Topical discussions in contemporary Russian social and political theory

Denis E. Letnyakov · Alexandra F. Yakovleva

Abstract The article presents an overview of the most interesting ideas, topics, and discussions among those constituting the problem field of social and political philosophy in post-Soviet Russia.

Keywords Political philosophy · Social philosophy · The political · Politics

Comprehensive development of social and political philosophy remained impossible in our country throughout the entire Soviet period as a result of the ideological dictate of Marxism–Leninism. The liberalisation of the society during the second half of the 1980s brought about radical changes in the Russian human sciences. A whole host of noteworthy social and political philosophers have emerged since then; hundreds of books and thousands of articles have been written, and a large number of lecture courses have been developed. There are several scientific periodicals in existence, the most prominent being *Polis: Politicheskie issledovaniya* (*Polis. Political Studies*) as well as the *Politiko-filosofsky Ezhegodnik* (*Political and Philosophical Yearbook*) *and Filosofsky Zhurnal* (*Philosophical Journal*) published by the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS).

The early 1990s saw the establishment of social philosophy chairs by the philosophical departments of the country's leading universities (most of them replacing the chairs of historical materialism and scientific communism), their main objective being the presentation of a comprehensive academic course in social

D. E. Letnyakov (✉)
Department of History of Political Philosophy, The Institute of Philosophy, RAS, Moscow, Russia
e-mail: letnyakov@mail.ru

A. F. Yakovleva
Executive Secretary of The Institute of Philosophy, RAS, Moscow, Russia
e-mail: afyakovleva@gmail.com

theory that would be free from the dogmatism and bias prevalent in the earlier years. Academic institutions conducting active research in social and political philosophy today include the Institute of Philosophy RAS (the departments of Social Philosophy, the History of Political Philosophy, the Philosophy of Russian History, and the Philosophical Problems of Politics), as well as the RAS Institute of World Economy and International Relations and the Institutes of Philosophy and Law of the Ural and Siberian branches of the RAS.

The ongoing political and philosophical reflection is fuelled by social processes and their internal dynamics at the level of economic or socio-economic processes as well as at the level of symbolic preconceptions, which are, in turn, affected by changes in the political and historical situation as well as by ubiquitous public debates concerning the future of Russia, the creation of a new ideology (the introduction of such semantic structures as "Russian World," the discussion of the "Russian idea"), the civilizational basis of contemporary Russia, and the problem of barbarism and civilization in today's world. Accordingly, the last two decades can be seen as the period of the emergence of social and political philosophy in Russia. It goes without saying that it is impossible to consider all the problem areas associated with social and political theory in post-Soviet Russia in a single journal article, so we have selected just a few subjects that we consider the most vital for understanding the exact nature of the questions studied by social and political philosophers in Russia today.

Political philosophy as an element of the system of political knowledge

Already at the dawn of its establishment in Russia, political philosophy was forced into a choice between whether it would remain a philosophical discipline or convert to political science alongside public relations, communication theory etc. One of the most actively discussed topics lately is the question of the exact nature of political philosophy and its correspondence with political science and the philosophy of politics. If political science, like any other science, is concerned with the analysis and description of what *is*, dealing with existing phenomena, the domain of political philosophy seeks what *ought* to be—it is based on a normative approach, attempting to criticise extant political convictions and beliefs, discuss the ideals of freedom, equality, and justice, and in this last respect being to a certain extent Utopian (Alexeeva 2007).

In order to define political philosophy, one has to answer a couple of questions first, such as whether it should be seen as a mere attachment to the "political aspect" of what one can define as "general philosophy" or whether its specific method of considering the political constitutes political philosophy itself, defining the difference and the correlations between political philosophy and political science, as well as the role played by the history of political thought, or the history of ideas, within political theory per se.

In reality, attempts to answer the above questions have largely predetermined the tendencies prevalent in the development of political philosophy in contemporary Russia. The discussion organised by the editorial boards of the journals *Voprosy filosofii* and *Polis* in 2002 was an event of great importance in terms of attracting the

attention of the country's scholarly community to the problems of methodological conceptualisation of the specific issues of political philosophy and its relation to those of other disciplines. The main questions discussed were as follows: the problem-specific issues of political philosophy, how its subject is positioned in relation to the subject areas of the philosophy of politics, the philosophy of morality, and political theory, as well as the state of political and philosophical studies in contemporary Russia, and their future. According to Academician V. A. Lektorsky, "[o]ne finds that the kind of philosophy that would choose political processes as a subject for reflection is especially needed today—at the very least, it is necessary if one is guided by something greater than the narrow pragmatism of momentary interest and takes into account the possible perspective of political processes and their moral and human consequences" (Lektorsky et al. 2002, p. 3). Even though by that point political philosophy had been studied in Russia for more than 10 years, the general dissatisfaction with the status of the political discipline and its place in the system of socio-political disciplines and human sciences was quite obvious.

The following approaches to the search for answers to these questions have emerged.

1. The first is characterised by its *failure to distinguish* between political philosophy and the philosophy of politics as different areas of political knowledge. Some prefer to refer to political philosophy exclusively (such as L. V. Smorgunov and K. S. Gadzhiev), while others only speak of the philosophy of politics (A. S. Panarin).

2. Within a second approach the situation is more complicated. For example, T. A. Alexeeva, while she agrees that the distinction between political philosophy and philosophy of politics is "rather arbitrary", nevertheless stresses the importance of recognizing that the two concepts are not the same. Philosophy of politics is a way for philosophy to enter politics, it is a desire to utilize philosophy in explaining political phenomena, conversely, political philosophy —it is politics intruding into philosophy. Political philosophy does not limit itself to mere reflection on the nature of political processes, but rather it is a practical knowledge, which "appeals to political bodies to utilize its theories" (Alexeeva 2007, p. 17–18).

V. Y. Smorgunova prefers to speak of a system of "political knowledge" comprised of several elements. Political knowledge rises from and dwells in the public space, in the process of communication between people; therefore, it is always biased and polemical. It has two levels.

The first level is theoretical (meta-political), consisting of political philosophy, political science and political ideology. The second level is practical, where reflection coexists with the "unreflective political impulse", with the "political mentality of the great masses of people," and a knowledge of policy is interlinked with the concrete actions. The sphere of practical political knowledge includes political mood and mentality of the people, political propaganda, politicians' speeches, policies, etc.

Theoretical and practical levels are closely linked, because theoretical knowledge attempts to penetrate the "political psyche", master it, and that is where the political

ideology assumes the most important role. Smorgunova emphasizes that political philosophy should not be viewed as a form of philosophical knowledge, because philosophy is a "dispassionate" thought, in the sense that it "is not interested in anything, does not pursue any goals apart from expressing out loud what you cannot refuse" (Smorgunova 1996, p. 104–105), whereas political philosophy, in spite of its abstractness, is practice-bound by nature. While contemplating the "right" and the "ideal," it also purports to actualize both "in the concrete manifestations of our life" (Smorgunova 1996, p. 106).

3. The most radical approach (as espoused by B. G. Kapustin) presents political philosophy as a specific area of knowledge that is essentially different from such contiguous disciplines as the philosophy of politics, moral philosophy, and political science.

The specific nature of political philosophy results from the method applied to considering the domain of the political. If the philosophy of politics and political science are looking for "non-political phenomena" that determine the domain of the political (economy, human nature, the laws of progress etc.), political philosophy relies on the notion of the primacy of human activity and human freedom (Kapustin 2011). Thus, political philosophy is the only kind of political knowledge that studies what makes humans human—namely, freedom. Political philosophy discusses how "ought" may transform into "is" and vice versa, and studies the human being as a political being (Kapustin 1996). The latter is perceived as a being capable of differentiating between such things as good and evil, justice and injustice, as well as communicating with peers.

On this approach political philosophy evolves as a critical theory whose purpose is the discovery of the forms and methods of the participation of moral (and not just instrumental) reason in politics. It strives to adopt the point of view of those social entities whose very resistance to existing cultural phenomena and institutions identifies them as the emerging dominant institutions and cultural phenomena (Kapustin 2010).

The political as a philosophical problem

A number of research projects have been implemented recently with the purpose of establishing political philosophy as a critical theory whose goals include those of popularising the contemporary Western political and philosophical conceptions. Important here as well in defining the vector or research is the long overdue requirement of rendering the conceptual instruments more precise that political philosophy applies to developing political practices.

We shall cite a number of scholarly results of the last decade that we consider to be the most important. A reconstruction of the genesis of nineteenth century Western European political thought has been conducted, and the conclusion about the complexity and the multidimensional character of the establishment of the primary paradigms of political thought (Liberalism, Conservatism, and Socialism) in their relation to the Enlightenment and among themselves has been carried out. It

has been demonstrated that during the period in question the development of political thought in Western Europe was characterised by a clash of two tendencies —one gravitated towards stability and the preservation of the basic principles of a given ideology, while the other had a propensity for renewing its conceptual kernel by re-conceptualising the inherited ideological postulates in such a way that each of the "great ideologies" was forced to reassert its identity in view of economic and socio-political changes (Pantin and Myurberg 2008).

The analysis of the development of political philosophy in the twentieth century has brought the concept of the *political* to the fore, and the idea of its autonomous existence as a specific domain of human activity was studied in detail by some of the most prominent Russian philosophers. The political is a term coined in the West as a reaction to the inadequacy of the term "social" to meet the needs of the developing life-world, and there is a long history of its "expansion" into the more traditional term "socio-political" in Soviet and post-Soviet research, contradicting the very idea of the introduction of the term in question. Given the abundance of Western publications on the subject, the Soviet and post-Soviet experience in the field is substantially more limited, but some of it is nonetheless quite notable. The staff of the Department of the History of Political Philosophy of the RAS Institute of Philosophy have recently been involved in some research aimed at making the definition more precise (Fedorova 2009; Myurberg 2009), primarily using the term "space of the political" to refer to the domain where the clashes of will/violence/ freedom occur, and also raising the complex issue of the "loss of the political" (Kapustin 2004). The space of the political is the space of connections and relations among humans manifesting the social nature of a human being and a common human identity. This is where different interests, intentions, wills, different goals and wishes associated with the interpretation of what constitutes the public good interact and struggle against each other. The political is the very domain of human existence where the conditions for the cohabitation of individuals in light of their humanity are specified (Fedorova 2012).

Philosophy in the public space (freedom, civil society, and ideology)

The entire body research into various concepts conducted in order to clarify the conception of the political can be classified as pertaining to a single general agenda —Philosophy in the Public Space.

Philosophy is the very framework where the re-conceptualisation of the political can begin, and where the political can move towards becoming more autonomous from all the other areas of social life. A public person is not merely perceived as a worker or an entrepreneur owning property and working for profit, but rather as a citizen participating in the life of a given society along with everyone else— government is, after all, a public affair, or *res publica*. The public space is understood as a place of constant communication, dialogue, discussion and argument among different people discussing problems common to all, or at least to a significant part of society. The problem of government obviously becomes the most important of these problems, that is, the issue of power transferred to different

parties and individuals with programs of their own capable of implementing reforms of a certain sort. In other words, it is the space of an individual's life in civil society that should be distinct from an individual's existence within the system of exchange relations (the economic space) as well as the individual's existence as governed by the state (Mezhuev 2012).

A great deal of research into the question of ***freedom*** and ***civil society*** in public space and in the space of the political has been conducted in this context.

Investigation of the concept of political ***freedom*** in Russia is primarily associated with such names as B. G. Kapustin, V. M. Mezhuev, M. M. Fedorova, M. A. Abramov, and I. I. Myurberg. They address the issue of the theoretical and practical importance, indeed the necessity of a more precise definition of the "relation" between freedom and liberalism, seen as crucial constructive elements of an unprecedented historical process that have simultaneously served as tools and "construction objects" for a new social order. The twentieth century was also the century when the set of questions associated with freedom experienced a practical expansion, breathing a new life into the classical philosophy of freedom (Myurberg 2013). Agreeing with B. G. Kapustin that political philosophy (being the philosophy of freedom) is capable of solving the classical "is–ought problem," I. I. Myurberg deems it necessary to emphasise that, firstly, the transformation of the "is" into the "ought" and vice versa does not occur behind desks, but rather in the very same space of the political, which serves as the space of historical and practical activity *par excellence*; and secondly, the agonistic nature of this activity results in the ethical imperative of transforming animosity into political competition, which the sociology of politics views as merely an unforeseen result in the interplay of private interests.

V. M. Mezhuev 's idea that philosophy's objective is to liberate humankind, as it is the only means for freedom to be perceived and justified rationally, has a place of its very own among the approaches to the study of the idea of liberty. Freedom does not liberate humans from time; however, it does permit them to break through into eternity without leaving the flow of time. A philosopher's way of thinking can be likened to the creation of a "wormhole in time" that gives one access to the domain of eternal truths (Mezhuev 2012).

This is also relevant to the discussion of such problems as the establishment of civil society and rule of law in Russia, in particular to the study of *citizenship*.

This phenomenon has traditionally been viewed from two perspectives—the perspective of solidarity and the perspective of conflict (Malakhov and Yakovleva 2013). The former emphasizes the adherence of individuals to a certain (political) communality. Consequently, the main concepts used in the discussion of the issue of citizenship are "consolidation," "integration" (often qualified by the predicate "national"), "belonging," "identity," and "obligation." The latter perspective shifts the emphasis from solidarity to inequality and procedures resulting in the denial or restriction of access to social benefits for certain social groups. In the context of this approach, citizenship becomes an instrument capable of alleviating social protest.

New approaches to the category of civil society are another important factor conducive to the novelty of theoretical conceptualisation of the political dynamics

within modern society. B. G. Kapustin defines *civil society* as the capacity of modern societies to unite people as subjects of the economy and as citizens in order to achieve certain goals they perceive as the common good (under given historical circumstances). No theory of civil society is valid if does not achieve correspondence between the descriptive and the normative elements. In this case, normative elements should not be understood as values or measures applied to certain practices externally in order to classify them as free or not free. Normative elements should rather act in the capacity of normative objectives for real historical work—namely, political mobilisation, motivation, and integration of forces, inasmuch as the normative elements are present in a given society's life as a utopia (Kapustin 2013).

The liberal version of civil society encountered very often today (as exemplified by "non-governmental" and "non-profit" organisations) testifies to the decline of the political capability of civil society, its excessive "de-politicisation" and a growing dependence on the accumulation of capital. The historical metamorphoses of the conception of civil society are ultimately a result of differences between the historical contexts associated with some "working" version of this idea. There is no abstractly "correct" conception of civil society that could be presented as the only true alternative to its "erroneous" interpretations. A correct understanding of the nature of civil society translates as the understanding of the political and ideological functions that it served during one period or another, which defined its essence and means of application. And this includes actual philosophical methods of "rationalising" these changing historical interpretations of the term in question (Kapustin 2011).

As a result, "civil society" is not interpreted as an attribute and a structural element of "modern society" in general, but rather as a particular method that society uses for self-reflection and self-criticism, including, first and foremost, by such means as political activity (Kapustin 2013).

This context makes the political and philosophical discourse of post-Soviet Russia with respect to *ideology* in the modern world particularly relevant.

During the last couple of decades, a large number of classical ideas of ideology have been revised. Total ideologies offering a comprehensive worldview have been replaced by "partial ideologies" that "easily experiment with different combinations of ideas." The very conception of ideology expands—under the present conditions the "intellectual class" loses its monopoly on the production of ideology due to the active participation of "other producers of symbolic forms in the process—first and foremost, the media. Ideology isn't merely expressed in traditional political texts, it is "ubiquitous" (Malinova 2003). All of the above leads to the "erosion" of traditional ideologies and their hybridisation.

However, none of the above allows us to accept as obvious the idea of the "end of ideologies". The numerous metamorphoses of the contemporary public space notwithstanding, the dispute among the actors nevertheless concerns some ideological alternative, and a politician can only be supported by the electorate by means of presenting "ideologically motivated argument as opposed to summarising textbooks on management and economics" (Musikhin 2013, p. 170). Ideology as a "meta-narrative" oriented towards "a universal axiological

explanation" of the world will always exist, and the best proof of this is the emergence of new ideological discussions today (for example, those related to globalisation).

Therefore, ideologies still survive in the modern world; however, the scholarly instruments used to study them can—and must—change. Given that it is pointless to approach ideology from a "true/false" position, it has been suggested that the Kantian theory of aesthetics can be put to good use for the analysis of ideologies, namely, by treating a given ideology as a political *sensus communis* that individuals associate with (Musikhin 2008).

Ideology as a form of knowledge does not involve critical reflection by an individual, ideology is a kind of aesthetic consciousness. In other words, people who share a particular ideology derive a subconscious "aesthetic" pleasure, firstly, from the use of certain "label-markers": "Freedom", "Nation", "State" and so forth, secondly, from the sense of belonging to a particular community whose members share similar values:

Similar to Kant's "subjective universality" of the aesthetic judgment, when one individual's statement: "This is beautiful" presupposes an existence of a like-minded community, which shares this evaluation without any knowledge of the theory of aesthetics, proclamations such as: "I am American", "I am Russian", "I am a Liberal" … suggest not only hope, but also confidence in the existence of the community of "others like me", who share the positive attitudes and sentiments expressed in that statement (Musikhin 2008, p. 125).

Another point of view on the "marginalisation of ideologies" in the modern world assumes modernity to have been the time of ideologies. The relocation of ideology to the periphery of politics is a result of the process of the "individu-alisation of the political space," which results in more frequent participation by an individual in political processes, addressing the government as an individual with distinct preferences and not as part of any social group. This becomes feasible due to evolving communication media. The choice of a political position becomes free and contextual to an increasing extent; consequently, ideological conceptions are replaced by contextual preferences that can be articulated by any human being and require nothing beyond the mundane, non-systematic body of knowledge. People become involved in politics by following a stream of information of a distinctly entertainment-oriented nature, even if the information in question represents political news. Thus, the function of the primary manufacturer of the "public discourse" is relegated to the media—what we see is the mediatisation of politics (Solovyov 2001, p. 18).

A comprehensive analysis of anti-totalitarian conceptions authored by a number of prominent Russian thinkers has led to the idea that society needs to create "barriers," including those of the institutional variety, against the mutation of ideas into repressive ideologies. Once the implementation of an idea as the initial declaration of a complex socio-cultural process begins to prioritise the economy and focus on the ideas of the redistribution of wealth and property, it reaches the dangerous phase of degenerating into an ideology, seeing as how the very possibility of constructing a "positive ideology" remains questionable (Kara-Murza 2012).

Morality and politics

Debates concerning the issue of morality and politics are of the greatest importance. The two main approaches here are represented by the theoretical ethics of A. A. Guseynov and the political philosophy of B. G. Kapustin.

The former rejects the interpretations of politics that emphasise relations based on power, control, conflict of interest etc. For Guseynov, the only correct interpretation of politics is the Aristotelian view according to which it is the most advanced form of interaction among humans in a public space modelled after the ancient *polis* within which "individuals perform by presenting themselves to others" (Guseynov 2012, p. 403). A *polis* represents the most perfect form of human interaction since, unlike every other kind of relation, it remains outside the boundaries of economic (or any other) necessity. Therefore, the domain of politics is where people approach the implementation of the principles of freedom and reasonable living most closely. This represents the first important instance of correspondence between politics and morality, since a moral choice can only be made in conditions of freedom and on the basis of reason. The second such instance of correspondence can be defined as follows: what is virtue (morality) if not the individual proclivity of human beings for attaining the ideal and the greater good? Correspondingly, the same inclination as projected over the public sphere is the essence of politics, for political interaction results from a human wish to cooperate in order to bring about greater good and a better life. Thus, "there is no way a coherent interpretation of politics can be anything but morality extended" (Guseynov 2012, p. 390).

The second approach as espoused by B. G. Kapustin regards the Aristotelian picture of the relations between morality and politics as too idealistic. The real interaction between these two domains is a great deal more complex. In a way, morality is the opposite of politics, since the core of every kind of politics is invariably power and coercion, and power is "at the very least violence against somebody's will" (Kapustin 2010, p. 347).

On the other hand, to claim that morality and politics are incompatible and leave it at that would also be wrong—after all, politics as a specific kind of human activity is only made possible by a conscious attitude in regard to perceived reality, and thus free from assessments in terms of justice and injustice, good and evil etc. Otherwise human beings turn into "mechanical command executors," in which case what we have is a complete "degeneration of politics." Morality is thus seen as the "final barrier" to the degradation of politics into a set of technologies of a purely manipulative nature (Kapustin 2010, p. 348).

One must also distinguish between the different role played by morality in "large-scale" and "small-scale" politics. In "large-scale" politics alternatives to the existing political and economical status quo are considered and implemented. It is the kind of politics that brings about a new social reality (as a result of a revolution, for example). On the other hand, "small-scale" politics reproduces the existing social structure as opposed to producing it. It is the kind of politics that can be given over to "administration and management" (Kapustin 2010, p. 351). The ultimate

function of morality in politics is to motivate people to struggle in the name of higher values and principles, and not merely for the sake of private interest.

The philosophy of political action and the concept of "Revolution"

The subject of political morality and political violence is closely associated with that of political action. The subject of political action has come to be perceived as a theme of particular relevance in contemporary Russian research, and there has been a surge of interest in its collectivist forms. The conception of "political action" has been analysed over the last couple of years by examining, among other things, the political cataclysms of the first part of the twentieth century (most of them a result of Socialist revolutions) and their relations to philosophy. First and foremost, these represent the main philosophical conceptions of the left wing and the fractions it split into once there were attempts to implement their ideas: European Social Democracy, Russian Communism, and European Communism. Researchers reject the binary logic of such dichotomies as "socialism versus capitalism" or "dictatorship versus democracy" and introduce a third factor into their analyses— the industrial world in which factories or armies serve as matrices of political institutions. Under such conditions the field of the political comprises "players" as industrial progress and centralisation of manufacture, as well as the aspirations of science to model social relations, which considerably alter the character and the vector of political action (Samarskaya 2010).

The category of "revolution" remains a popular topic for theoretical discussion among Russian researchers. One of the actively discussed issues is the definition of "revolution" as well as applying the concept beyond the context of familiar social events (coups, revolts etc.) to the philosophy of political action in general. Particularly, researchers note an erosion of the concept of "revolution" and its turning into a "wandering metaphor", mostly due to it being used in a wide variety of contexts: from the "colour revolutions" in the former Soviet Union to advertising slogan about a "revolution" in cosmetics. This complicates the use of this concept as an instrument of scientific analysis.

The main disputes oppose those researchers who view revolutions as a "historical project" and trace immanent connections between revolutions that have been taking place ever since the epoch of modernity and those who classify each revolution as an "absolute" event unrelated to others.

For example, B. Mezhuev argues that revolution differs from mere revolt in that it is always "placed in a historical context", at the same time a coup or an uprising remains a one-off event that do not influence the historical context where they take place. Each revolution plays part in a fundamental transformation of the social reality, which endures from the end of the eighteenth century and can be encapsulated in the following three principles: the "de-legitimization of any power", "democratisation, or the rejection of any hierarchy" and "secularisation" as "the denial of any influence of religion on the life of society." (Mezhuev 2008, p. 200). This historical program, once launched, is being executed to this very day in one form or another.

Adding his thoughts on the matter, A. Magun proposes that the history of revolutions "presents as a series of freedom movements that fail to reach their (perpetual) goal, being interrupted mid-way, they are caught by the next wave of history and radicalized so that once again they falter and retreat under their own force (described like that revolution resembles a *tide*)" (Magun 2008, p. 17).

Magun endeavours to define revolution in terms of rejection, an internal rift in society, a crisis, a situation when sacral institutions of power become replaced by the new regime that is "immanent to society," unlike its predecessor, which was always seen as external to the people. However, once the external authority of transcendental power is discarded, it is invariably followed by "the crisis spreading into the society, an explosion, and the dissolution of social relations" (Magun 2003), since the negative energy initially aimed against the "old regime" remains intact and comes to be directed at society itself. Revolutions are often accompanied by masses rising against themselves and "tearing themselves up from the inside", which results in the civil wars and the terror that normally accompany revolutions.

This internal crisis of society and the surfacing of its internal contradictions becomes the crucial phase of the revolution—a society that denies itself and its own past—and not the overthrow of the "old regime," which can take place relatively quickly and harmlessly. Therefore the idea of a revolution leading to the foundation of a new society and a transition to a new historical stage is mythological and anti-scientific idea. "A revolution is not a fixed moment of magical foundation, but an unfinished and repetitive act of negation." (Magun 2008, p. 24).

B. G. Kapustin claims that every revolution is unpredictable, which is why it cannot be considered a "historical project." Whose project can it be, and who are its initiators and beneficiaries, if it is true about every revolution that its actual implementation turned out to be at odds with the initial ideas of its instigators? Even though revolutions attempt to seek legality ex post facto by presenting themselves as imminent events arising from the logic of historical laws of one sort or another, it is in fact impossible to create anything resembling a "unified theory of revolution" that could describe and explain this phenomenon, let alone predict the outbreak of new revolutions. This is easy enough to explain: a revolution is "an act of [human] freedom," and as such possesses the attributes of "randomness" and "free causality" or spontaneity (Kapustin 2010, p. 119).

Thus, it is impossible to construct a viable theory of revolutions; however, it is possible to point out a number of "general conditions" that can be used to characterise a certain event as a revolution. First and foremost, a revolution is an event that "opens the possibility of disputing certain worldview elements previously deemed to be self-obvious, as well as… the structures of domination they legitimise, both theoretically and practically" (Kapustin 2010, p. 121). Further, revolutions are proper to the the epoch of modernity: "In a way, all of bourgeois contemporaneity… can be seen as a history of 'revolutions'—scientific/technological, industrial, post-industrial, and sexual" (Kapustin 2010, p. 138). Finally, revolution is an event whereby the free political subject emerges and reveals itself (for instance, "hungry mobs of Parisian mutineers" turn into "a sovereign people") (Kapustin 2010, p. 164).

Revolution as an "absolute political event" is not a direct consequence of the logic of the events that precede it. It does not correspond to those events in any way, nor is it induced by them (otherwise it would have to be categorised as a "relative" event) (Filippov 2006, p. 117). Revolution creates "a rift in the existing order of things," and thus cannot be traced back to some original cause along the chain of cause and effect. Therefore, revolutions are always unexpected, and often also illogical. There is a criterion for distinguishing between revolutions and mere political uprisings or coups: "if one can find tangible reasons [for the events], we can speak of a re-formatting of the order, but not an absolute event. Most political coups are like this, even if they are occasionally declared to be revolutions." (Filippov 2006, p. 117).

Research in social philosophy (modernisation and civilization)

The particular nature of the Russian research in social philosophy is determined by a historical tradition of regarding social and political as two sides of the same coin. Similarly, both were prevalent in the media to the same degree. Consequently, to this day social and political issues go hand in hand in Russia.

In particular, the work of the Department of Social Philosophy of the RAS Institute of Philosophy involves identifying the socio-cultural determinants of social cognition, introducing a culture-centric research program into the methodology of social cognition, discovering the relation between globalisation and modernisation, and developing national models of modernisation, the conception of autochtonous capitalisms under the conditions of globalisation and a new cycle of modernisation, as well as a new epoch of modernity for the non-Western peoples (V. G. Fedotova). Russia's goals are interpreted as bilateral: access to the global economy and the solution of internal problems by means of a new type of modernisation, which no longer involves any catching-up.

Russian scientists willingly use terms coined by the Western social sciences, since the goals of modernisation imply intimate familiarity with global science. At the same time, one feels how Russian reality transforms many Western conceptions into something entirely different. The solution of this problem involves new conceptual means in order to fuse mundane notions with philosophical and scientific ideas, as well as the emergence of hitherto unfamiliar conceptions (that of a "good society," for instance).

The development of the conception of a "Good society" emphasizes the re-establishment of subjectness and the rejecting the idea that the society is nothing but a quasi-natural reality (developing regardless of conscious human effort, similarly to natural processes), which is typical for neo-Liberal doctrines. Collective notions, as well as history and culture, play a crucial role in the processes of social change. A "Good society" is understood as a specific mode of social existence that "removes" the fundamental dichotomy between "freedom" and the "public good," as well as that between the two basic strategies for implementing the idea of the "public good"—welfarism and perfectionism (Fedotova 2005).

In addition, there is ongoing research dealing with the conception of society as a form of organisation of self-sufficient human activity—a multilevel model of the social system based on the typology of the necessary forms of activity (K. K. Momdzhyan). The subject of social philosophy is believed to be the system analysis of social reality considered in the unity of its essence and existence. Since social reality represents a continuity of the organic type, its system analysis requires a special methodology known as the substantial approach (Momdzhyan 1997).

An important part of this research deals with the changing nature of sociality (Russian and global) in a situation where the system of social and philosophical ideas congruent to the Russian socio-cultural reality is just being formed. Attempts to trace out so much as a general outline of such a system are primarily associated with the issues of globalisation and the criticism of the idea of "catching-up development" (Fedotova et al. 2013). This changing social reality associated with access to intense global development and economic growth by some non-Western countries and a growing number of resource consumers can no longer be adequately described within the framework of the classical conception of progress that characterises the West as a universal development model for the non-Western countries doomed to follow the strategy of "catching-up modernisation." The linear model of progress is measured against the multi-factor model, which combines Westernisation with the application of local methods for the solution of local problems (Fedotova 2010).

Modernisation is viewed here not simply as development, but a specific variety thereof that implements the transition from the traditional society to its modern counterpart (V. G. Fedotova). We can say that modernity corresponds to people's awareness of their civilization identity, whereas modernisation results from a crisis of that identity. The kind of society with which people identify, the kind they perceive as a necessary prerequisite for their existence, is modern to them regardless of all of its possible shortcomings. They may opine that their society might be in need of changes for the better and even reforms, but not modernisation, since it is already modern enough. Not every reform is tantamount to modernisation by far. Certain reforms (Keynesian, for instance) did not involve modernisation since they did not require that Western people give up their identity (Mezhuev 2009). The kind of development we are referring to presently only applies to non-Western countries (Russia in particular), which are ipso facto excluded from the "modern" classification.

Discussions of the concept of *civilization* typical for the political and socio-philosophical discourse of contemporary Russia primarily deal with the question there are numerous coexisting civilizations on the planet developing alongside each other (including Russia as a distinct civilization), or whether "civilization" is a mere ideological and political construct that has got nothing in common with reality.

The proponents of the former approach identify with the intellectual tradition that can be traced back to N. Danilevsky, who was one of the first to promulgate the idea of a multi-civilizational world, in 1871. This tradition was interrupted during the Soviet period, when social studies were dominated by the linear Marxist scheme of interpreting history; however, once the worldview monopoly of the Marxist

ideology was vanquished, the civilizational approach was rehabilitated and instantly became popular among many Russian experts in human studies.

Some view Russia as an "Orthodox Christian civilization" whose identity is defined by the ideological maxim of Moscow being the third Rome (Panarin 2002). The philosopher V. L. Tsymburskj is the author of the conception of "insular Russia" as a distinct world separated from the "Euro-Atlantic civilization" by the so-called "straits civilizations" of the Eastern European and the Baltic states, which occupy an intermediary position between Russia and the West without belonging to the paradigm of either civilization (Cymbursky 1995, p. 135).

Scholarly analysis of the intellectual and political experience of certain prominent Russian public figures in nineteenth and twentieth century Russia has demonstrated that the evolutionary direction of Russia's development was associated with a synthesis of Russian "uniqueness" and European "universality" in the acquisition of personal freedom as the basis of law and order, and its main problem is the still open question of its identity, which is made all the more poignant by the constant attempts to return to the traditionalism and conservatism that are so characteristic of Russian political history. Throughout the centuries of Russian history it has seen regular "disruptions of civilized evolution" resulting not just from external factors (such as the Mongol invasion), but primarily from the deep contradictions inherent in society, many of which were brought about by the specific nature of the Russian social order and its quaint religious/political metaphysics. The Russian intellectual heritage is perceived as the source to turn to in order to outline the most organic ways and means for attaining the common liberal goal—"Russian freedom," which is primarily understood as positive and creative individual freedom (Kara-Murza 2011).

However, apart from adherents, the multi-civilizational approach has some vocal critics who claim that the idea of a distinct Russian civilization is charged with the mission of filling the ideological vacuum by a new national idea of sorts replacing the Soviet system. A. Yanov maintains that the very precise definition of civilization is given in classical political philosophy, and it is expressed the most lucidly by Hegel's phrase about the history of the world being "progress made in the awareness of freedom." Thus, civilized nations are those that have won the struggle for political freedom—everybody else "remains a barbarian." Yanov is convinced that only the classical approach to the definition of civilization fills human history with meaning thanks to the fact that it "uses the categories of freedom and human dignity as the basis for social evolution," whereas the multi-civilizational approach transforms history into "the flow of time without rhyme or reason reflected in the process of expanding and contracting borders (Yanov 2006). After all, if each civilization has intrinsic value and is equal to all the others, the goals of historical progress may be declared obsolete.

B. G. Kapustin is also skeptical of the multi-civilizational paradigm. The main danger of the view of Russia as the distinct civilization lies in the justification of "Western usurpation of the most important moral and political achievements of the Modern Era" (Kapustin 2008, p. 153). After all, if Russia has no connection to the Western civilization, then the "political rights and freedoms, representative democracy, impartial jury, and all that jazz are spawned by "the Judeo-Christian

model", and thus they are alien and harmful to all of us over here" (Kapustin 2008, p. 153).

In reality, all of the institutions and values listed above are hardly a result of some "civilizational constant" of the West, allegedly its inherent quality. In fact, all of them are "specific products of the Modern Era" (Kapustin 2008, p. 153) and therefore, can be claimed by no one.

In lieu of a conclusion

According to the prominent Russian philosopher V. A. Podoroga, "the return of philosophy to itself, to the metaphysics of foundations, is, oddly enough, adjacent to politics—not the kind of politics perceived as a collectivist ideological action, however… but rather an individual matter—a return to metaphysics via a freedom of choice interpreted as a political choice." (Podoroga 2009). A. A. Guseynov emphasised the following in his reply to the above statement: "The very way of thinking characteristic of philosophy should become politics in and of itself—philosophy can do this while it remains philosophy and acts in the capacity of philosophy. We cannot let politics become the playground of parliamentary demagogues and cynical political technologists." (Guseynov 2009). This may be seen as a beacon for Russian social and political philosophers, whose work is so important not only to philosophy, but also to society as a whole.

References

Alexeeva, T. A. (2007). *Политическая философия: от концепций к теориям.* (Political philosophy: From conceptions to theories). Moscow: ROSSPEN.

Cymbursky, V. L. (1995). Сюжет для цивилизации-лидера: самооборона или саморазрушение? (В полемике с версией С. Хантингтона) (A scenario for a leader civilization: Self-defence or self-destruction? [polemics with S. Huntington's version]). *Polis: Political Research, 1*, 134–147.

Fedorova, M. M. (Ed.). (2009). *Политическое как проблема. Очерки политической философии XX века.* (The political as a problem. Essays on the political philosophy of the XX century). Moscow: Idea-Press.

Fedorova, M. M. (2012). Философия и политика (Philosophy and politics). *Filosofsky zhurnal, 2*(9), 17–27.

Fedotova, V. G. (2005). *Хорошее общество.* (The good society). Moscow: Progress-Traditsiya.

Fedotova V. G. (Ed.). (2010). *Меняющаяся социальность: новые формы модернизации и прогресса* (Changing sociality: New forms of modernisation and progress). Moscow: RAS IPh.

Fedotova, V. G., Kolpakov, V. A., & Fedotova, N. N. (2013). Какая модернизация и какой капитализм нужны России? (What kind of modernisation and what kind of capitalism does Russia need?). *Voprosy filosofii, 10*, 3–12.

Filippov, A. F. (2006). Триггеры абсолютных событий. (The triggers of absolute events). *Logos, 5*, 104–117.

Guseynov, A. A. (2009). Выступление в дискуссии. (Participation in a discussion). *Filosofsky zhurnal, 1*(2), 17.

Guseynov, A. A. (2012). *Мораль и политика: уроки Аристотеля.* (Morality and politics: Aristotle's lessons). In Gusejnov, A. A. *Философия—мысль и поступок: статьи, доклады, лекции, интервью.* (Philosophy: Thought and act. Articles, talks, lectures, and interviews). St. Petersburg: Sanktpeterburgskij gumanitarnij universitet profsojuzov, 390–403.

Kapustin, B. G. (1996). Что такое «политическая философия»? (What is «political philosophy?»). *Polis: Politicheskie issledovaniya,* 6. Retrieved from http://politology.vuzlib.org/book_o236_page_8.html.

Kapustin, B. G. (2004). *Моральный выбор в политике* (The moral choice in politics). Moscow: Moscow State University Publications.

Kapustin, B. G. (2008). «Цивилизация» как идеологический конструкт ("Civilization" as an Ideological construct). *Russkij zhurnal,* autumn, 153.

Kapustin, B. G. (2010). *Критика политической философии: избранные эссе.* (A critique of political philosophy. Selected essays). Moscow: Territoriya buduschego.

Kapustin, B. G. (2011). *Гражданство и гражданское общество.* (Citizenship and civil society). Moscow: HSE.

Kapustin, B. G. (2013). *«Гражданское общество» как исчезающее понятие* (Civil society as a disappearing conception). In Malakhov, V.S. and Yakovleva, A. F. (Eds.), *Гражданство и иммиграция: концептуальное, историческое и институциональное измерение* (Citizenship and immigration: The conceptual, historical, and institutional dimension). Moscow: Kanon.

Kara-Murza, A. A. (2011). *Свобода и Вера. Христианский либерализм в российской политической культуре.* (Freedom and faith. Christian liberalism in Russian political culture). Moscow: RAS IPh.

Kara-Murza, A. (2012). Как идеи превращаются в идеологию: российский контекст. (How how to ideas become ideology: Russian context). *Filosofskii zhurnal, 2*(9), 27–44.

Lektorsky, V. A., et al. (2002). Политическая философия в России. Настоящее и будущее (Political philosophy in Russia. The present and the future). *Voprosy filosofii, 4,* 3–30.

Magun, A. V. (2003). Понятие и опыт революции (The concept and the experience of revolution). *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie (NLO), 64.* Retrieved from http://www.politstudies.ru/universum/esse/11mgn.htm#_ftnref4.

Magun, A. V. (2008). *Отрицательная революция: к деконструкции политического субъекта.* (Negative revolution. Towards a deconstruction of the political subject). St. Petersburg: European University in St. Petersburg Publications.

Malakhov, V.S. & Yakovleva, A. F. (2013) (Eds.), *Гражданство и иммиграция: концептуальное, историческое и институциональное измерение* (Citizenship and Immigration: The conceptual, historical, and institutional dimension). Moscow: Kanon.

Malinova, O Yu. (2003). *Концепт идеологии в современных политических исследованиях.* (The concept of ideology in contemporary political studies). *Politicheskaya nauka, 4,* 25–27.

Mezhuev, B. V. (2008). *«Оранжевая революция»: восстановление контекста.* (The "Orange Revolution": Restoring the context). In L. E. Blyakher, B. V. Mezhuev & A. V. Pavlov (Eds.), *Концепт «революция» в современном политическом дискурсе.* (The concept of "Revolution" in contemporary political discourse). St. Petersburg: Aleteya.

Mezhuev, V. M. (2009). Ценности современности в контексте модернизации и глобализации (Contemporary values in the context of modernisation and globalisation). *Znanie. Ponimanie. Umenie (E-journal),* 1. Retrieved from http://www.zpu-journal.ru/e-zpu/2009/1/Mezhuev/.

Mezhuev, V. M. (2012). Кому и зачем нужна сегодня философия? (Who needs philosophy today and for what purpose?). *Filosofsky zhurnal, 2*(9), 5–16.

Momdzhyan, K. K. (1997). *Введение в социальную философию.* (An introduction to social philosophy). Moscow: Vysshaya shkola, KD "Universitet".

Musikhin, G. I. (2008). Красота спасет мир? Идеология как эстетика. (Will beauty save the world? Ideology as aesthetics). *Polis: Politicheskie issledovaniya, 4,* 112–128.

Musikhin, G. I. (2013). *Очерки теории идеологий.* (Essays on the Theory of Ideologies). Moscow: HSE.

Myurberg, I. (2009). *Свобода в пространстве политического. Современные философские дискурсы.* (Freedom and 'the Political'. Philosophical discourse of modernity). Moscow: Idea-Press.

Myurberg, I. I. (2013). L'objet de la philosophie politique contemporaine. *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger, 138,* 215–226.

Panarin, A. S. (2002). *Православная цивилизация в глобальном мире.* (The orthodox civilization in the global world). Moscow: Algoritm.

Pantin, I. K. and Myurberg, I. I. (Eds.). (2008). *Европейская политическая мысль в XIX столетии* (European political thought in the nineteenth century). Moscow: Nauka.

Podoroga, V. A. (2009). О чем спрашивают, когда спрашивают «Что такое философия» (What do people really ask about when they ask, what is philosophy?). *Filosofsky zhurnal, 1*(2), 10.

Samarskaya, E. A. (2010). *Философия политического действия. Очерки истории левой политической теории XX века* (The philosophy of political action. Essays in history of left political theory of XX century). Moscow: Idea-Press.

Smorgunova, V. Ju. (1996). *Феномен политического знания*. (The phenomenon of political knowledge). St. Petersburg: Obrazovanie.

Solovyov, A. I. (2001). Политическая идеология: логика исторической эволюции. (Political ideology: The logic of historical evolution). *Polis: Politicheskie issledovaniya, 2*, 5–23.

Yanov, A. L. (2006). Сколько на Земле цивилизаций? (How many civilizations are there on earth?). *Rossija v globalnoj politike*, 5. Retrieved from http://globalaffairs.ru/number/n_7415.