction between intelligentsia ideas and popular passions reminiscent of that between Smerdiakov and Ivan; in Frank’s eyes socialist ideals allowed “the consecration of base profit motives with the moral pathos of nobility” at the popular level, while Struve charged that “the masses do not accept, nor understand, nor are able to understand, the constructive goal of socialism but, on the other hand, greedily apprehend and enthusiastically apply the destructive means.” Bulgakov, emphasizing the intelligentsia’s nihilism rather than its socialism, argued through one of his characters that revolutionary violence was intimately linked towards the preaching of destruction and amorality, for “the people has been told that it commits the most natural deed, that it is right in plundering and murdering.” Despite their awareness that the revolution of 1918 was more than just an “intelligentsia” revolution, they could not help seeing the echoes of the nihilism they had long decried in the orgy of violence which surrounded them.

485 Struve, “Historical Meaning,” 204-205.
487 Struve went so far as to argue that in the events of 1917-1918 “ideas played the role of a chance decoration, an ornamental overlay, on destructive instincts and passions”; in the revolution one saw the awakening of “anti-cultural and bestial forces that slumbered in the masses” (Struve, “Historical Meaning,” 205, 213). Frank, on the other hand, criticized politicians “who, in their programs and their mode of action, deal with some kind of imagined, ideal people, and not with the people as it really exists” and questioned how the people could conceivably have developed a positive faith based on confused intelligentsia slogans of “class hatred and envy” (Frank, “De Profundis,” 221, 223). Bulgakov offered a somewhat ironic take on the perceptions vs. reality of the Russian people in the eyes of not only the old atheist-materialistic intelligentsia but also the new religious intelligentsia of which he was, for a time, a part: one character one claims “the people, in its higher self-consciousness, is the body of the Church, the clan of the holy, the kingdom of holiness; but, in its fall, it is the revolutionary mob”; which a more cynical observer rephrases to note, “one moment they are crusaders, and the next, beasts!” (Bulgakov, “Feast of the Gods,” 69-70, 73).
Thus the four men turned once again to the baleful ideology which they believed had helped to poison the national climate and unloose the negative passions of the people. Its disregard for spiritual culture once again became a subject for criticism, this time however with greater focus on culture’s links to the nation. Frank and Struve, having thoroughly recanted of their earlier economic prescriptions, compared socialism’s focus on economic class unfavorably with culturally-based nationalism, viewing the latter as a locus for the embodiment of absolute values which class as a purely material category could never touch. For Frank, the socialist idea possessed an “anti-national, anti-state, and purely destructive essence,” which was “preconditioned by its materialism, by its denial of the only truly creative and unifying forces of society, namely, the organic inner spiritual forces of social existence.” Struve developed this point at length, contrasting the socialist ideal, which he saw as based on hatred and rooted in the “meager social and economic content” of class, with nationality, which unites people through shared ownership of “that great and imperishable wealth which is possessed by any member and participant in the nation, and which, in essence, comprises the very concept of the nation.”

Berdiaev, though less critical of socialism as such than Struve or Frank (his political views, at least with regard to questions of economic distribution, remained to the left of theirs from this point onwards) showed a similar concern with this “great and imperishable wealth” by his repeated criticism of the intelligentsia’s hostility to culture. A thread of suspicion towards internationalism also ran through Iz Glubiny. Frank listed “anti-patriotic internationalism” as a basic flaws of the socialist ideology; Berdiaev contended that “all our internationalism received an injection of Smerdiakov”; Struve charged “militant class internationalism” with an inherent tendency to produce “the mood of civil war,” and Bulgakov’s characters ruminate on the danger

492 Struve, “Historical Meaning,” 216.
493 See Berdiaev, “Specters,” e.g. 49, 56.
of Russia’s excessive tendency towards importing foreign ideas and social forms.\textsuperscript{494} Several authors took care to distinguish between desirable and undesirable internationalism,\textsuperscript{495} but all were skeptical of the socialist form with its perceived hostility to national culture.

Struve and Frank most thoroughly developed the idea of a positive, spiritual, and cultural nationalism to stand against materially-based internationalism; both their visions carried strong echoes of the Romantic idea of each nation as a bearer of particular aspects of the universal good. Struve called for Russians to rally around “the loving, conscious creation of a national culture,” which could become “a healing and organizing force.” While “[n]either the class interests of the international proletariat, nor any political or social forms (for example, republic, commune, socialism) may lay claim to any recognition of higher ideals or values,” national culture could claim a “spiritual content whose significance and meaning goes beyond any class frameworks and surpasses any political and social forms.”\textsuperscript{496} Frank sought a “rebirth of the Slavophile dream of an organic development of a spiritual and social culture out of the deep historical roots of the national, religious, and social understanding of life”; such a vision would acknowledge “the spiritual bases of social existence,”\textsuperscript{497} which revolutionary socialism with its emphasis on material factors ignored. Such a culturally-oriented approach to national life would thus evolve naturally from the spiritual content of the people, excluding the “worship of any particular political and social forms” (against which Vekhi had also warned).\textsuperscript{498} The latter, in Frank’s view, was responsible for breeding a “hatred for living persons and romantic idealization


\textsuperscript{495} Bulgakov’s mystical Refugee declares the lack of Russian nationalism to be a sign of the people’s “universal consciousness,” which somewhat paradoxically made Russia unique among nations; Struve contrasted the destructive internationalism of Bolshevism with the peaceful universalism of Christianity (Bulgakov, “Feast of the Gods,” 88; Struve, “Historical Meaning,” 217).

\textsuperscript{496} Struve, “Historical Meaning,” 216-217.

\textsuperscript{497} Frank, “De Profundis,” 233.

\textsuperscript{498} Struve, “Historical Meaning,” 217.
of abstract political forms and parties” with disastrous consequences. Instead of forcing change from above, elites should seek to change Russian life “only through organic re-education” and respect the “genuine ideal of democracy, seen as the inner founding of social relations and political structure on the vital spirit, concrete needs, and ideal strivings of the people.” Given his disappointment with the termination of the February revolution, Frank’s words surely to a certain extent reflect his anger at the Bolsheviks’ assumption of dictatorial power, which had revealed the ruling faction of Social Democrats were entirely unconcerned with democracy insofar as the term entailed responsiveness to the people’s wishes.

The second theme which figured particularly prominently in Depths’ criticism of the intelligentsia and aspirations for the national future alike was the question of religion. Berdiaev traced many of the sins of the intelligentsia to its atheism, which he believed led its members to believe they could “correct the design of God for man and the world”; he saw the desire to do so by bringing about forced happiness as “the temptation of Antichrist.” He also contrasted the Tolstoyan rejection of “the individual” and of “all superpersonal value” in order to ensure “a happy animal life for all,” a motive he also attributed to the revolutionaries, with “the love of people in Christ,” which meant “an infinitely profound, penetrating affirmation of any human image in God.” Lack of appreciation for the spiritual foundations of life thus prevented a proper respect for free will, for ideals, and for people, who could be understood properly only if one acknowledged their roots in the divine. Frank mourned the absence of a developed religious consciousness in Russia as a factor that had prevented the formation of a creative moral worldview, one that would be conscious of higher values and engaged in life on the basis of

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500 Frank, “De Profundis,” 233-234. Bulgakov in his dialogue put forward a similar suggestion that Russia needed to develop “a personal, concrete state structure, linked with its soul,” through “an act of creation by all the people,” but it is frustratingly difficult to discern whether this represents its author’s genuine personal belief.
these values. In his view, as a result of the historical obscurantism and “degradation” of the
church, “Russian religious consciousness gradually retired from life and out of life: it studied and
taught how to endure and to suffer, but not how to struggle and create life.” National renewal
depended on disseminating knowledge of “the ennobling and enlightening consciousness of the
spiritual basis of life,” on a “creative manliness, based on a humble recognition of its dependence
on higher forces and its rootedness in them.” Even Struve cited Christianity as “the highest
form” of positive internationalism and invoked a historical appeal to preserve the Russian state
which opens with the words “May all of us be Orthodox Christians in love and unity.”

Bulgakov, who was himself ordained a priest in June 1918, a few months after
completing his essay for Iz Glubiny saw a renewal of the Russian Orthodox Church as the
country’s main hope. This hope was linked to the ongoing All-Russian Church Council, in which
Bulgakov was participating, with one of his characters (a Worldly Divine in whom
particularly strong echoes of Bulgakov’s own personality are evident) even suggesting that “one
can be cured of any skepticism regarding the fate of Russia by attending the sessions of the
Council.” The intelligentsia was to blame for its historic “persecution of the Church by silent
scorn, passive boycott, and that whole atmosphere of arrogant indifference with which it
surrounded the Church.” Nonetheless, the current predicament of the Church, faced with a new

504 Bulgakov, “Autobiographical Notes,” 6-8. The changed intellectual climate of the 1910s notwithstanding,
Bulgakov recalls that such a decision for someone of his social position (a Moscow University professor) “was
scandalous, eccentric, and certainly meant estranging oneself from enlightened society” (6). He lists Struve and
Berdiaev among his friends present at the ceremony.
505 The Church Council of August 1917-September 1918, the first convened since the time of Peter the Great, sought
to reform the Church in accordance with the principle of sobornost’ (a fully accurate translation of this term is
probably impossible, but it implied something of a free harmony among members as opposed to the formal
hierarchy of the Petrine Church structure.) The Council included over five hundred members from both laity and
clergy at the time of its opening; it represented the culmination of hopes for a change in the position of the church
dating at least back to the meetings of the first Religious-Philosophical Society in 1901. Having previously
entertained hopes of political influence to ensure compliance with Christian principles, it became openly hostile to
the Bolshevik government in January 1918 (Evtuhov, Cross and the Sickle, 191-228).
government explicitly hostile to faith, was a chance for reconciliation between the Church and its longstanding enemies among the intelligentsia since “now, fate has led the Church and the intelligentsia into a state of common persecution by the Bolsheviks.”

Moreover, the advent of the Council and the end of the autocratic order meant that the Church (he believed) could no longer remain its former state-serving, obscurantist self: “[a]lthough persecuted, the Russian Church is now free.” In a new chance for the Church to operate in accordance with the moral principles and collective will of its members as opposed to the dictates of political expediency, he saw hope despite the surety of grave physical hardship. At the conclusion of his dialogue all the participants, save only the Westernized diplomat, find comfort in their shared Orthodox faith, linked to a mystical assurance that “we need not fear for Russia in the final, and only important, ultimate sense, for Russia is saved – by the power of the mother of God.”

Berdiaev’s essay, though both national and religious in tone, is less clearly directed towards national or religious prescriptions than any of the other three. However, his general alienation from worldly affairs notwithstanding, he actually offered the loudest protests against the incipient tyranny as well as the destructive essence of the revolution, as for instance in his lament that that “the old autocracy is no more, but despotism still rules in Russia, and there is still no respect for man, for human worth, or for human rights.” In his criticism of the intelligentsia he attacked its tendency towards “shame of one’s own opinion” and its “infernal passion for universal leveling” as assaults against the personality. Returning to the original idealist theme of individual development in accordance with moral values, he linked what he saw as “the undeveloped and unexpressed nature of the human personality in Russia” and “repression

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of the human image” to a lack of room for personal moral development, evidenced by bribery and other forms of ignoble behavior.\textsuperscript{512} Yet Berdiaev’s contribution, while highly interesting insofar as it looked at the realization of absolute values on the personal level where his co-contributors focused on the nation or the church, is also highly confused in its subsequent discussion of apocalypticism and nihilism. Indeed, though Berdiaev invoked Smerdjakov’s query “why are you so upset about it now” in order to chastise the nihilist-materialist intelligentsia, his rather contradictory statements in \textit{Depths} and \textit{Meaning} make it difficult not to pose the same question to Berdiaev himself. Having declared nihilism to be the reverse side of apocalypticism and acknowledged that the two “easily transform into one another,” he made statements such as “the Russian man may commit a nihilistic pogrom just as easily as an apocalyptic one,”\textsuperscript{513} which certainly raise the question of whether Berdiaev would respond more favorably to butchery in the name of the genuine apocalypse rather than a nihilistic imitation. Despite its many striking observations, Berdiaev’s essay appears to be a case in which his aphorisms have gotten the better of any regard for logical consistency. He issued perhaps the most damning indictment of apocalypticism in the symposium when he stated that “[d]enial of the rights of the relative, that is denial of all of life’s multifacetedness and of all the stages of history, in the final analysis, departs from the sources of absolute life, from the absolute spirit” and lauded the apostle Paul for taking Christianity “into the flow of universal history by admitting and consecrating the truth of relative stages.” Nonetheless, after decrying revolutionary maximalism for its hostility to culture and even citing the tendency “to experience everything transcendentally, but not immanently” as no less than “an indication of insufficient spiritual maturity,” he insisted that a more positive “apocalyptic consciousness” could be recovered once cleansed of its nihilistic coloring –

\textsuperscript{512} Berdiaev, “Specters,” 38-40.  
\textsuperscript{513} Berdiaev, “Specters,” 42.
notwithstanding the fact that the apocalypticism’s signature characteristic is its disdain for the relative, its scorn for the historical world which, in Berdiaev’s own terms, “is hierarchical, it consists entirely of stages, it is complicated and many-faceted.”\textsuperscript{514} While of a kind with the other three essays in its concern for people and their spiritual values in the midst of events that seemed purely driven by material interest and the establishment of new, external social forms, Berdiaev’s contribution thus seems to partially retract its most trenchant criticism of the intelligentsia’s disregard for the embodiment of good within the stages of historical life.

The tone of “Out of the Depths” strongly reflects the environment in which it was written. While \textit{Vekhi} came four years after the revolution of 1905 and its authors were able to look back with some distance on what they believed to be the intellectual factors behind the violence of that year, “Depths” was written in a period during which Russia itself appeared to be on the verge of disintegration. Hence it is unsurprising that the symposium’s most resonant theme should be horror at not the totalitarian impulses, but the sheer destructiveness of the revolution. Its authors looked for an explanation for what seemed a catastrophe of Biblical proportions rather than for a multidimensional assessment of philosophical flaws of the sort provided in \textit{Vekhi}. In addition to its suppression by contemporary authorities, these factors help explain why \textit{Depths} has not attracted the same attention from historians as \textit{Vekhi}; while its warning about the destructive essence of an effort to at once abolish the political, economic, and cultural legacy of the past was certainly apt, some of its analysis, sensible at the time, was quite simply wrong. Socialism, in the process of converting itself from a revolutionary movement to a governing ideology while Struve and Frank were writing, proved to have rather the opposite of an “anti-state essence” once it had consolidated its power, and Bolshevik rule proved far harsher for the Orthodox Church than Bulgakov likely imagined. Moreover, faced with the prospect of

\textsuperscript{514} Berdiaev, “Specters,” 58-61.
national disintegration, even the two self-styled Westerners of the previous decade\textsuperscript{515} began to express a distinctly Slavophile sensibility. In their search for a national rallying point, all but Berdiaev moved away from the focus on individual persons that made Problems so useful as a defense of liberalism and which lent Vekhi’s critique much of its sting.

Nonetheless, the final symposium’s outlook in several regards represents the culmination of the intellectual journey four of its authors had made over the previous decades. Convinced of the supreme importance of the human spirit in its communion with the transcendent, they appealed to their readers to rediscover the latter through faith; convinced of the value of culture as the embodiment of these values, they sought its preservation in the face of a regime which planned the wholesale destruction of the past in the name of the future. The emphasis of each individual contribution on one or two particular loci of moral worth (nation, culture, the Church, or the person) also highlights each author’s individual areas of concern – even while all remained convinced that value as such, embodied to a certain extent in each of these entities, is transcendentally rooted and cannot be subordinated to political formulas. The focus of Iz Glubiny thus further suggests that the uniting aspect of their challenge to the radical intelligentsia was not that of individualism vs. collectivism or monism vs. pluralism (on which questions they were both divided and inconsistent). Rather, it was their faith in absolute values, understood first as abstract ideals and later as the properties of God, as transcendentally existing values accessible to the human conscience, and to which man owed his first allegiance, before that which he gave to any political or social goals. In short, it was the insistence that the convictions of the individual human conscience, as well as the manifestation of these convictions in personal development and cultural creativity, have objective significance that no political goal, no \textit{dictat}, no conditions of expediency and no change of environment can negate.

\textsuperscript{515}Kelly, “Which Signposts?”, 156, 197 cites Struve as making this point.
The personal convictions of the four apostates from Marxism ensured that all of them faced exile. Struve’s political reputation forced him to flee Moscow upon Lenin’s promulgation of a “Red Terror” against counterrevolution in August 1918; he sought the assistance of friends who arranged to smuggle him out of the country, whereupon he joined the White movement.\textsuperscript{516} Berdiaev, with the assistance of Frank, managed to run a Free Academy of Spiritual Culture (founded in the spring of 1919) until August 1922, when a decision by Communist leaders to deal with the “bourgeois-democratic intelligentsia” led to both their arrests and subsequent expulsion.\textsuperscript{517} Bulgakov lost his teaching post in Moscow, took a new one in a region outside Bolshevik control, and was expelled from that one as well upon Bolshevik seizure of the city before suffering deportation along with Berdiaev and Frank.\textsuperscript{518} All eventually ended up in emigration moving among various European cities where all continued their scholarly activity and the latter three, particularly Berdiaev, became known for their religious philosophy.

\textit{Out of the Depths} was left in storage as its authors realized the impossibility of circulating it in the tightening political climate, and for the most part it remained inaccessible in Russia, though it made a brief appearance during the March 1921 Kronstadt sailors’ mutiny.\textsuperscript{519} \textit{Vekhi}, which could not be made to vanish so easily given the controversy which surrounded it at the time, received the expected opprobrium from Soviet historians but also managed to reach the attention of dissidents.\textsuperscript{520} In 1974 the exiled dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn published his own symposium, with contributions from in-country dissidents, entitled \textit{From Under the Rubble} (Russian: \textit{Iz Pod Glyn}) in which he declared that “\textit{Vekhi} today still seems to us to have been a

\textsuperscript{516} Pipes, \textit{Liberal on the Left}, 259-268. The Whites were the Bolsheviks’ military opponents in the brutal Russian Civil War of 1918-1921; their members included a broad assortment of genuine reactionaries, liberal opponents of the Revolution, and every political gradation between.


\textsuperscript{518} Evtuhov, \textit{Cross and the Sickle}, 230-231.

\textsuperscript{519} Woehrlin, Introduction to \textit{Depths}, xxiii-xxiv. Berdiaev smuggled a copy out with him upon his journey into exile, and a Soviet book agency, presumably in error, actually sent a copy to a Dutch professor upon request in the 1930s.

\textsuperscript{520} Shatz and Zimmerman, Introduction to \textit{Vekhi}, xxvii-xxviii.
vision of the future.” As was the case with the prerevolutionary symposia discussed above, not all of the perspectives presented in Solzhenitsyn’s collection are sympathetic to liberal democracy; indeed, in this writer’s opinion, some entirely fail to present a practical remedy for the evils that they decry. Yet its existence nonetheless serves as a reminder that, as Berdiaev observed in a slightly different historical context, “in the autocratic police state spiritual culture is contraband; by its existence it only shows that there is a factual limit to the political repression of even the strongest and most reactionary government, that the spirit cannot be finally extinguished, that it will somehow rise and declare its rights.”


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