Stud East Eur Thought (2010) 62:315–329
DOI 10.1007/s11212-010-9118-7

Discourse on a Russian "Sonderweg": European models in Russian disguise

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Published online: 12 October 2010

Abstract This article examines (on the basis of Russian history) the development of the concept of a "special path" in societies that have experienced problems with their self-identity. Western European intellectuals who needed an "other" in the construction and definition of their own cultural and geographical space in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries played an important role in shaping the understanding of a Russian "special path." The "Russian chaos" they postulated was contrasted to "Western" rationalism and order and Eastern "slavery" was seen as a counter position to the "Western" demands regarding human dignity. With the coming of an era of nationalism in Russia, many of these ideas were adopted by Russian intellectuals and laid a foundation for their own work toward the formation of a national identity. Orthodoxy (as opposed to Catholicism and Protestantism), autocracy (as opposed to parliamentarianism), *Narodnost'* ("national spirit") and communal traditionalism (in contrast to capitalism, private property and individualism) were seen as the only alternatives to the modern West. The Russian "Westernizers" were captivated by the idea of a "special path" as much as the "Slavophiles" and saw this path through the prism of uniquely refracted concepts of "Orthodoxy, autocracy and *Narodnost'*". The author considers the concept of the 'special path' not only as a means of forming group identity, but also as a type of social search within the boundaries of the dominant paradigm. Russian intellectuals claiming Russian 'uniqueness' today, as two centuries ago, are doing so, to a very considerable degree, as a result of western intellectualism.

Translated from the Russian by Katherine Bowers; Edited by John-Thomas Eltringham.

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Keywords Nationalism · "Special path" (*Sonderweg*) · Messianism · The Other · Industrial society · Westernizers and Slavophiles · Romanticism · Enlightenment

The well-trodden "special path"

There are probably no subjects more 'Russian' than those of the 'Russian soul' and the Russian 'special path.' The whole of Russian philosophy and literature—and, consequently, Russian studies abroad—are in thrall to these topics. Anyone who begins writing about Russia inevitably alights on these subjects.

As Vladimir Medinskij noted in a discussion on the Radio Station 'Echo of Moscow' on 27 November 2006, "The myth of a special Russian path, or, not the myth, but this idea is, of course, a favorite topic of all thinking Russians, philosophers and historians." Not only Russian society, but also the Russian state has long laid claim to the idea of Russia's predestination, of its 'special' historical path. Russian authorities have always actively exploited these concepts in moments of crisis, realizing that they are the only thing that can unite the intellectual and the ordinary person, the anarchist and public servant.

The nineteenth century lent this idea a pseudo-scientific form and allowed historical, linguistic, anthropological, and geographic material to be mobilized in such a way that fervor for the Russian 'special path' was reflected in both Slavophilism and Westernism, in the official concept of *Narodnost'*, in the nationalist movement in literature, in the *Narodnik* movement and communal socialism according to a diverse set of 'scientific' justifications and arguments. Subsequent generations appropriated and introduced their own variations on the theoretical approaches that had been developed in the course of the nineteenth century. Based on sociologists' observations of public sentiment and on the speeches of popular politicians, the idea of Russia's 'special path' is now experiencing a triumphal reincarnation, after a period in which it had lost some of its popularity (Andreev 2003: 35–36).

At the same time, the idea of 'special path' is not an exclusively Russian phenomenon. Similar ideas (together with their messianic overtones) were popular in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Poland ('the Christ of nations'), in Germany, Finland, and in the United States ('the New World'), as they were in England (which carried the light of civilization to the East) and France (which ushered in an era of reason and freedom). Lately, claims by a people that they are following a 'special path' and carrying out a special mission have been regarded as the 'growing pains' of industrial society and national consciousness (Kohn 1967; Levkievskaja 2000; Lur'e 1999; Miller 1992). "The modernization process destroys the old institutions that acted as intermediaries between individuals and the state (guilds, communities, etc.)… Industrialization, increased social mobility, widespread claims of political equality and participation—these are the circumstances under which the formation of a new mechanism of identification becomes necessary" (Miller 1992: 126). Under these circumstances, "a means of self-identification of a society (or nation)" emerges in the framework of the mythology of the early nationalistic construct of the *special path*, which allows communities to

construct an image of themselves in contrast to an image of the Other as this "answers the question 'Who are we?', 'What kind of value system do we have' … creating a historical 'cosmos' out of the chaos of modernity … helping the society endure severe shocks" (Levkievskaja 2000: 67; Wittram 1973; Kappeler 2000). However, a number of scholars believe that the concept of the 'special path' and sentiments related to the feeling of uniqueness do not arise in all countries in the course of modernization, since they are compensatory to the realization of their own backwardness (Kohn 1967). In the nineteenth century, Aleksandr Gradovskij drew attention to the relationship between utopianism and the construction of a 'special path' (Gradovskij 1881: 1).

On the other hand, because it is not the process of modernization but the accompanying identity crisis in society that inspires the search for a 'special path', we can expect that the concept of a 'special path' could also take root in 'pre-modern' and 'postmodern' societies experiencing the distortion (or loss) of their 'ego' and the need to reinvent it. Since every community constructs itself in contrast to an 'other' ('we are not like that, but like this'), through the formulation and justification of its mission ('we are not like that, but like this, in order to …'), this 'missionism' (in the terminology of Nikolaj Berdjaev), be it national, social, political or religious, quickly gains a dangerous proximity to messianism. Indeed, all proponents of the idea of a 'special path' have also been tempted by messianic ideas. Once the community is able to overcome the crisis of identification, the prospect of 'uniqueness' is no longer topically relevant and is stored in cultural memory, where it then lies dormant until it is called upon in a new dramatic situation to save the community. Because these ideas really do save the community from disintegration and collapse, messianic fervor seems natural to some extent.

For all these reasons, it seems to me that it would significantly reduce the potential of the concept of 'special path' to consider it only within the framework of modernization, nation and nationalism, or to present it as an issue related only to developing countries. Even quite modern societies at certain points exhibit sentiments of 'uniqueness' and a messianic consciousness, as it is obvious that the 'protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism' do not rid humans of the need for the irrational, mythological and communal. The myth of the 'special path' undoubtedly lies in the deepest layers of human consciousness and relies upon a number of key archetypes (the Other, the Victim, the Child, the Slave, the Hero, etc.).

Where are its origins?

In Russia, the idea of 'uniqueness' was originally connected with Orthodoxy and with the construction of Russia not as a national but as a religious community (Pipes 2001). This process was very quickly taken over by the state, so that, in the future, the idea of a 'unique' Russian path was used to construct a political community (which was very important in a space devoid of long standing state traditions, such as those present in Western Europe). And last of all, the idea of a 'special' Russian path was used in the construction of a national community.

In addition, the historically unusually long and painful devotion of the Russian consciousness to the idea of 'uniqueness' is to no small part a product of the 'West,' as the image of the uniqueness of Russia was actively maintained and reproduced by the 'West' over the course of several centuries, and adopted from the West by Russian intellectuals.

Whether the birth of the concept of a 'special' Russian path can be traced back to the era of Ivan III or to that of Nicholas I, it was, in either case, born of the 'West.'

Western European civilization, which was also working to understand and shape itself, needed the image of an Other. Russia was better suited for this role than the obviously foreign (even in an anthropological sense) 'East' or the 'savages' of distant lands, hardly even seen as 'people,' with whom Western European civilization might compare itself. As the 'human world' of the European Middle Ages was a Christian world, neither the Chinese nor the Arab civilizations were considered as subjects upon which a self identification could be based. Because any comparison implies some sense of 'equality', in very basic terms, it is important that Russia was seen as suitable for such a comparison. This speaks not only to the fact that it was perceived by the West as an Other, but also that it was perceived as fundamentally similar—the same but different. This ambivalence lead to the formation of an extremely flexible, convenient, and functionally important image of Russia in the West. In different situations, different components of this image of Russia could be highlighted: Russia as something familiar (although different)—a partner, a source of renewal, an experimental alternative; Russia as the Other who forces the West to mobilize (though in principle remaining familiar, suitable for assimilation and cultural development). It seems to me that this combination—familiar but different—forms the core of what can be called the 'special path.' At the same time, of all the various qualities of the Other, those emphasizing (construing) the Europeans' own (real or imaginable) qualities were more often expressed in its speculative image. In this way, emphasis on Russian 'chaos' was used to establish 'Western' rationality and orderliness; Russia's 'savage manners,' underscored the 'Western' humanization of morality; the 'slavery' of the 'East' was used as the foundation of a 'Western' canon of rules and requirements related to the dignity of man. Merchants and travelers, foreigners in the tsar's service, Catholic missionaries, naturalists and theorists all played a role in the process of creating the image of Russia (Filjuškin 2004: 191–227).

But the true scope of the construction, or in the terminology of Wolff (2003) the 'invention' of Russia, took shape in the eighteenth century. The Enlightenment viewed Russia as a 'savage', which was to be 'civilized', a 'tabula rasa' upon which the new history of an ideal state could be written, a platform for large-scale testing of progressive European ideas. It would seem that in these constructions Russia was viewed as an unequivocal other. However, Voltaire and Diderot strongly emphasized that the unique position of Russia (its non-easternness, at any rate) and the enlightenment of its (western) rulers would play an important role in the success of these ideas. Russia was seen as a younger (late, backward, belated) sibling who was born at a point where its elder western brother had already emerged from poverty and amassed wisdom and life experience: it appeared later, but had the potential to do better, because it was able to begin its development under optimal conditions. One should not forget the archetypes which accompany

the image of the savage (barbarian, innocent, threatening, pupil) and the child (victim and savior).

Not only the French Enlightenment, but also German philosophy maintained an ambivalent attitude towards Russia at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: the 'special path,' for example, could easily fit into the 'cleverness' of Hegel's Absolute Idea, the concept of universal progress. Then, what seemed to be historically uneventful suddenly became the foundation for a new turn in the development of mankind.

These impulses from the West were perceived, reproduced, and interpreted by the Russian educated elite since the middle of the eighteenth century, although it is hardly possible to speak of the first stages of development of a national consciousness before the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The search for a national form was carried out in the organizational framework of literary circles and journals and secret societies. However, the process was quite slow and, in any case, lagged behind the requirements of the times. By the 1830s, Russia had not even taken the first step: the construction of a positive national myth ('Who are we? What kind of nation are we?'), and the establishment of a national goal lagged even farther behind ('What should we do?'). This incomplete process carried over into the reign of Nicholas I, a very unsuitable time for its successful completion. The suspicion of the authorities, the total silence of the public, and a feeling of growing internal crisis, all of which had characterized the last years of the reign of Tsar Alexander, only intensified under the reign of Nicholas. At a time when European revolutions crept to the very borders of the Russian Empire, dialogue with and comparison to the West was artificially hindered. This helped create and perpetuate certain speculative, ideal representations, according to which the ideal representation of the West was colored now in positive, now in negative tones. The lag behind leading European countries in socio-economic development added to many Russians' rejection of 'pure' capitalism and bourgeois culture.

These tendencies were supported by the signals sent from Europe in the 1830s: there, the departure from reality in search of an ideal was associated with the deepening crisis of original capitalism. It was at this point that images of a capitalist society in which "all social bonds crumbled except the implacable gold and paper ones" appeared in literature and art (Hobsbawm 1999: 43–44). Contemplation of the crisis in Europe on top of feelings of an internal crisis fostered among Russians an apocalyptic sense of the destruction of the *entire* old world and their sense of the necessity to seek radically new forms.

For the first time since Peter I, this gave rise to a course of cultural isolationism and cultivation of Russian "distinctiveness" (*samobytnost'*) not only supported by intellectuals but also by the government for more than a quarter of a century (during the reign of Nikolaj I, 1825–1855).

The new priorities were officially laid down in a manifesto by the Tsar on 13 July 1826 under the title "Enforcement of the conviction of state offenders." The document proclaimed, inter alia, the steadfast bond between autocracy and the people as well as the necessity to educate the young in a nationalist spirit. In 1827, on the invitation of Nikolaj I, the German scientist, geographer, and explorer Alexander von Humboldt embarked on an expedition to the Ural and the Altay

mountains and to the steppes of the Caspian region. His observations filled gaps in knowledge and gave support to the concept of a "special path" with scientific facts. Symptomatic in this context was the introduction of a national anthem (performed for the first time in December 1833 at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow), with the line "God save the Tsar"; a spate of state-aided patriotic creativity on topics of Russian history; construction of the Christ the Saviour Cathedral in Moscow for which the emperor himself chose the building site; and installation of pedestals for the Tsar's canon and bell. An important, though not the first and only link in a chain of events, was the proclamation by Count Sergej Uvarov, in 1832, of the formula "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality" as a guide to national norms and values (in a report concerning Moscow university). It is difficult to tell whether it is true, as Uvarov maintained, that the phrasing of the 'triad' was provided to him by Nikolaj himself. To be accurate, it should be pointed out that all these ideas had long been ripening and were discussed among intellectuals: the polemic of Mikhail Ščerbatov against Ivan N. Boltin, the pamphlet battles led by followers of Karamzin against those of Šiškov, or the polemical activities of "Arzamas," the "Friends of Wisdom" etc., to name only a few. However, it was a commonplace to believe in the necessity of "nationalist education" of the young. Almost everybody wrote about this, from Mikhail Ščerbatov and Alexander Šiškov to Faddej V. Bulgarin and Alexander Puškin. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the concept of a special path became highly topical again following the failure of Alexander II's (1855–1881) westernizing project. Under Alexander III (1881–1894) the "special path" was once again elevated to the rank of official doctrine. Moreover the last Russian emperor, Nikolaj II was quite attached to this concept (Wortman 2004).

In this way, nineteenth century Russian thought was characterized by the search for a fundamentally non-bourgeois, non-'European' 'special path', which partly reflected the demands of the 'West', in its search for means of reform and renewal. Figures on the margins of European thought and Russian society undertook the development of a means to 'rescue' the West. It is significant that Russia was once again conceived as a possible testing ground for new models (remember Robert Owen's dealings with Nicholas I, or Karl Marx's interest in the Russian language, or the willingness of Protestant clergymen, who corresponded, for example, with Aleksej Khomjakov, to learn from orthodox experience). Even the Russian Westernizers were not an exception to this rule. It would be a mistake to assume, based on its name, that this movement idealized bourgeois political and social norms. Bowing to European cultural tradition, to its development of a source of personality, those who are usually referred to as being of a 'pro-Western orientation' (Petr Čaadaev, Timofej Granovskij, Aleksandr Herzen, Konstantin Kavelin, Boris Čičerin, etc.), were scathing in their criticism of the shortcomings of parliamentarianism, the loss of culture, the widening social divisions, the distortion of moral values, and other negative consequences of capitalism, and suggested various methods of dealing with the 'crisis' in which Russia invariably played a key role. Indeed, when "the West will perish" (V. F. Odojevskij) time has come to save it with child-like gratitude, this "far West", the "land of holy miracles" (A. S. Khomjakov).

"Russia, Russia, Russia, messiah of the days to come" (Andrej Belyj)

But what did Russian thinkers see as an alternative? A National Empire (Mikhail Pogodin, Nikolaj Danilevskij), a theocracy of the kind present in the Middle Ages (Čaadaev, Konstantin Leontev), an 'autocratic republic' (Kavelin), a patriarchal agrarian society (Nikolaj Gogol', Stepan Ševyrev), communal socialism (Konstantin Aksakov, Herzen, the *Narodniki*), and an aristocratic monarchy (Khomjakov, Ivan Kirejevskij) were all suggested. It is not difficult to see, however, that all of these are only variations on the theme of 'Orthodoxy, Autocracy, *Narodnost*' (Nationality)' mixed in different proportions.

Only three of these factors seemed to be an alternative to modern West: Orthodoxy stood in contrast to Catholicism and Protestantism, both of which were experiencing difficulties; autocracy offered an alternative to parliamentarianism; *narodnost*' (*obsčinnost*') was the Russian alternative to capitalism, market economics, private ownership and the egoism that was tearing apart society. In this regard, Russia's 'backwardness' held a promise of salvation, both for itself and the West. For this reason, 'Slavophilia' naturally followed 'Westernism.' Čaadaev's letter to Aleksandr Turgenev (1835) perfectly illustrates the dialectic of this evolution:

> We were never motivated by the great beliefs, by powerful persuasions […] and do not say we're young, that we are lagging behind other nations, that we will catch up to them […] we do not embrace the same principle of civilization that those peoples do. You will find that those nations have always lived an animated, intelligent, and fruitful life. […] Tell me, what idea are we developing? What did we discover, invent, or create? It is not a question of running after them; it is a question of an honest appraisal of ourselves, of looking at ourselves as we are, to cast away the lies and to take up the truth. After that we shall advance, and we shall advance more rapidly than the others because we have come after them, because we have all their experience and all the work of the centuries which precede us. […] The people in Europe are strangely mistaken about us. There is Mr. Jouffroy, who tells us that we are destined to civilize Asia. […] Some Europeans persist in handing us the Orient; with the instinct of a kind of European nationalism they drive us back to the Orient so as not to meet us any longer in the Occident. […] On the contrary, it is Europe to whom we shall teach an infinity of things which she could not conceive without us. Don't laugh: you know that this is my profound conviction. […] The day will come when we shall take our place in the middle of intellectual Europe, as we have already done in the middle of political Europe; and we shall be more powerful, then, by our intelligence than we are today by our material forces (Čaadaev 1990: 97–99).

In 1842 and 1844, the 'Westernizer' Herzen made allusions to a kind of yet unknown, but very important mission for Russia, an idea that he had already begun to develop between 1833 and 1836. Even during their most heated clashes with Slavophiles, Westernizers argued that the embryo of the future was developing in the Slavic world (Gercen 1954: 354). In this way, Herzen's disappointment in Europe after the events of 1848–1849 only marked a continuation of the evolution

of his consciousness. It is also significant that, in advocating the importance of identity, Herzen blamed the West for the social inequality that had begun to develop there (which was actually a direct consequence of individualism) (Gercen 1955b: 205–206). In this way, the interests of society—in terms of values—actually began to take a higher place than individual freedom. As a result, Herzen saw the state of Russia at the time less and less as proof of its backwardness and increasingly as the key to the realization of something *new*. All the old forms would have to be destroyed in preparation for *a new future*. If these forms were much less developed in Russia than in Europe, this was all the better for Russia. That which bound the West did not exist for Russia (Gercen 1955a: 14; Gercen 1957: 128). "We have not achieved anything. So much the better! There remains all the the more for us to do" (Gercen 1957: 263).

According to Kavelin, Russia lagged hopelessly behind Europe, not only in material and technical development and civil relations, but also morally. Fruitless self-flagellation was a typical, Russian national trait (Kavelin 1989: 290, 291). However, as Kavelin notes, it is immoral and unnatural to consider one's people historically handicapped. It is a sign of national 'rot' and recognition of personal powerlessness. It is fatalism and a lack of faith in the human character. No matter what happens, it is essential to prove one's historical value. Therefore, Kavelin continues, if Europe has developed a principle of the individual, then it is Russian patriarchality, expressed both in the community and the strong state, that gives her its national character. Both community and autocracy were useful in the course of national history. In any case, autocracy played a progressive role and cannot be compared with Eastern despotism (which demonstrates that Russia is not only not Europe, but also not Asia) (Kavelin 1989: 196, 184, 251, 221, 222). On the other hand, European principles were not unambiguously positive, even for Europe itself. Pure, unfettered liberal principles (personal freedom, private property) lead to the polarization of society and to inevitable conflict. Kavelin wrote that this fact was demonstrated in the West. Social upheaval there is accompanied by moral decay, departure from the principles of Christian morality, and social decadence (Kavelin 1989: 109, 110). The Russian people grew out of an organic and distinctive family. According to Kavelin, the fundamental differences between Russia and Europe did not, however, mean that they did not share a common development and common goals. On the contrary, it was his opinion that opposition of the two lines of development—the rational and the organic, the individualistic and the patriarchal—must be overcome in order to achieve these goals (Kavelin 1989: 167, 168). The goal of world history is the realization of Christian moral principles and the discovery of personal dignity. In this sense, Russian principles are not any less important, and perhaps even more important than Western principles. The community is an almost ideal mechanism for promoting social peace, ensuring a harmonious balance between the community and man. "I am told: it is a utopia!" Kavelin wrote in 1859, "'But how is it a utopia,' I would ask, 'when that of which I speak already exists here in reality, though, of course, in an embryonic, undeveloped form? This utopia is a tangible fact, not to be doubted" (Kavelin 1989: 114). But the community is directly connected to the autocracy that makes it possible. Kavelin

defended not only the advantages of Russia's social system compared to the Western system, but also the advantages of autocracy over constitutionalism.

Firstly, constitutionalism is not a universal model even in Europe: it is born of revolutions and only distorts the mutual desire of the people and government to unite. Secondly, constitutionalism cannot ensure that authority transcends class. Under autocracy, the tsar is not indebted to anyone; he is 'free' and 'of the people'. The people and the government are finally mystically united, in the only way possible (Kavelin 1989: 438, 436). Thus, Kavelin professes a social and political ideal, which has already been realized (at least to some degree) in Russia and which can save Europe (understood as a totally different model of human life) (Kavelin 1989: 440, 458). While it is possible to reject this ideal, the choice is limited in this case: "… you must choose one of two things: the peaceful progress of socialism or the revolutionary fits of a constitution," which will sooner or later lead to this ideal (since it is impossible to avoid), but with heavy losses (Kavelin 1989: 440). Thus, for the general wellbeing, Russia is obliged to develop its inherent principles: "History itself compels us to create a new, unprecedented, unique political system, for which only the name *autocratic republic* is suitable" (Kavelin 1989: 436).

As we can see, the Russian Westernizers were not any less enchanted with the idea of a 'special path' than were the Slavophiles. They postulated the 'Russian path' as a possible future for the West and looked upon this 'Russian way' through the prism of 'Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality'.

The long Russian enlightenment

Even if the relationship between Orthodoxy and socialism and the relationship between nationality and the ideas of Herder, Schelling and the Romantics are obvious enough, it is not immediately apparent what is 'European' in Russian autocracy. However, if we take into account that autocracy is regarded as a component of the 'Russian path' not for itself but for its moralizing and civilizing mission, it is impossible not to see the influence of the European intellectual tradition here, from Plato to the Enlightenment. Karamzin, Puškin, Gogol', Čaadaev, Herzen, Aksakov, Kavelin and Dostoevskij were all opponents of despotism and proponents of the unique system that could be called enlightened autocracy (enlightened absolutism).

Equating these two highly complex terms needs some clarification. In my judgment, the controversy among historians about the issue whether the Russian autocracy can be considered a variant of European absolutism is in itself part of the polemical discourse about the "Russian special path" (Pavlova-Sil'vanskaja 1969; Čistozvonov 1971). Yet one should try to resist the charm of this concept even when it comes across very convincingly in scientific disguise. The attention paid to the difference between the general and the particular and the succinct articulation of the problems connected with linear progress are typical of the European intellectual cultural tradition in general. If the question of identity has long preoccupied Russia and Europe, this implies that they have not discerned any clear or fundamental differences between each other, however much they may claim the contrary.

In other words, I am inclined to agree with those scholars (Šapiro 1968; Titov 1973) who understand Russian autocracy as part of "Western" absolutism and which even in Europe appears multifaceted to a discouraging degree. This means that even if the existence of absolutism 'in reality' is questionable, the existence of absolutism as a phenomenon of consciousness and culture is indisputable (Henshall 2003).

The concept of 'enlightened' or enlightening absolutism is usually associated with the era of Catherine II in Russia (some scholars believe, with certain stipulations, that this period extends to 1815), after which, it seems, both public policy and public sentiment were transformed and could be adequately described in the categories of conservatism and liberalism. It is difficult, however, to call a government in a constant state of reform conservative, especially when society is unprepared for many of these reforms. In enacting reforms, the government placed a special emphasis on improving education and promoting 'culture' within various classes. Even the educational program of Nicholas I, typically criticized for its conservatism, significantly exceeded, according to Boris Mironov, the educational needs of the 'people' (Mironov 1999: 226). In other words, however 'conservative' government policy may have seemed from the outside, it still outpaced the actual degree of maturity of the society. In this sense, the perception of the demands for 'freedom' and 'rights' articulated by the Russian public (at least until the middle of the nineteenth century) as liberal is quite incorrect. The liberty discussed by Russians from Radiščev to the Westernizers and Slavophiles, fits poorly into the paradigm of Western legal liberty. Even the use of the words 'constitution' and 'republic' by Russian thinkers does not necessarily imply that they intended these words to have the same meanings as in the West: Kavelin's 'republic', as we have seen, was 'autocratic'. Just as Catherine's *Nakaz* seems more 'liberal' than the ideas defended by the 'liberals', government projects and their even more modestly realized incarnations, from Alexander I to Alexander II, seem much more 'bourgeois' than those offered by the Decembrists and those contained in the actual programs of the Westernizers and Slavophiles. As a result of government actions, the institution of serfdom was abolished, the judicial system was reformed (the ordinances of 1864 only crowned this process), as well as the state apparatus and local governments, the education system was expanded and specialized and a consistent effort was made to ensure that government policy had the support (real or imaginary) of 'public opinion'. Let us examine this last detail separately. The autocratic government attached great importance to legitimating its actions before its subjects, postulating the existence of a 'public opinion' in Russia and constantly stressing its necessity and usefulness. The government even believed that it would be impossible to carry out the reforms of the 1860s without preparing (fabricating) corresponding 'public opinion' in advance.

Indeed, the government's program does not seem to be conservative, but it does not look liberal either. Firstly, 'freedom' in its western, institutional sense frightened the Russian authorities no less than it frightened Russian society. Secondly, a policy that condemns not only capitalism and unrestricted private ownership but also 'technical progress', if it is separated from 'spirituality and 'enlightenment', can hardly be called liberal. Thirdly, the rhetoric employed by

government in convincing society of the need for the abolition of serfdom appealed not to the inalienable rights of man, but to a sense of humanity and 'love of the tsar'. The mixed results of the reforms of Alexander II were only a further expression of the contradictory nature of the policies of his predecessors since the mid-eighteenth century. This is not an expression of the 'specificity' of Russian liberalism, not an example of the 'hypocrisy' inherent in autocracy, and not the government wavering between conservatism and liberalism under the pressure of economic necessity or revolutionary threats. Claims concerning 'hypocrisy' and 'inconsistency' only reflect the hapless attempts of contemporaries and historians to explain the fact that the government time and again declared very radical intentions, for which it often had to overcome considerable resistance from society, only to implement a more than modest version of these intentions, which again provoked a conflict with educated society, whom the government itself had inspired to action. But what seems to be an inexplicable contradiction in terms of liberalism or conservatism fits perfectly into the logic of enlightened absolutism.

In the field of Russian history, enlightened absolutism is understood as a policy of reforming the most outdated feudal institutions, carried out by absolute monarchs in several European countries in the last decades of the eighteenth century in order to preserve the basic foundations of the old order. Enlightened absolutism is seen as "one of the stages in the development of absolutism," which "corresponds to a certain alignment of class forces and a certain level of class struggle" (Fedosov 1970: 34, 35), or a no less vague "combination of the best features of the 'legal', 'class based' and 'police' states with particular emphasis on social justice and social welfare, which also contribute to the greatness and power of the state" (Ragsdale 2001: 3). The inclusion of enlightened absolutism into the theory of modernization, where it can be considered as a form of modernization 'from above', based on the ideas of Enlightenment, seems to be a more productive approach to the topic. But even here there is a sufficient gap between the modernization that actually took place, and the cultural inheritance, the ideological backdrop that we identify with enlightened absolutism. For example, the modernization of Russia undertaken by Catherine II was more modest in scope than in Austria or Spain, but the cultural context of Russian enlightened absolutism, with regard to its extensiveness, saturation, and values, establishes it as an ideal model.

For this reason, it might be more suitable to redefine enlightened absolutism as a cultural model based on the idea of the civilizing mission of the state in relation to the mass of subjects, who find themselves in a state of 'ignorance'. The 'enlightenment' that the state facilitates is a complex combination of spiritual, intellectual, and moral conditions and cannot be reduced to the possession of a certain amount of knowledge. The state, personified in the monarch, is granted unlimited powers in the framework of this model precisely because of the 'unenlightened' nature of the people. The state's constant attempts to enact 'civilizing' reforms and, at the same time, its fear that its subjects will reach this 'enlightened' state, which would limit the ability of the state and monarch to act, are also a product of this. For this reason, reforms are implemented but in very slow motion: the goal, ultimately, is to postpone the achievement of the announced goals.

The key features of this model, common to Russia and, at least, Prussia and Austria, seem to be the following (Ivonin 2003):

- The special role of bureaucracy as the main instrument in the 'civilizing' mission of the state. Extraordinary attention to territorial and central governance and to systems of communication between the center and the provinces, with the goal of improving their 'rationality' and utility. Special attention to the status of legislation and large scale codification. Until the achievement of an 'enlightened' society, the monarch had absolute power over everyone, even the 'correctly' divided branches of government.
- Special interest in the education system and the formation of public opinion, as one of the indicators of the 'enlightenment' of the people. Outspoken patronage of the arts and sciences. A notion that freedom is only one condition for achieving the common good, and that, without enlightenment, freedom can only be harmful. The belief that the education of the people must precede or at least go hand in hand with their emancipation. In any case, there is an understanding that it is unacceptable to grant freedom to 'savages'. The authorities hold a deep mistrust of the yet 'un-enlightened' society, which is unable to distinguish the wheat from the chaff and therefore needs constant supervision. Out of this arises a complex gradation between free speech, a loyal attitude to a pseudo-opposition, the government game of creating a sense of reality and meaning in the opposition, and the well-known elements of a 'police state'.
- The humanization of the general attitude towards man, a notion of man as a rational creature and one naturally called to do good; at the same time the recognition of the 'weaknesses' that arise from that very same physical nature. The proclamation of charity as one of the values of the state. Along with this, the search for harmony between the individual and a 'common cause,' a 'common good.' A special ethic of work, duty, moderation and modesty, of which the monarch himself is an example.
- The notion that 'truth' can be equated with 'goodness,' morality and 'benefit.' Accordingly, the condemnation of bourgeois relations for their immorality and indifference to the principle of the 'common good' and the public interest. A belief in the need to maintain a healthy balance of powers within the country; a tactic of alternating support for various economic groups and classes. The dissemination of knowledge is seen as the primary guarantee against economic turmoil. The underlying belief that not property, but knowledge and reason rule the world and are capable of transforming nature.
- A general theatricality, exaggeration, and sentimentality of the proclaimed goals and deeds (but not 'hypocrisy' in today's sense). The importance of how 'civilized' the country looks from the outside (consider 'Potemkin villages' or toilets in the military settlements).

While these principles were obviously perceptible during the reigns of Catherine II and Alexander I they were somewhat less clearly discernible during the era of Paul and Nicholas. However, Paul and Nicholas were interested in technical progress, demonstrated zeal for legislating and codifying, made efforts to open new educational institutions (both the most basic and those with a professional

specialization), pursued a 'balance of power' policy between the nobility, merchants and peasants, centralized the state apparatus which actively intervened in cultural and artistic matters and to the extent of their understanding acted as patrons of culture and the arts. In addition to the special role of aesthetics during Paul's reign, as described by the historian Natan Eidelman, there are numerous examples of the Tsar's intense interest in monuments, works of applied arts and the theater. With regard to the privileges of the nobility, Paul compensated the old privileges with new and very generous privileges. His austere son Nicholas, whose autocratic despotism was so dramatically praised by his contemporaries, introduced about one hundred measures reforming serfdom and funded the work of commissions to develop a mechanism for its abolition. Nicholas also actively sponsored Russian artists, scientists and writers and considered himself a person of enlightened manners. He not only allocated a pension to the widow of the poet and Decembrist Kondraty Ryleev, but was also the first to applaud during the silence following the final line at the premiere of Gogol's *Inspector General*, thus signaling his positive reception of the work to the perplexed audience.

It should also be noted that not only the authorities functioned within this discursive framework, the public did as well.

> The famous summary of the statements of the Decembrists drawn up by Borovkov at the behest of Nicholas I," writes Vladislav Grosul, "gives an idea about the intentions of not only members of secret societies, but also of the wider community. First of all, the Decembrists complained about existing laws that were not incorporated into the system and were characterized by a great number of contradictions. The result was tyranny and a triumph of the strong … They subjected the very system of governance to serious criticism… They saw the governor and governor-general as the true despots. Government headquarters, in their opinion were poorly organized and had lost their unity. The system of ministries acted without any transparency in its dealings and was a shelter for abuses. The senate was turned into a simple print shop … The Decembrists also commented on the condition of the state fiscal policy. They pointed out embezzlement and a lack of clarity and regularity. They claimed that it was impossible to gain an overview of the finances. The management of state-owned monopolies undermined manufacturing and trade… The Decembrists found the living conditions of the peasants to be terrible. They described the fury of the landed nobility… They spoke of the oppressed state of the merchants … At the same time they drew attention to the shameful nature of statutes that reinforce the position of capital and not of man. Thus, the Decembrists were against the rule of rich, but intellectually dishonest merchants and called for the protection of the interests of the virtuous, but poor" (Grosul 2003: 159–161).

The Russian 'liberation movement' and Russian social thought obviously revolved around these ideas for quite some time, from Catherine's coup and the Decembrists to the Slavophilism and Westernism of the 1840–1860s (concepts such as: 'the power of opinion—to the people, the power of authority—to the government', 'autocratic republic' 'the calling of the Varangians' and other similar

concepts were built one way or another around the idea of the state as a propagator of culture). From these concepts came familiar difficulties in attempting to characterize the various movements in Russian public thought in terms of classic bourgeois ideology. Vladimir Pustarnakov very convincingly qualifies even the ideas of the radical democrats of the 1860s (Černyševskij, Pisarev, Dobroljubov') as enlightening (Pustarnakov 2001). *Khoždenie v Narod* (going to the people), just like any other form of payment of the "intelligentia's debt to the people," along with Bazarov's dissected frogs, strongly resembled a vulgarized Enlightenment. Positivism and Marxism provided Russian intellectuals with the means to confer a completely new and modern appearance on the old ideals of enlightenment.

Window of opportunity or emergency exit

Russian democrats and Russian nationalists grew out of a single European foundation. In order to find a special Russian path, Černyševskij reached out to Leskov and Dostoevskij. The Socialist Revolutionaries, Bolsheviks and the Black Hundreds built their programs under the banner of the 'special path.' This was not the case perhaps only with Menshevism and a few other movements during the 'Russian liberalism' of the twentieth century. We can observe sincere attempts (perhaps too sincere) to copy the 'basic' path of the West from European writings on the Russian 'tabula rasa' without any exceptions and amendments. All of this, from the debates of the Russian liberals of the 1990s with 'patriots' like Prokhanov or Kara-Murza to the long-standing disputes of the devotees of Karamzin with supporters of Admiral Šiškov, is not only a reflection of a Russian problem, but an internal dialogue in which the developing West engaged itself.

The 'special path' is not only a way of constructing the identity of a group, it also acts as another alternative to the 'main' path, a different type of social search within the boundaries of the dominant paradigm (since, in the words of Rudolf Stichweh, the image of the other always "embodies a society's own opportunities, which could not be realized or were not given enough attention" (Štikhve 1998: 44)).

If the 'main path' to the development of the West lies in capitalism, individualism, democracy, Catholicism and Protestantism, than its 'special path', as an intellectual speculation, would respectively be based on the idea of a strong state, corporatism, nepotism, orthodoxy, paganism or atheism. It is another question altogether as to whether these alternatives are viable and promising, but there is no doubt that they significantly changed the 'classic' look of the West.

Finally, we should not forget that the intensification of interest in the 'special path' in the last decades of the twentieth and at the beginning of the twenty-first century is associated with the common intellectual and epistemological situation of postmodernism and, in particular, the crisis of theories of modernization. Russian intellectuals who postulate ideas of Russian specificity today are responding, just like two centuries ago, to the demands of Western intellectualism. Today the debate about the possibility of a historical 'special path' is also, in some sense, a debate between the champions of globalism and anti-globalization

campaigners. It is a confrontation between those who see the meaning of progress in the freedom of the individual, built on the achievements of science and technology, and those who do not connect progress to these things. It is a deep philosophical dispute, and, in many ways, the philosophical question of a personal choice of worldview.

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