

## Conclusion

We saw at the beginning of our study that even as he embarked on his pursuit of philosophy Solov'ëv hoped to play a larger role in the spiritual and intellectual life of his country than that typically associated with a university professor. For an indeterminate period shortly before and after obtaining his *magister's* degree, he saw himself as Jurkevich's philosophical heir with the proviso that he would be far more effective in combating the widely held belief in scientific methodology as the unique avenue to truth and knowledge. This message was, then, to spread in some ill-defined manner through not just academia but society at large a revived Orthodox Christianity. Solov'ëv believed that with his early work he had shown that all possible philosophical directions had been exhausted. This was important in that in the modern era the secular philosophies had opposed the promulgation of this religious revival. The path now lay open. However, in his own time a new obstruction, indeed a new competitor, had emerged. The Western scientific aspect of positivism in its various forms obstructed what Solov'ëv saw as the path forward and needed to be removed. That Solov'ëv never at this time saw himself as intrinsically part of the Western philosophical tradition and sharing its principal concerns is clear not just from the content of his early writings, particularly *The Crisis of Western Philosophy*, but also from his choice of topics, his writing style and his sheer neglect of contemporary scholarship, particularly Western but also Russian. He saw *The Crisis* as meant not solely for an academic elite, but also for a broader educated public willing to be convinced and participate in this religious awakening. Solov'ëv came to philosophy not to solve its traditional problems but, in an Hegelian manner, to supersede them. Make no mistake, though, he was addressing first and foremost a *Russian* audience during these early years – arguably throughout his literary career. In effect, he hoped to transform his own country by showing it the fruitlessness of its current philosophical and religious path: crude scientism in philosophy and stagnant dogmatism in religion. This approach with Russia, thereby, serving as a beacon would guide other countries along the path to truth, goodness and beauty.

For Solov'ëv, the first step but by no means the last, then, in this plan was to obtain a professorship. Yet apparently without fully realizing even the basic necessary steps

to achieve a university position – this despite his own father holding one – Solov'ëv undertook a number of highly unconventional moves that surely could not have endeared him to those in a position to help him achieve his goal. His initial research program included the examination of ancient Gnostic texts. This, though odd, was not without precedent. However, Solov'ëv went not to German universities, as had Vladislavlev and was usual at the time, to acquaint himself with the latest developments and investigations in philosophy, but to England and not even the universities there. Instead, he isolated himself in the British Museum's library. After this aborted study-period, his tourism within Europe and in particular his stay in Egypt surely must have sounded frivolous and, if scarce government funds were used, alarming, perhaps even outrageous. All of this could hardly have won him supporters within academic circles. His brief involvement upon his return to Russia in academic politics at Moscow University set him against most of his colleagues, even his own father, and earned him few plaudits there. He did at first have supporters outside or on the periphery of the relatively small university circle, though these too distanced themselves when he evoked what they viewed as unusual and unacceptable stances. We saw, for example, the Church's reluctance to publish his *Lectures on Divine Humanity* as soon as he veered in the direction of unorthodox beliefs. That he finally abandoned all hope for a professorship in both Moscow and St. Petersburg shows merely that on some level he finally recognized its futility.

Solov'ëv's war on Comtean positivism, even when coupled with assistance from other, notably clerical, quarters, also proved pointless if viewed in the short term. The positivist rejection of metaphysics could not, of course, find a receptive audience among those at Russia's theological institutions, and so Solov'ëv's efforts in this regard were unnecessary, even superfluous. However, his espousal of a metaphysical all-unity with its subtle pantheistic implications, however adamantly he denied them, prevented any embrace of his system among the first estate. Given the sharp and implacable divergence of his philosophical stand from positivism, it comes as no surprise that his criticism fell initially on deaf ears within Russia's educated society, the radical intelligentsia most of all. The basic outlines of Comte's positivism, a dismissal of metaphysics and a belief in a progressive philosophy of history through stages leading to the apotheosis of natural science, continued to hold sway even in the philological and juridical faculties through the 1880s in Moscow.<sup>1</sup>

With his hopes of a highly visible professorship in either Moscow or St. Petersburg dashed and with it the transformation of Russia's religious consciousness by way of the classroom and academic publications, Solov'ëv in the early 1880s sought to bring about such a change through the role of a public intellectual. Although his one-sided struggle against positivism had failed to win immediate and decisive battles, his efforts did eventually bear fruit among a receptive, though, selective, audience in the younger generation and the following one – some within the philosophical community and some within the poetic. Like the early Solov'ëv, his successors emphasized grand schemes over detailed philosophical analysis.

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<sup>1</sup>Putnam 1977: 29.

We need not search long and hard to find evidence of the early Solov'ëv's influence even if his messianic hopes proved to be delusive. True, many, indeed most, of these disciples invoked Kant's name as he did, but their Kant was not the Kant of the "First Critique." Few exhibited any interest in the natural sciences, particularly the latest developments in theoretical physics. Certainly none had the patience to probe the intricacies of the "Transcendental Deduction," and none pondered over any perceived deficiencies in Kant's "Refutation of Idealism." Instead, some – if they gave it any thought at all – simply accepted, as it were, from the early Solov'ëv the approach that the only avenue out of a Cartesian skepticism was ultimately a sheer faith allegedly grounded in a metaphysical intuition, thereby revealing their debt to Solov'ëv's fideism. For example, both the major Russian neo-Kantian Aleksandr Vvedenskij, Vladislavlev's successor at St. Petersburg University, and Sergej Trubeckoj, a professor at Moscow University and a long-time friend of Solov'ëv's, hailed faith as a major factor in cognition: "We must admit," Trubeckoj remarked, "that a *recognition* of the reality of external appearances and in particular of those independent living entities for which these appearances exist also independently of us – the recognition of such a reality has a valid logical foundation neither in our senses, taken by themselves, nor in our *abstract* thinking: it is an act of faith – a third factor in our cognition. That which is, consequently, is determined to be not just an object of the senses and of thought, but also *an object of faith*."<sup>2</sup> Surely, we cannot simply assume the "faith" that Trubeckoj mentions here and in many, many other passages is analogous, let alone equivalent, to religious belief. Nevertheless, if these Russian philosophers found it so easy to appeal to a vaguely described "faith" to escape a Cartesian solipsism, how much easier must it be to appeal to "faith," i.e., a non-empirical faculty, to posit the existence of God, immortality and the soul. Indeed, Trubeckoj himself remarks that there is no "impassable abyss" between the two "faiths," since both have the same object, that which is.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Vvedenskij proclaimed that to accept the existence of a non-subjective world as truly existing can only be done on the basis of an "unprovable faith."<sup>4</sup>

And then there were some such as Lev Lopatin, a close friend of Solov'ëv's since childhood, who also gave far more prominence to the role of faith at the expense of reason than that found in all mainstream Western philosophical systems. In addition, it can be hard to distinguish Lopatin's position from pantheism in that he, like Solov'ëv in the *Critique of Abstract Principles*, held that everything is contained in, or an attribute of, God.<sup>5</sup> Lopatin also shared other tenets with the early Solov'ëv. That Lopatin, and others for that matter, failed to follow Solov'ëv's later philosophical trajectory is clear from a prominent disagreement that erupted between the two concerning the latter's explicit denial of the substantiality of the ego cogito, a position that Lopatin could not abide. Since everything is in God and, therefore,

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<sup>2</sup>Trubeckoj 1994: 651.

<sup>3</sup>Trubeckoj 1994: 668.

<sup>4</sup>Vvedenskij 1917: 319.

<sup>5</sup>Lopatin 1911. vol. 1: 407.

a part of God, it comes as no surprise that something of God is in everything. God as spirit means everything is to some extent spiritual. For Lopatin, this deduction took the form of a panpsychism in which everything is an expression of a “free” force moving it along towards a teleological goal.

Another aspect of this influence – arguably its most interesting – revealed itself in the anti-scientism of many of those who came to philosophical maturity in the first two decades following Solov’ëv’s death. Particularly notable in this regard was Nikolaj Berdjaev, who, like Solov’ëv, opposed applying scientific methods outside the scientific realm. Far more adamantly than Solov’ëv, Berdjaev rejected reason, logic and systemization. He viewed science as providing only relative information, whereas the metaphysics provided by his subjective, intuitionist thinking provided values. In the age-old controversy between faith and reason, Berdjaev squarely positioned himself on the side of the former.

There were others within Russian philosophy who came under Solov’ëv’s spell, so many in fact that the early Solov’ëv’s philosophy exerted the dominant influence on the way in which Russian philosophy was conducted until it was silenced with the consolidation of the Bolshevik regime. Certainly, it would not be an exaggeration to say that Solov’ëv’s place in his country’s intellectual history is univocal, that he “started a new philosophical tradition in Russian thought.”<sup>6</sup> However, Solov’ëv’s influence was also quite pronounced among an emerging artistic group, the symbolists Aleksandr Blok, Andrej Belyj, Georgij Chulkov and of course Solov’ëv’s own nephew Sergej.<sup>7</sup> What they saw in Solov’ëv’s mystical compositions naturally was what each wished to see, but there genuinely was much to inspire them. What interested them most in Solov’ëv was not the very elements of his philosophy we have been examining here, but his writings on Sophia, his poetry and his account of a future apocalypse. Such was the interest in and influence of the symbolists’ reading of Solov’ëv that even today do we rarely see Solov’ëv’s thought presented not bearing the stamp of their concerns.<sup>8</sup>

Make no mistake, though, Solov’ëv, for his part, was not consistently anti-scientistic and certainly not opposed to using reason when it suited his needs even at the time of his “Philosophical Principles.” Berdjaev famously contrasted the “day” Solov’ëv with the “night” Solov’ëv.<sup>9</sup> There is much to be said in support of this, provided it is understood that the “night” Solov’ëv, Solov’ëv the mystic and irrationalist, appears not only in his poetry but is intermingled with the “day” Solov’ëv to various

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<sup>6</sup>Evlampiev 2003: 77.

<sup>7</sup>Smith correctly notes: “Symbolism, sophiology, neo-idealism, humanism, neo-Leibnizianism, and many others, all claimed him as their own, and developed his ideas in directions that he could barely have foreseen.” Smith 2011: 277.

<sup>8</sup>It is difficult to disagree with Kornblatt who writes: “What is more curious is that we, to this day, tend to read Solov’ëv through the symbolists’ eyes showing interest in his ethics and social philosophy only with difficulty.” Kornblatt 1996: 70. For a more complete depiction of the symbolists’ debt to Solov’ëv, see Cioran 1977: 89–120.

<sup>9</sup>Berdjaev 1911: 357.

degrees even in his early philosophical writings. In these, as Berdjaev recognized, “rational philosophy and rational theology predominate over the mystical.”<sup>10</sup>

Why did Russian philosophers, particularly Solov’ev, appeal to an explicitly religious outlook with metaphysical answers with an abandonment of reason and empirical science? Just what was the philosophical basis for their rejection of positivism? What was it in positivism that alarmed them? Was there a neglected alternative between sheer fideism and scientism both as a general outlook as well as in terms of questions Solov’ev posed? Finally, even if we regard Solov’ev’s project with its introduction of some intellectual intuition and an all-unity as misguided and unnecessary, does this mean it is an unmitigated failure and his philosophical thought delusional?

Already in *The Crisis*, Solov’ev indicated that his opposition to modern philosophy stemmed from its reliance on *personal* reason. Such philosophy is the handiwork of *separate* individuals.<sup>11</sup> Given his criticism of abstraction, of abstract principles, this alone would be sufficient to condemn it. However, the underlying basis for this condemnation is the subjectivism and the relativism he sees entailed by it. Solov’ev, on the same pages, claims that in true art artists relinquish their individuality and utilize their “ecstatic inspiration.” The less of the personal element, the greater is the artistic worth of the creation. The same holds for philosophy: What the early Solov’ev ultimately fears is the relinquishing of objective truth, positivism being the most recent and most consistent expression of this relativism. “The basic principle, or essence, of positivism consists in the fact that, besides observable phenomena as external facts, nothing exists for us, and that the relative knowledge of these phenomena therefore constitutes the sole actual content of human consciousness.”<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, Solov’ev was no seeker of either a philosophically-informed natural science or a scientifically-informed philosophy. With characteristic youthful impatience, he could brook no excuse to wait for science’s gradual asymptotic approach to objectivity when religious belief presented itself as having obtained truth from the outset and without effort. In this, he hastily dismissed Kant’s lesson that objectivity is secured by *a priori* laws characterized by universality and necessity. In fact, as we saw when discussing *The Crisis* Solov’ev did not even see this “lesson,” being indebted as he was throughout his early writings to an interpretation of Kant drawn primarily from Schopenhauer. Furthermore, despite being enamored with Plato, Solov’ev forgot Plato’s position, which taught that mathematics provides just those qualities and provides the basis of pure natural science. Such a strategy avoids the relativism inherent in psychologism and a psychological reading of Kant’s “First Critique.” The point, though, is that if we take Kant’s concern for the *a priori* conditions of the possibility of experience to mean the possibility of natural science, i.e., “experience” to be understood as physics, we eliminate a physiological or psychological interpretation of our philosophical investigations. We dispense

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<sup>10</sup>Berdjaev 1911: 356.

<sup>11</sup>Solovyov 1996: 12 and 13; PSS, vol. 1: 39 and 40.

<sup>12</sup>Solovyov 1996: 167; PSS, vol. 1: 160.

thereby with not only talk of the psychophysical structure of the cognizing subject but also of the substantiality of that subject and come to a common ground though not a full concurrence with the later Solov'ëv. To the detriment of Russian philosophy, the early Solov'ëv clearly did not take this approach nor did his disciples.

Rather than an outright appeal at the start to a religiously-inspired faith, we saw in our discussion of *The Crisis* that Solov'ëv portrayed the history of modern philosophy as a *rational*, albeit dialectical, process culminating after having exhausted all of its logically possible options in the abandonment of "abstract formalism" and a turn to what we have to presume is to Solov'ëv's mind the only *rational* recourse, namely metaphysics. Not only does Solov'ëv not abjure reason but he upholds the role of universal forms in experience and the need to initiate an ontology of reality with a description of it as given in consciousness. Such bald proclamations would certainly not sound alarming to the student of twentieth century European thought.

Certainly, there is a great deal in Solov'ëv's philosophy that must be discarded as plainly groundless and fanciful. It is to his credit, however, to have recognized at an early age both the problematic status of Kant's concept of an essentially uncognizable thing in itself and our apparently quintessential human need for metaphysics. Regrettably, he lacked tenacity and the perseverance to provide extended treatments of these topics. Deeply troubled by a fear of relativism and ultimately of skepticism, Solov'ëv held that all knowledge in the final analysis rests on an acceptance of some metaphysical tenets. Yet he recognized that although none of the modern philosophies alone was satisfactory each had some merit that could not be discounted. While his proposed solution, an integration of all empirical experience, reason and metaphysics that he called "integral knowledge" remained an unrealized project, indeed a dismal failure, the aspiration must be deemed meritorious.

In the realm of ethical and political theory, Chicherin and subsequently others rightly pointed out the deficiencies and superficiality in Solov'ëv's pronouncements. Nonetheless, in upholding the spirit of Kant's approach tempered by the realization that our conscience has only a regulative but no positive function, Solov'ëv took a step beyond Kant in the direction of levelheadedness. Furthermore, Solov'ëv recognized that individual moral saintliness requires a social system that cooperates to bring this about. Hence, the project to make individuals moral must be accompanied by one aimed at society as well, for if the latter remains incomplete so will the former. We should also not forget Solov'ëv's pioneering belief in including the animal kingdom within the moral sphere, that animals should not simply be treated as means to human ends.

Arguably of greatest philosophical significance, however, is Solov'ëv's concern with objectivity, i.e., with the sense of objectivity that the intentional objects of our perception have. On what basis do we say that the perceived objects of my senses exist independently of our sensations of them? Solov'ëv persisted with this question through his early years thereby demonstrating the centrality of this issue in his philosophy. We saw that he recognized that the objectification of the intentional object of consciousness, that it temporally endures apart from consciousness, cannot be due to sense data, or at least not alone. It must be the result of some other, independent activity on the part of the subject. In his most extensive treatment of this

topic, such as it was, he ascribed the function in his *Critique* first to the imagination and also then to faith without specifying exactly how either can achieve such sense bestowal. Nevertheless, Solov'ëv is to be applauded for recognizing the issue despite its obvious shortcomings. Not the least of these shortcomings is that by relying on imagination and/or faith, Solov'ëv opens himself to the charge of subjectivism, which he surely would have disavowed upon reflection. He apparently did not realize that the objectivity of mathematical truths and those of contingent facts concerning the world are different.

We have pointed out a number of other features in Solov'ëv's thought that would become prominent concerns in European philosophy in the years to come, such as the intentionality of consciousness and, of course, his opposition to any form of reductionism, which was so characteristic of the positivism of his day. Other scholars have indicated, however fancifully, additional similarities.<sup>13</sup> There can be little dispute, though, that in spite of all this, in spite of numerous glimmers of genuine philosophical insight, Solov'ëv passed smugly and without hesitation into the realm of metaphysics and concomitantly introduced ambiguities and contradictions. As with any philosophical thought from the past, the job in the present is to retrieve its living kernel, illuminating that kernel with others from the present as well as the past, thereby shedding light on today's questions and concerns. The task of salvaging the rational from the irrational in Solov'ëv's thought still awaits us, though the door is now open.

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<sup>13</sup> Chubarov sees several other common points between Solov'ëv and Husserl including a prescient "phenomenological reduction" and a doctrine of eidetic intuition in the former. If only this were true! In any case, many of Chubarov's other claims are well taken. See Chubarov 1998: 102–106.

# Appendix 1

## Comtean Positivism in Russia

In studying any philosopher, the ideas expressly opposed are often more illuminating than an investigation of the positive formative influences. In Solov'ëv's case, the paramount adversary, particularly during his early years, was Auguste Comte's intellectual progeny "positivism," with its rejection of metaphysics and its emphasis on natural science as the paradigm of human knowledge. Regrettably, we have scant information as to precisely why Solov'ëv chose to combat Comtean positivism and not, say, materialism – a more obvious target – so strongly in his *magister's* thesis. Was his opposition purely intellectually motivated, or was there more to it than that, something having to do with Comte's sociological views? Could it even be that Solov'ëv saw in Comte's attempted establishing of a new positivistic clergy, expressly based on a religious model, a threat to his own quasi-messianic ambitions? Whatever the case, he must have felt positivism loomed as a threat, a threat at least within Russia if not on the world stage. However, there are no polemics against any Russian positivists in Solov'ëv's early publications. This in itself is not surprising in that theses and dissertations were implicitly intended to raise the level of intellectual discourse in Russia vis-à-vis the West by engaging with it at a time when Russians themselves considered their level to be inferior. Although with measured qualification we can agree with Walicki that positivism played neither a dominant nor even a large role in Russian intellectual life at large at the time, by no means was it an unknown doctrine, that it had no adherents, nor that it was uniformly dismissed.<sup>1</sup> What, then, was the position of Comtean positivism in Russia in the early 1870s, and was Solov'ëv alone in sensing a threat from it?

The first references in Russia to Comte occurred already in the 1840s by the literary critic Valerian Majkov (in 1845) and the economist Vladimir Miljutin

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<sup>1</sup> Walicki 1979: 349. More accurately, Poole remarks that positivism "was remarkably pervasive in Russia from the middle of the nineteenth century." Poole 1999: 319–320.

(in 1847).<sup>2</sup> However, it was only in the comparatively more relaxed atmosphere of the late 1850s and 1860s that Comtean positivism attracted widespread attention first among those on the political left, such as Dmitrij Pisarev, and then, as a reaction, in the early 1870s by critical scholars, broadly speaking on the right. Majkov (1823–1847), who studied in the law faculty at St. Petersburg University and was a close friend of the young Dostoyevsky's, in his first significant publication "Obshchestvennyye nauki v Rossii" ("The Social Sciences in Russia") from 1845 urged the development of a new critical analysis. This was to be a new independent discipline (*nauka*) concerned with society that he called a "philosophy of society" and "social philosophy," but, significantly, not "sociology."<sup>3</sup> Although much of the article is infused with the spirit of Comtean positivism, the founder of positivism is actually mentioned only once and then only in a footnote in the incomplete published version. Majkov's qualified sympathy with positivism stemmed from his opposition to the introduction of metaphysics into social theory. Unlike Belinskij, Majkov never embraced nor even was influenced by classical German Idealism. For Majkov, the Germans, presumably including Kant, constructed their systems without consulting the facts of reality. However, in a fragment only posthumously published Majkov clarified his stand that Comte's synthesis was ultimately disappointing.<sup>4</sup>

Belinskij's name hardly needs an introduction to the student of nineteenth century Russian cultural and intellectual history. Although arguably the most distinguished literary critic of the era, his interests were wide-ranging and included following developments in contemporary European philosophy. Unfortunately, his ignorance of German made him rely on others to provide summaries and translations from that language. Nevertheless, he remained at least for a time enthralled with Hegel, particularly his philosophy of history. And it is from this perspective that he viewed Comte, with whose ideas Belinskij could acquaint himself in the French press. Yet, he best summarized his attitude towards positivism in a letter dated 17 February 1847 to V. P. Botkin: "Comte is a remarkable man; but that is a far cry from saying he is the founder of a new philosophy! One needs genius for that, and there is not a trace of it in Comte. This man is a remarkable phenomenon as a reaction to theological interference in science, and an energetic, troublesome and disturbing reaction at that. Comte is a man rich in knowledge and of great intellect, but his intellect is dry. He lacks that verve which is essential to every kind of creativeness, even to a mathematician, if it be given him to push asunder the walls of science."<sup>5</sup>

Miljutin (1826–1855), who hailed from a distinguished family, – his uncle Pavel Kiselev was a reform-minded high government official during the reactionary

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<sup>2</sup>Radlov 1920: 20. In an early work on the Legal Populist Mikhajlovskij, one writer, S. P. Ranskij remarked in a footnote that "the first popularizer of the philosophy of Comte in Russia was V.A. Miljutin." He also remarks, though, that Miljutin's article had little influence on his readership. Ranskij 1901: 101 f.

<sup>3</sup>Majkov 1901: 6. Majkov's piece originally appeared in the new journal *Finskij Vestnik*, vol. 1, otd. IV, 1845, of which Majkov was the co-editor.

<sup>4</sup>Majkov 1901: 88.

<sup>5</sup>Belinsky 1948: 491.

regime of Tsar Nicholas I and his brother Dmitrij a long-serving Minister of War from 1861 to 1881 – studied at St. Petersburg University and received a *magister's* degree with a dissertation on the real-estate holdings of the Russian clergy. However, already in a series of articles published in 1847 Miljutin tipped his hand revealing his deep-seated sympathy with Comte's overall position. These were the first explicit exposition and defense of positivism in Russian literature. Of course, as an economist Miljutin had little to say concerning traditional philosophical issues, but he expressed virtually at the start his dissatisfaction with the contemporary state of the social sciences, believing, as did Comte, that they remained at the second, metaphysical stage of development.

To answer why the social sciences have developmentally lagged behind the natural sciences, Miljutin appealed to their respective objects, not their respective methodologies. All of the sciences utilize reason and observation. In political economics – Miljutin's primary concern – we seek general and unvarying laws just as in the other sciences. In the former, these laws explain how societies develop materially.<sup>6</sup> However, the complexity of social phenomena and their relative dependence on other phenomena make the emergence of positive scientificity in their study that much more difficult. There is also the issue that the social sciences lack the abundance and variety of phenomena that can be observed in the natural sciences.<sup>7</sup> Once and only once does Miljutin name the individual whose ideas he has been expounding, although he gives every indication that he wholeheartedly endorses them. Concerning the enterprise of reformulating political economics to emulate physics and chemistry, he writes: "There is nothing that could prevent the success of such an attempt. This is all the more so in that contemporary positive science in the person of one of its most remarkable representatives has succeeded in proving quite scientifically both the necessity and possibility of using the positive method for studying social facts."<sup>8</sup> And in the accompanying footnote he mentions Comte as this pioneer.

The intellectually quiescent 1850s was a period inhospitable to the dissemination of ideas that could be deemed irreligious, iconoclastic or liberal. Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the Crimean War, which witnessed Russia's disastrous performance on many fronts, the wellspring of socio-political ideas that had been seething burst forth at least temporarily with the relaxation of the censorship laws. The chief figure to emerge at this time as the voice of radicalism was the literary critic Nikolaj Chernyshevskij (1828–1889). Despite his exalted position in the Russian intellectual pantheon during the Soviet era, Chernyshevskij was by no means a philosopher in the technical sense. Yet as early as 1848 while still a student, he noted in a diary that he had been reading the first volume of Comte's *Cours de philosophie positive* the discussion in which of mathematics he found unintelligible. Nevertheless, he liked the opening sections dealing with positive philosophy in general. Whatever ardor he felt, however, was tempered with the passage of time. While still acknowledging

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<sup>6</sup>Miljutin 1946: 379.

<sup>7</sup>Miljutin 1946: 367.

<sup>8</sup>Miljutin 1946: 391.

Comte in 1860 as “one of the most ingenious men of our time,” Chernyshevskij remained averse to Comte’s initiating of a philosophical system, as he saw it, via mathematics and science.<sup>9</sup>

The most significant single exposition of Comte’s views in the 1860s stemmed from another young literary critic even more radical than Belinskij and Chernyshevskij, namely Dmitrij Pisarev. In his lengthy article, which appeared over four issues of the journal *Russkoe slovo* in 1865–1866, Pisarev hailed Comte as “one of the greatest thinkers of our century.”<sup>10</sup> Pisarev remarked that although in the course of the previous decade close attention has been paid to other European intellectual movements, Russian readers lack any knowledge of Comtean positivism. Hence, the need Pisarev felt for his present article. Obviously quite enamored with Comte’s three phases of historical development, he was favorably disposed to seeing social development as intimately connected with the accumulation of knowledge, particularly as manifested in the natural sciences. However, this did not entail any abrogation of human individuality and of the role played by those who are directly involved with the problems.<sup>11</sup> Nor did Pisarev’s overall estimation of Comte’s philosophy of history deter him from finding fault with it in specifics. In particular, he found positivism to have a defective account of moral development, according to which morality is quite independent of the economic conditions and other spheres of knowledge. Whereas Comte saw the principal task of morality in the systematic weakening of egoism, Pisarev held that the highest level of moral development will be reached with the understanding of rational egoism, with the attainment of the greatest knowledge and practical know-how.

We need not enter here into a discussion of whether Petr Lavrov (1823–1900) merits being designated as a “positivist.” However, as indisputably one of, if not the, most notable Populist figures in his era, Lavrov surely helped draw attention to Comte and positivism in general in 1860s Russia merely by discussing and referring to them in his own writings. Although he mentioned Comte already as early as 1859, this was only in passing, providing no basis upon which we can determine his familiarity with the Frenchman’s writings. Certainly Lavrov’s most detailed and noteworthy discussion of positivism prior to the time of Solov’ëv’s *Crisis* was a lengthy article that appeared in 1868. Lavrov already at this relatively early date emphasized the epochal significance of positivism by writing that it had many supporters among the intellectual elite in France and England. Lavrov was arguably best able to disseminate information about positivism in Russia, for unlike many others at that time he was well acquainted with contemporary philosophies through the works in their original languages, be they German, French or English. In this way, he saw that positivism was not simply the position of Comte nor even a French intellectual phenomenon. He recognized the contributions of others, particularly of Mill, Spencer and George Lewes. Lavrov’s understanding of positivism, therefore,

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<sup>9</sup> Chernyshevsky 1939–1953. vol. 1: 166. Chernyshevskij’s article originally appeared in 1860.

<sup>10</sup> Pisarev 1869. vol. 10: 1.

<sup>11</sup> Pisarev 1869. vol. 10: 93.

was sufficiently broad that he could say, whether justifiably or not, that it was his era expressed in thought.<sup>12</sup>

Notwithstanding his overall rather high estimation of positivism as a philosophical movement, Lavrov did express his misgivings and criticisms of it. For one thing, despite his esteem for the physical sciences he could not accept the positivist reductionism that attempted to translate subjective phenomena into purely objective terms. He also faulted positivism for its deficiencies in treating moral issues. This, in his view, stemmed in large part from Comte's own education in the sciences. Nevertheless, Lavrov applauded Comte's philosophy of history and its anti-metaphysical stand. German Idealism, too, sought the laws of nature and how history unfolded. The clear difference, though, lay in the latter's elevation of the religious and metaphysical above the scientific spirit and its achievements.<sup>13</sup>

Lavrov's fellow Populist, Nikolaj Mikhajlovskij (1842–1904), too, saw valuable features in positivism as he understood it, and in expressing these opinions he also helped disseminate positivism within Russia already during the late 1860s and early 1870s. Although sharply critical of certain facets of positivism – indeed many facets – Mikhajlovskij already in 1869 in one of his most famous essays, “Chto makoe progress?” (“What is Progress?”), held that its fundamental principles had received little recognition among educated people. Indeed, “a clarification of the fundamental principles of positive philosophy is, perhaps, at the present time, one of the most pressing concerns of the Russian reading public.”<sup>14</sup> These principles are that all human knowledge is ultimately based in experience and thus relative, that it is impossible to reach some “essence” of worldly things and that natural phenomena are law-governed.

In another essay from April 1870, Mikhajlovskij devoted considerable attention to Comte and positivism, writing that Comte had laid out the necessary conditions for genuinely scientific work. “This is why it is natural that all previous scientific work necessarily satisfied the demands of positive philosophy, for otherwise those works would not have been scientific.”<sup>15</sup> Of course, prior to Comte scientific investigators were not explicitly aware of how they were pursuing their work. In this sense, Comte merely stated what was implicit all along in scientific methodology, and thus positivism was not Comte's creation, his exclusive property, but a simple, though explicit, recognition of the scientific tradition.

Yet another literary figure at this time who shared many of the views expressed thus far was Sergej N. Juzhakov (1849–1910), who has regrettably received scant scholarly attention. In late 1872, he stated with Comte that “first, everything that is true of both inorganic and organic phenomena is true also of social phenomena;

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<sup>12</sup>Lavrov 1965. vol. 1: 586.

<sup>13</sup>Lavrov 1965. vol. 1: 592.

<sup>14</sup>Mikhajlovskij 1906. vol. 1: 24. Mikhajlovskij deserves arguably the somewhat dubious distinction as one of the most verbose figures in Russian intellectual history. Why say in a mere 10 words what you can say in 1,000?

<sup>15</sup>Mikhajlovskij 1906. vol. 4: 96.

second, that the general laws of life that hold wherever life is manifested are also true of social life; and thirdly, that physical and organic laws when manifested in society are influenced by a new series of conditions and agents. Therefore, they bear their own peculiar and special character.”<sup>16</sup>

Finally, we turn to arguably the most outstanding representative of positivism within Russia in the years immediately preceding Solov’ev’s *magister’s* thesis defense, a name we saw in connection with that defense – Vladimir V. Lesevich (1837–1905). Although his book *Opyt kriticheskogo issledovanija osnovonachal pozitivnoj filosofii* (*Attempt at a Critical Investigation of the Fundamental Principles of Positive Philosophy*) appeared only in 1877 and thus after that defense, Lesevich had already made a name for himself as a propagandist for positivism through a series of articles starting in 1868. In one of these, “Filosofija istorii na nauchoj pochve” [“Philosophy of History on a Scientific Basis”], he defended Comte’s position on history as the gradual development of the human outlook and linked progress with intellectual activity. Lesevich expressed his open admiration for the positivist belief in the three successive stages of human spiritual development.

In his next article, “Pozitivizm posle Konta” [“Positivism After Comte”], Lesevich, of course, discussed the contributions of others besides Comte to positivism as well as some of their disagreements with each other and with Comte. More than this, though, Lesevich wished to show that positivism was not simply the newest French philosophical fashion, that it was neither parochial nor ephemeral. Rather, it was international in scope, growing and spreading. In this way, he tried to make positivism more respectable and acceptable to his Russian audience. Lesevich also there reiterated his fundamental thesis that positivism essentially was the natural, inevitable and ultimate result of all previous human mental activity, i.e., of science. Therefore, despite being systematically enunciated by Comte and certain others, it is neither a personal expression of beliefs nor a matter of some individual creative insight. Its appearance was simply a matter of time and bound to be laid out. In a subsequent article published in December 1873, Lesevich reiterated his position that “positivism is the natural result of all previous conceptual work and the inevitable culmination of the intellectual development of society.”<sup>17</sup> With the advance of science and its popular dissemination, it is only natural that as people around the world anchor their very outlook in science rather than religion positivism too expands, gaining more and more adherents. Whereas his first articles on positivism stressed its philosophy of history, Lesevich now emphasized what he considered its inseparable link with science: “Positivism forms with science one indivisible whole.”<sup>18</sup> It is merely a philosophical or conceptual expression of the scientific outlook. Each science, such as astronomy and chemistry, exists in a concrete form, dealing with, say, our particular solar system and a particular set of chemicals, and an abstract

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<sup>16</sup> Juzhakov 1891, vol. 1: 4

<sup>17</sup> Lesevich 1873: 57. The major theme of this article is to show how ancient Greek philosophy was already inching towards positivism.

<sup>18</sup> Lesevich 1869: 27.

form, dealing with planetary bodies or chemical composition in general. In other words, an abstract science is the philosophy of that particular science. Abstract astronomy is the philosophy of astronomy, understood as a concrete science. The aggregate of these abstract sciences composes the system of positive philosophy, which is, therefore, the world-view consisting of all the philosophies of the sciences.

Unlike Solov'ëv, Lesevich rejected a notion of truth that spoke of an objective reality *an und für sich* apart from the cognizing subject. Truth is for him a conditional relation with validity serving as its criterion. Since we have no access to reality apart from observation and scientific techniques, no single phenomenon can be taken in complete isolation from others.

Although he wisely attempted to veil the political implications of his position, he found it difficult to resist the temptation to express, albeit cautiously, his convictions: Scientific laws may be discovered by an individual, but as laws of empirical phenomena their operation is for all to see. They are not to be taken on faith nor accepted by the general public through some pronouncements of an authority figure. No, they can be verified by all without the intermediary of a "priestly" class or an autocracy.<sup>19</sup> Several years after the Solov'ëv thesis defense, namely in 1879, his association with the Populist underground led to his internal exile to Siberia. Although allowed to return to St. Petersburg the following decade, he was kept under surveillance.

Arguably more indicative of the dispersive influence of a doctrine than a simple tabulation of its adherents is a tabulation of its critics and an assessment of their vehemence. Of course, we have seen the young Solov'ëv's thorough, if at times belabored, lambasting of positivism. Although Solov'ëv came from the right, the others mentioned above, albeit qualified critics, such as Lavrov, Mikhajlovskij and Lesevich came from the political left. However, Solov'ëv's was not the first even from his direction. Already in 1866, S. S. Gogockij (1813–1889) in the third volume of his massive four-volume *Filosofskij leksikon* decried what he considered to be Comte's reduction of human morality to the set of physical forces and laws. Comte, in his eyes, sought to explain not just our human biological life in terms of physical laws but also moral life. This, he could not countenance. Morality not only cannot be explained naturalistically, but owing to that fact its study requires other techniques than those used in physics. Moreover, Comte's division of human history into three periods is far from original and is, in any case, fraught with conceptual confusion.

Given the nature of Gogockij's remarks contained as they were in an entry for what amounted to an encyclopedia of philosophy, we cannot rightfully expect a detailed analysis of positivism. What is interesting is to compare Solov'ëv's treatment with others, particularly others from the same general direction and from within academia. Surprisingly, Kudrjavcev, some of whose lectures at the Moscow Theological Academy Solov'ëv in all likelihood attended during his brief stay there,

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<sup>19</sup>"Lesevich chose to work for a democratic polity by attacking the ideological and philosophical pillars of autocracy." Vucinich 1970: 253.

devoted a talk to the topic of “religion and positive philosophy” in October 1874 and thus some months after Solov’ëv had already ceased attending classes at the Academy. For this reason, it is hardly likely that there was any possible influence from Kudrjavcev to Solov’ëv. The possibility of some influence in the other direction, however, cannot be excluded, despite the fact that the former never mentions the latter. Although the talk was not officially published until early 1875 in a more complete and re-worked form, it is only on that basis that we can presently judge Kudrjavcev’s stance.

Contrary to Walicki’s remark about the meager influence of positivism, Kudrjavcev explicitly stated that he was taking up this theme because of its “significant influence” within his society even though, he added, there is noticeably less sympathy for it among philosophers.<sup>20</sup> A look at positivism again raises the issue of the relationship between science and religion, faith and knowledge. And again its philosophy of history with its view of all previous philosophical systems necessarily culminating in positivism as the ultimate and truly rational philosophy reminds us of Hegel with his similar contention. But is it not possible, Kudrjavcev asks, that this alleged third period, with the intellectual hegemony of science, will not be followed by a fourth period in human thought?

Nevertheless, the question of particular interest to Kudrjavcev was whether Comte had given religion a fair assessment. Does it belong to a transitional moment in human history to be superseded and completely displaced by the reign of science? After all, it does not share the same set of objects as science and is not, contrary to Comte’s statements, a cognitive method. It concerns itself with a unique series of phenomena that are inexplicable in terms of scientific knowledge, and we can and do speak of religious knowledge. Moreover, Comte is silent on the logical processes involved in his alleged three phases or moments, but in fact the same laws of logic and the same cognitive methods are employed at all stages of thought. “If, therefore, we have no right to call Comte’s three spheres of cognition ‘methods of knowledge,’ then obviously we have no right to seek the bases to distinguish them within their subjective spheres. ... The bases lie outside the subjective, in a distinction between the very objects that form the content of religion, philosophy and natural science.”<sup>21</sup> Assuming there is a Deity and a super-sensible world that we can cognize, there must be a form of cognition corresponding to these objects, a form that is as different in character from sense cognition as these objects are from those of our senses.

Looking at Comte’s philosophy of history, we find a distinct oddity. Since nature usually proceeds from the simple to the more complex, would we not expect the same in history, i.e., a progression from the simpler to the more complex and abstract? Yet in Comte’s rendering, intellectual history unfolds from the most abstract to the simplest and easiest, viz., a limitation to the phenomenal world. And again, were someone to claim that religion or philosophy in general is doomed

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<sup>20</sup> Kudrjavcev-Platonov 1874: 322.

<sup>21</sup> Kudrjavcev-Platonov 1874: 329.

to disappear, that they cannot be revived, this can only be accomplished by proving that their very essence precludes such resuscitation. History alone cannot provide this; it speaks of what was, not of what can or must be.

Kudrjavcev devoted scarce attention to positivistic epistemology. For him, that it espouses the impossibility of metaphysical knowledge, that only a cognition of phenomena is possible, is a conclusion, a purely personal opinion, in the positivist's mind, not one based on historical data. As such, it need not concern those involved in theology and metaphysics. Even though one moment or type of knowledge – religious, philosophical or empirical – may be predominant at some particular time, Kudrjavcev concluded that all three supplement each other leading to complete truth.

Another figure to arise against positivism was M. I. Karinskij, whose name we encountered in connection with the chair in philosophy at Moscow University vacant upon Jurkevich's death. As we also saw, he, like Gogockij and Kudrjavcev, came with a background in theology. Just as Kudrjavcev wrote his piece on positivism in apparent ignorance of Solov'ëv's serialized *magister's* thesis, so Karinskij in an article appearing in October 1875 mentioned neither Solov'ëv nor Kudrjavcev! In fact, he apparently would have us believe that his is the very first article of its kind: "The so-called positive philosophy has already existed for several decades; not once has it been subjected to a critical analysis."<sup>22</sup>

Karinskij wrote that when thinking of positivism, one naturally first thinks of Comte. There are, however, others who are counted as positivists and whose views are often enough in conflict, if not contradiction, with each other in specifics. Any examination of positivism in general, then, must first ask what distinguishes it, i.e., the common thread among all its adherents, from other philosophies. Additionally, if we take its pronouncement seriously that it stands in stark opposition to all other philosophical directions, we must ask what distinguishes it from the others with regard to the fundamental issue of modern philosophy. Yet, just what is this fundamental issue? Karinskij, without hesitation or qualification, believed it to be that of the conditions, limits and validity of human cognition. Modern philosophy places it center-stage, and the solutions to other philosophical questions are seen as dependent on this one.

Positivist epistemology can unabashedly be said to be an empiricism, indeed the empiricism stemming from Hume. Seen in this way, empiricism forms the foundation or essence of positivism.<sup>23</sup> To be more specific, positivist epistemology consists of three theses: (1) experience is the sole source of knowledge; (2) human knowledge

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<sup>22</sup> Karinskij 1875: 345. It should be remembered here that this journal was the house organ of the Moscow Theological Academy and as such should certainly have been accessible to Karinskij, who was at the St. Petersburg Theological Academy and Kudrjavcev at the Moscow Academy. Additionally, we saw in discussing Solov'ëv's earliest publications that the interval between the submission of an article for this journal and its publication therein was not long indeed, thus ruling out the logical possibility that Kudrjavcev could not have known of *The Crisis* when penning his talk or of Karinskij not being able to know Kudrjavcev's piece when writing his article. Rounding out our picture, another article in the December 1875 issue also dealt with Comte, mentioning – and nothing more – Solov'ëv only in a footnote. See Gusev 1875.

<sup>23</sup> Karinskij 1875: 347 and 349.

is restricted to the similarity and succession of appearances; and (3) scientific conviction must ultimately be based on particular observed phenomena. However, for Karinskij it was John Stuart Mill and not Comte who consistently elaborated this viewpoint. The latter's full position in this matter is unclear.

Karinskij now asked us to conjecture: Let us suppose that contrary to empiricism our cognitive faculties did not restrict us to appearances. In that case, we would have to grant that at some point such faculties would find a use, an object. If, as positivism asserts, the third phase of our development is represented by the hegemony of science and its associated exclusive reliance on empirical techniques, then we must suppose that a fourth phase will be associated with the correct employment of these other faculties. Positivism would, as a consequence, fall to the wayside. Here, we see a similarity with Solov'ëv in that both recognized at least the possibility of human cognition beyond what is given to the senses, Karinskij being more cautious in not directly affirming the existence of such a cognitive capability. Karinskij, for his part, was manifestly indebted to Kant's criticism of empiricism, though he refrained from an explicit and wholehearted endorsement.

Karinskij rejected the Comtean stand that the religious and the empiricist standpoints are directly opposed and irreconcilable. Again taking a cue from Kant, he found no contradiction between the two. Empiricism denies the possibility of any metaphysical cognition, but the object of religion is not known in the proper sense. It is believed in. Religion ultimately rests on faith. "Empiricism is concerned with the natural order of phenomena, whereas religious intuitions are directed primarily to a sphere beyond appearances."<sup>24</sup> When it does happen that religion aims at something within the phenomenal realm, this something is extraordinary, not bound by physical law, and as such cannot be an object of knowledge.

We see from this short sketch of Comte's impact within Russia up to circa 1874 that positivism was by no means an unknown Western philosophy. In fact, if we include a stark scientism as part and parcel with it, the real influence of the fictional character Bazarov in Turgenev's 1862 novel *Fathers and Sons* provides another example of the Russian recognition of Comte's views. While it was not directly responsible for either a revolutionary movement or a counter-movement, such as Slavophilism, Solov'ëv's choice to attack positivism was by no means startling. What was startling was the manner in which he launched his attack and that his thesis was approved and applauded by so many. In comparison with the patient and rather judicious treatment accorded positivism by others, particularly Karinskij, this contrast becomes all the more apparent. We find little of the patient and thorough scholarship of the latter in Solov'ëv's thesis. In hindsight, we can say that the faculty committee charged with advising on a successor to Jurkevich wisely chose to pass over Solov'ëv for the professorship, but perhaps unwisely gave too little consideration to Karinskij's nomination. The direction and content of Karinskij's later writings are a testament to this error.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Karinskij 1875: 354.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, during the years under discussion Karinskij 1878 and his doctoral dissertation Karinskij 1880.

## Appendix 2

### Family Constellation and Early Youth

Unfortunately, Solov'ëv's father, Sergej Mikhajlovich, was notably silent on his pedigree. In a formal resume he curiously, though vaguely, noted that he originated from the *dvorianstvo*, Russia's landed class. However it came about, his father, Vladimir's grandfather, Mikhail Vacilevich, was an Orthodox priest of ethnic Russian stock and taught religion at the Moscow Commercial School. Despite his death when Vladimir was merely 8 years of age in 1861, biographers unanimously concur that the boy retained warm memories of his grandfather throughout his life and remained proud of his clerical background. Vladimir's older brother Vsevolod, on the other hand, found it embarrassing and shameful – attitudes undoubtedly reflective of their respective religious viewpoints and of their respective views of their own social standing. To support their positions, biographers invariably adduce the fact that Vladimir's major ethical tract, *Opravdanie dobra* [*The Justification of the Good*], written when he was already in his forties, bears a joint dedication to his father and his paternal grandfather. However, we could pose the question in rather blunt terms: Which came first – the dedication or the memory? That is, are the biographers correct, or could it be that through an act of filial piety on his part stemming from a general moral stand he came to treasure what few memories he could possibly have retained of his grandfather and in this way came to revere the person? In this regard, we should bear in mind that the dedication was also to his father with whom Vladimir shared neither a particularly tender nor close relationship. Following this train of thought, it is only natural, then, to infer that since half of Vladimir's dedication was to a man with whom he was not exceptionally close either intellectually or emotionally, then the other half of the dedication also may not have sprung from anything other than a Kantian sense of duty. Whatever the case, though, other family portraits concur that the grandfather was a pious, happy and gentle man.

As for Vladimir's father, much can and already has been said by scholars. He himself shortly before his death wrote an autobiographical sketch intended chiefly,

but not exclusively, for his children. Here, we need mention only those points most relevant for our purposes. Sergej Mikhajlovich Solov'ëv, one of Russia's greatest historians and the author of an enormous, 29 volume *History of Russia* among other works, was born in Moscow in 1820. Educated first at home, his father Mikhail, after agonizing deliberation, permitted Sergej to attend a secular secondary school, a most unusual step for the son of a clergyman. Arguably, this was at least in part due to the influence of Sergej's mother Elena née Shatova, who herself coming from a family of civil servants, was actually somewhat averse to the first estate. In any case, Sergej at the age of 18 entered the University of Moscow, where he quickly took to the study of history. Afterward as a tutor to the children of a Russian nobleman he had the opportunity to travel abroad for 2 years. Returning to Russia, Sergej received an appointment at his alma mater to the chair of Russian history, a position opened by the death of his own professor Mikhail Petrovich Pogodin. Sergej worked on his *History* at a furious pace producing almost a volume each year until 1879, when he died at his writing desk in mid-sentence.

As an active scholar and historian, Sergej could not help but participate in the controversies of the day particularly that between the Slavophiles and the so-called Westerners concerning Russia's past and thereby, at least by implication, its historical mission. Despite a personal relationship with several of the Slavophiles and an initial attraction to their ideas. Sergej distanced himself from them in view of what he considered their fundamental ignorance of Russian and modern Western history. As the years advanced, he harbored an even more disparaging opinion of Slavophilism. According to Sergej, the only truly "scientific" approach to history is through a comparative study of homogeneous phenomena. He advanced a view, starkly at odds with Slavophilism, that saw the development of government machinery as equivalent to that of the nation. Indeed, some scholars have seen the influence of Hegel, particularly his *Philosophy of History*, in Sergej's championing of the central role of the state in Russian history.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, he made clear that he was never fond of what he called "abstraction." He acknowledged having read that Hegelian work and that the book made a great impression on him at the time. Nevertheless, he felt ill at ease in discussing broad historical issues divorced from concrete facts. There can be no question of Sergej passing on to his son Vladimir even a vestige of some supposed Hegelian legacy. Whatever Hegelianism flowed through Sergej's veins was so meager and diluted that there was no possibility of direct contagion from father to son even were the bond between them strong and vibrant.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, the relationship was far from that. Immersed in his writings, Sergej spent little time with his children and devoted even less attention to them. The family picture in this sense was surely not unique for the time. At home, Sergej clearly conveyed a domineering presence demanding the utmost respect from his children

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<sup>1</sup>One such example is Anatole G. Mazour, who claims the influence of Hegel is obvious. See Mazour 1975: 117.

<sup>2</sup>For a somewhat different opinion that attempts to illustrate the influence of the father on Vladimir with respect to history, see de Courten 2004: 184–193. de Courten's discussion focuses, however, not on the transmission of Hegel's philosophy of history through the father.

toward their elders. Silence promptly ensued at dinner when the father struck the table with his thumb several times. Years later, Vladimir publicly put the best face on his father's severe and serious demeanor toward his children, but there is no denying that it surely contributed to the estrangement of the eldest son Vsevolod and that of a younger sister Ljubov from their father and from the family on the whole, rifts that never quite healed.

In Vladimir's case, Sergej's personal influence was neither positive nor negative, but essentially nonexistent.<sup>3</sup> When Vladimir had to resolve spiritual and emotional conflicts within himself, he could find no comfort or encouragement from his father. Vladimir would have to work through his troubles on his own without any paternal advice or consolation. We have it on Vladimir's own testimony that when during his early adolescent years he began to have religious doubts and ceased attending church services with his father, the devout Sergej uttered not a word of remonstrance or thoughtful argument in hopes of persuasion but contented himself with insouciant sneers. True, later in life Vladimir retrospectively interpreted his father's cynical indifference as an intentional pedagogical device, but it is hard to give much credence to this construal of the father's mental attitude. There simply is no evidence to corroborate Vladimir's contention that his father was purposely indifferent to his children so that they could in some incredible manner lift up themselves to become morally stronger.

Based on Vladimir's correspondence published after his death, a reader of the letters may get the mistaken impression that his lengthy letters home to his parents while he was traveling serve as an unmistakable indication of his warm feelings toward them both. Yet a closer reading reveals that these letters were not addressed to both the mother and the father. Contrary to the impression conveyed by their editor, E. L. Radlov, a distinguished scholar in his own right though prone to making egregious factual errors, who places both names in brackets as the addressees, Vladimir's letters home were explicitly intended only for his mother. Vladimir simply was not on a familiar basis with his father even in adulthood and with reason did not think his father would take much time to learn of his son's activities abroad. Nor is there even the slightest evidence that the father took pride in seeing his son in time succeed academically. On these bases, Vladimir's partial dedication of the *Opravdanie dobra* to his father should not be interpreted as a display of affection.

Vladimir's mother Poliksena Vladimirovich, née Romanova, came from a Ukrainian family with purportedly a touch of Polish blood. For some unspecified reason, all biographers are quick to point out that the eighteenth century Ukrainian peripatetic "philosopher" Grigorij Skovorada belonged to one branch of Solov'ëv's maternal ancestry. The relevance of this is certainly dubious, even if true, for whatever philosophy is, a disposition toward it is certainly, and perhaps most fortunately, not an inheritable trait. Moreover, the respective positions espoused by Skovorada and Solov'ëv bear little resemblance, except perhaps for a shared

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<sup>3</sup>To be fair, we should note that Vladimir's nephew and biographer, who was named Sergej after his grandfather, was of the opposite opinion. Solovyov 2000: 10.

religious striving and a propensity to express these longings through poetry! Vladimir's maternal grandfather, Vladimir Pavlovich Romanov, a merchant sailor born in 1796, was away from home much of the time and died in 1864, thus 3 years later than Solov'ëv's paternal grandfather. Yet, oddly there is no dedication to or even much discussion of this grandfather in Solov'ëv's writings. If anything, it was this grandfather who led a life that seemingly would impress any young man. Vladimir Romanov, for whom our philosopher was named and who served as Solov'ëv's godfather, was imprisoned for 9 months due to his acquaintance with two conspirators in the 1825 Decembrist Uprising and years later participated in the Siege of Sevastopol during the Crimean War, in which he was wounded.

Strangely, few concrete facts concerning Vladimir's mother exist. Again for some unspecified reason, Solov'ëv's biographers have been discretely silent as to her year of birth possibly in 1828, although her death is recorded as July 1909, some 30 years after her husband's and nine after Vladimir's. Clearly, Poliksena, at the time of her wedding was young. In his memoirs, Sergej spoke little of his marriage as such, this despite the undeniable affection Vladimir's parents shared. Sergej undoubtedly regarded such matters as purely personal and hence private between his wife and himself. One's intimate feelings, however exemplary, were not considered to be a fit topic for disclosure, not alone discussion. Yet, Poliksena and Sergej enjoyed each other's company, attending religious services together on Sundays as well as concerts and the opera. Vladimir in this differed so notably from his parents: Despite his demonstrable love of poetry and classic Russian literature, he evinced no appreciation for music at any time in his life.<sup>4</sup> Poliksena, a brunette, noticeably bore little physical resemblance to her balding, one-time blond-haired husband but much to her son Vladimir, who was also swarthy in appearance. She basically administered, albeit with the aid of a governess, to the needs of her large household on her husband's modest salary and remained quietly in the background. In later years after Sergej's death, Poliksena continued to reside in Moscow with her two unmarried daughters Nadezhda and Poliksena. However, when Poliksena the younger moved to St. Petersburg in 1898, the mother accompanied her. Upon her death, the coffin of Solov'ëv's mother was transported back to Moscow to be interred between her husband and her son.

Any discussion of Solov'ëv's background and upbringing would be remiss without some mention of the Solov'ëv children's governess Anna K. Kolerova, who in addition helped with domestic chores. She arguably exerted as important an influence, if not more so, on Vladimir as a child than either of the parents. Although overall responsibility for the children naturally rested on the mother, daily interaction with the children was the concern of Anna. An orphaned daughter of a priest, she studied for some unspecified period in Odessa but entered into the service of the Solov'ëvs while still a young girl. As so often happens in such cases, Anna grew to love her charges as if they were her own. Certainly, her own religious feelings were

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<sup>4</sup>This, I believe, can be said despite his remark to his cousin Ekaterina in a letter of 23 September 1873 that he is glad she will study music.

pronounced and may have also contributed in no small measure to Vladimir's sensibilities. Even after the children were already grown, Anna remained a presence in the Solov'ëv household, such as it was. After the mother moved to St. Petersburg with her daughter, Anna remained behind in Moscow with the unmarried Nadezhda and died sometime during the winter of 1902–1903.

By today's standards, Vladimir came from a rather large family with a number of siblings. One older sister Vera, born in 1850, married Nil A. Popov, a Russian historian and director of the archives in the Ministry of Justice. When he died in 1891 Vera lost what little *joie de vivre* she originally possessed and devoted much of her time and attention thereafter to charity work. Another older sister Nadezhda (1851–1913), like Vladimir and as already mentioned, never married. Although in her youth she reportedly loved the arts and knew how to enjoy herself, her later years were plagued with what may have been a form of clinical depression. Whatever the cause, family members would often find her weeping for no apparent reason. Still another sister, Ljubov, 4 years younger than Vladimir, was reportedly also of a chronic unhappy disposition and in later years a hypochondriac. Although she did marry, her husband's early death left her rearing a son alone. To add to her grief, the boy developed a sudden illness and died. Just as ill-equipped psychologically to handle money as Vladimir, Ljubov wasted her inheritance and like Vladimir relied on the munificence of others for the rest of her life.

Some 10 years younger than Vladimir, Maria, a Francophile, spent many years in Paris and like Vladimir felt an attraction toward Catholicism. As with Vera, Maria married a distinguished historian Pavel Bezobrazov, himself a champion of the rights of women and, remarkably, even of animals. It is to Maria that we are indebted for a touching memoir of Vladimir's early years. Unfortunately, she died from typhus on the road while fleeing with her children from the effects of the Bolshevik Revolution in St. Petersburg.

Poliksena, named after her mother, was the youngest of the siblings born 14 years after Vladimir. Although she published some poetry already in the 1880s, her talent, such as it was, remained largely unrecognized, and she spent much of her time during that decade engaged in painting. After a move to St. Petersburg she began to publish more under the pseudonym "Allegro" and moved in the Symbolist circles. Secondary literature is noticeably discreet except to say that she liked to dress in men's clothes and had what her nephew called a "masculine character."<sup>5</sup> She spent the years immediately after the Bolshevik Revolution in the Crimea amid disease and poverty working in a sanatorium. Finally managing to leave for Moscow with her companion Natalija Manaseina in December 1923, she underwent surgery there. Unfortunately, her health continued to decline, and she finally succumbed in August 1924.

Vladimir had one younger brother Mikhail and one older brother Vsevolod. Mikhail, born in 1862, came closest of the siblings to fitting the traditional image of "normalcy." He lived a settled life, earning his living as an unassuming secondary

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<sup>5</sup> Solovyov 2000: 28.

school geography teacher. A devoted father and husband, Mikhail still found time to cooperate with Vladimir in preparing Russian translations of the Platonic dialogues.<sup>6</sup> His character was reportedly closest of the brothers to that of their father, and like the father had a keen sense of history. While he shared during the 1880s Vladimir's idea of a reunion of the Christian churches, Mikhail's interest in biblical criticism partially separated him from Vladimir. Yet like his brother, Mikhail died an early death at the age of 41 in 1903. His wife Olga thereupon committed suicide.

Vsevolod, born in 1849, is chiefly remembered today, apart from being Vladimir's brother, as the author of minor works of historical fiction. He inherited far more of his father's physical features than his mother's. As the first-born or perhaps because of his resemblance to his father, Vsevolod remained his mother's favorite even later when much of the family had turned against him. Vsevolod's decision to commence his career in St. Petersburg rather than Moscow was not received with encouragement by his father if the fact that the latter failed to provide any financial assistance is any indication.

To say that Vladimir and Vsevolod were not personally close would be an understatement. In adulthood, Vsevolod spoke contemptuously of Vladimir and his ecumenical religious ideas, saying that his brother one day "hoped to be a Roman [Catholic] cardinal." Whatever its origin, the enmity between the brothers certainly went back to their childhood. Vladimir's ill feelings toward his brother aroused considerable anxiety within him that, despite combative efforts to overcome, he just could not dispel. This, he frankly acknowledged in an early letter of 23 November 1873 to his cousin Ekaterina: "By the way, I do not want to go on about [Vsevolod], because I must say that, however bad this may sound, I simply do not love him. Try as I might and however hard I persuade myself that I must love him and that I do love him, I fail. There is in me some kind of instinctive antipathy."<sup>7</sup>

It must be said that the two brothers enjoyed distinctively different lifestyles. In addition to his eventually settled marital status with three children from a second wife, who was a sister of his first wife, Vsevolod enjoyed comfortable accommodations in St. Petersburg. Politically, his unabashed monarchist sympathies endeared him to the government and its increasingly important bureaucracy. Despite his flirtations with potentially compromising theological positions, including a somewhat short-lived affiliation with the Theosophical Society, Vsevolod publicly and prudently remained an adherent of Russian Orthodoxy. Vladimir, on the other hand, was an

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<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, Vladimir's sudden death prevented the fulfillment of his original intention to translate Plato's entire corpus. He succeeded in completing only one volume and part of a second. Mikhail, together with S. N. Trubeckoj, completed the work on a second volume. A projected third volume containing the *Gorgias*, the *Meno* and other dialogues never appeared. See Trubeckoj 1903: VI.

<sup>7</sup> This letter was originally published as part of Solov'ëv's complete correspondence in 1911, when many of the figures mentioned by name were either still alive or memory of them was fresh. Vsevolod's name is simply given as "X." Nevertheless, the reference is clear and made explicit in Remizov 1938: 161–162. Vladimir's feelings were shared by others in the family and by family friends. K. M. El'cova, sister of the Moscow University philosopher Leo Lopatin, speaking surely for her entire family wrote of her dislike for Vsevolod. See her essay El'cova 1926: 112.

ascetic, peripatetic thinker, who depended much of the time on largesse from friends for even the barest necessities of life. He shunned possessions and spent most of his adult life unemployed. He was quick to become emotionally infatuated with one female after another, but whatever these relationships were they more often than not came to an abrupt end. Whether this was a result of excessive zeal on his part, a certain awkwardness, or simply a realization that he could not provide domestic security is unclear. Notwithstanding the various and numerous “love affairs” reported by friendly, if not indulgent, biographers and his audacity to write about the nature of love in grandiose, even bizarre and mystic, terms, Vladimir never married or had a lengthy involvement with a woman.

We have little information about Vladimir’s earliest years, most probably because there is little to tell. The fourth of 12 children born to Sergej and Poliksena, we can be certain that given his father’s profession he received ample intellectual stimulus and likely had access to quite varied resources. Vladimir himself once remarked that his mother read Pushkin and Lermontov to him and that his father developed in him a love of the natural sciences. On Friday evenings, the Solov’ëvs often welcomed numerous distinguished visitors and professional colleagues from the university, whose conversations undoubtedly could have piqued a bright child’s interest. Yet in spite of the relatively high social status of the Solov’ëv family and its apparent normalcy, later accounts from those close to Vladimir tell that he often daydreamed and acted out various fairy tales and phantasies, that in this role-playing he animated and assigned names to the familiar objects surrounding him. Nonetheless, it is difficult to ascribe great significance to such behavior from Vladimir’s earliest years even if true. Many, if not most, children play with dolls or toy figures – whether it be “Barbie” or “G I Joe” and still become in adulthood fully adjusted and functional members of society.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, on the face of it there is nothing extraordinary in finding a youth of, say, 10 years of age experiencing a brief infatuation with a young girl. One long-time friend, though, years later went so far as to say that Solov’ëv spent much of his life even from an early age in a state of “erotic enthusiasm” without clarifying precisely what he had in mind.<sup>9</sup>

In a short autobiographical sketch, Vladimir wrote that at the age of 13 he already began to have religious doubts and that during the course of the next 4 years this skepticism evolved along the same historical lines of modern European thought, passing successively through rationalism, deism, pantheism and materialism. There is, fortunately, ample evidence in support of this general scheme. In a remarkably early letter to his cousin E. Romanova dated 13 December 1872, Vladimir stated that he rejected the faith of his childhood when he was 13, and in an even earlier letter of 18 August of that year he wrote to a friend, Susanna Lapshin, that at the age

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<sup>8</sup> It requires quite a leap of logic to see this rather common childish propensity to name playthings as “the basis of one of Solov’ëv’s fundamental philosophical ideas,” as Velichko 1903: 12 writes. In a similar vein, Mochul’skij sees Vladimir’s childish practice as early evidence of his implicit mysticism. See Mochul’skij 1936: 17.

<sup>9</sup> Trubeckoj. 1995. vol. 1: 581.

of 13 or 14 he was a zealous materialist.<sup>10</sup> Leo Lopatin, who knew Solov'ëv already at this time, wrote that he “was a thorough materialist – in his early years, however, when he was barely more than 15.” Nevertheless, whichever of these chronologies we take for dating Solov'ëv's materialist phase we have a conflict with his autobiographical claim. For if his thought followed the historical path of modern Europe over a 4-year period, Vladimir would have arrived at materialism only at the end of that odyssey, thus at the age of approximately 17. In all likelihood, he framed and schematized his autobiographical claim to fit a historical pattern to which he was then attracted. Another biographer, Velichko, relates that once during this phase after an evening of passionate discussion with friends, Solov'ëv went to his room, took down the icons and threw them into the garden.<sup>11</sup>

As mentioned in Chap. 2, the most well-known alleged event in Vladimir's youth is one he himself related in his 1898 poem “Tri svidaniija” [“Three Meetings”].<sup>12</sup> He spoke there of three visions or apparitions of a single feminine figure that he called “Sophia.” Taking the poem literally, he took these visions to be in some sense three manifestations of one and the same aspect of the Deity. The first of these three visions, which a note to the poem tells us were actual autobiographical accounts, took place unremarkably enough in a church in 1862 when Vladimir was just 9 years old. The peculiarity of this is that if it were such a profound event in his life why did he never mention the incident in his writings earlier than the composition of the poem and why did the incident not have an impact on his religious convictions during his adolescent years? Moreover, according to one of his sisters, there was never any talk in the family about “visions” during Vladimir's youth. Thus, if the incident actually did take place, he must have kept it to himself – a most unusual silence for a boy particularly in light of the extraordinary significance he later supposedly attached to it. Additionally, the occurrence of such a profound religious experience is difficult to reconcile with his marked abandonment of religion during his teen years. We would at the least expect later autobiographical accounts of his youthful apostasy to include how he came to renounce theism despite what could, to a believer, be taken as first-hand evidence in support of belief. Nevertheless, we find not a word of this mentioned.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Pis'ma*, vol. 3: 73 and vol. 1: 158 respectively.

<sup>11</sup> Velichko 1903: 15.

<sup>12</sup> For the complete text of the poem, see Solov'ëv 1968: 170–179.

<sup>13</sup> Most biographers, for whatever reason, simply accept the historicity of the visions. Peyton Engel, for one, demonstrates no hesitation in writing that Solov'ëv had three and only three visions! See Engel 1996: 28. Mochul'skij concedes Solov'ëv's “erotic agitation” at the time but incredibly holds that the emotional state simply made him receptive to the apparition but did not cause it. Mochul'skij 1936: 18. Such was also Solov'ëv's own understanding of his visions. The attentive reader of the secondary literature will also note that he experienced, or reported to have experienced, more than three “visions” during his lifetime. That Vladimir spoke of three in this poem was dictated by his sheer fixation on seeing trichotomies everywhere. One often neglected “vision” is that recounted in the tale “Na zare tumannoj junosti” [“At the Dawn of Mist-Shrouded Youth”]. In this story, he tells of fainting while traveling by train to visit his cousin Ekaterina in Kharkov. A girl who saved him from a potentially fatal accident was transformed when he regained

Solov'ëv did not start his formal schooling until 1864, at which time he entered the same gymnasium attended by his older brother Vsevolod as well as their father. Before this time, Vladimir received instruction at home, particularly in modern languages. Although as already noted he had a reading knowledge of German, he never acquired practical fluency in it, an awareness of which may account for his failure to visit Eduard von Hartmann in Berlin when passing through there en route to London in 1875. We know from surviving records that he received excellent grades in all subjects except mathematics and physics, but even in these classes his grades improved towards the end of his gymnasium years. All in all, his results, taken as a whole, must have been outstanding: Upon completion of these studies in the spring of 1869 he was awarded a gold medal and his name entered on the gold board hanging in the hallway. His remarkable grades granted him the right to enter immediately a university or other institution of higher education without submitting to a qualifying examination. The difficulty in this picture is that the regulations in effect at the time stated that students had to be 17 years of age: In August 1869, Vladimir was only 16. Regardless of how he obviated this requirement – whether the officials made an exception because of his academic record or through some other unmentioned device – he obviously did not run into any bureaucratic obstruction.

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consciousness into a feminine demiurge, and Vladimir experienced a certain ecstasy. The tale is constructed as if it recounted actual events that took place 20 years earlier. Concerning it, his nephew Sergej wrote: "I think it necessary to stipulate that only with great caution can we use this tale as an autobiographical document. It was written in 1892, when Solovyov was in an extraordinarily erotic mood." Solovyov 2000: 59. How we are to understand Sergej's expression "erotic mood" is again far from clear. And of course, by the same token we should "only with great caution" take the other visions as actual and accurate accounts.

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