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Revisiting Russian Identity in Russian Thought: From Chaadaev to the Early Twentieth Century

ROBIN AIZLEWOOD

A RECURRENT preoccupation in the tradition of Russian thought, from Chaadaev through to the twentieth century, concerns Russian identity. From Chaadaev onwards, questions concerning the distinctiveness (or the lack of it) of Russian thought, both in approach and subject matter, were linked to questions about Russian identity and Russia's role and place in the world. The very question of 'Russia and the West', for example, can be seen as a broad conceptual framework which in a certain sense informs the whole of philosophical thinking in Russia.

In recent years many of the questions posed by that large part of the Russian philosophical heritage — religious, idealist, conservative and/or liberal in its orientation — which had been partially or totally excluded in the Soviet period, have returned or re-entered the domain of public discourse.¹ More specifically, the exploration of Russian identity in Russian thought, broadly speaking from Chaadaev to Berdiaev and the Eurasians, and the publication and interpretation of this tradition, provides the background and context for the current reinterpretation of Russian identity (the problematics of which extend, of course, to the broadest discourses of the post-Soviet period). In the first great swell of publication at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s this theme was perhaps especially marked by the (Berdiaevan) motifs of the Russian idea and the destiny of Russia. But the range of

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¹ Concerning this return, see Robin Aizlewood, 'The Return of the "Russian Idea" in Publications, 1988–91', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 71, 1993, 3, pp. 490–99; Stanislav Bemovich Dzhimbinov, 'The Return of Russian Philosophy' in James Scanlan (ed.), *Russian Thought after Communism: The Recovery of a Philosophical Heritage*, Armonk, NY, 1994, pp. 11–22 (in Russian 'Vozvrashchenie russkoi filosofii', *Zdes' i teper'*, 1992, 1, pp. 76–84); and James P. Scanlan, 'Overview' in Scanlan (ed.), *Russian Thought after Communism* (see above), pp. 3–10. A full account of the background would of course take into account the preceding continuation and assimilation of this tradition in emigration, in private and in *samizdat*, and in debate that rested on it, directly or indirectly: concerning the revisiting of Chaadaev in the later Soviet period, see Julia Brun-Zejmis, 'Messianic Consciousness as an Expression of National Inferiority: Chaadaev and Some Samizdat Writings of the 1970s', *Slavic Review*, 50, 1991, pp. 646–58.

publication soon extended to include a notable shift towards Eurasianism, as well as further general anthologies and collections of works by individual thinkers specifically devoted to questions of Russian identity. Indeed, all the publications bring together, in a loose sense, a fuller and more diverse corpus of thought in this area than ever before.² Although initial enthusiasm for publication may not correspond to assimilation on a deeper level, it is still striking how persistently the contemporary relevance of the material is invoked, in terms of both particular themes and overall framework.³ In revisiting this tradition one can chart certain parameters for the reinterpretation of Russian identity today; historical and contemporary perspectives can overlap. Needless to say, the interpretation of the 'Russian idea' is problematic, and the subject of polemical debate, in relation to the distinctiveness not only of Russia but also of Russian thought.⁴

My aim here, however, is a more limited one, both in scope and perspective. I would like first, and more briefly, to outline certain general issues concerning the character of Russian thought in relation to the theme of Russian identity: these concern the distinctiveness of Russian thought and the notions of definition and consciousness. Then I will attempt to trace certain overarching paradigms in the treatment of this theme, using Chaadaev as a starting point and prism through which to project forward to the early twentieth century. Without pretending to provide an all-encompassing framework, such an

² On the early period, see Aizlewood, 'The Return of the "Russian Idea" in Publications, 1988–91'; for a comprehensive bibliography of writings by and about Eurasianists and Eurasianism and an article on the polemics around the latter, in the 1920s and again in recent years, see A. V. Antoshchenko and A. A. Kozhanov (eds), *O Evraziï i evraziïstakh: Bibliograficheskii ukazatel'*, Petrozavodsk, 1997 (especially A. V. Antoshchenko, 'Spory o evraziïstve', pp. 7–43). A wide range of publications is listed in the notes below.

³ To give two examples, the first more general (and typical for its time), the second rather particular: Mikhail Maslin, the compiler of the collection *Russkaia ideia* (1992), entitles his Introduction with the well-known Gogolian complaint about lack of knowledge of Russia, and invokes its contemporary relevance (Mikhail Maslin, "'Veliko neznan'e Rossii. . .'" in M. A. Maslin (comp.), *Russkaia ideia*, Moscow, 1992, pp. 3–17). More curiously, a recent study of Chaadaev, which quite rightly emphasizes the attention he pays to the need for civilized comfort in one's personal life, concludes by relating this to the 'new Russians': see M. I. Mikeshin, 'P. Ia. Chaadaev kak filosof povesednevnosti' in A. F. Zamaleev and A. A. Korol'kov (eds), *Filosofskaia mysl' v Rossii: traditsiia i sovremennost'* (vol. 2 of *Chelovek-Filosofia-Gumanizm: Tezisy dokladov i vystupleniiu Pervogo Rossiiskogo filosofskogo kongressa (4–7 iunია 1997 g.)*, 7 vols, St Petersburg, 1997), pp. 173–76.

⁴ The issue of Russian identity has become a prominent and recurrent topic on the pages of the journal *Voprosy filosofii*, and from a variety of perspectives: see, for example, V. M. Mezhuiev, 'O natsional'noi ideie', *Voprosy filosofii*, 1997, 12, pp. 3–14; V. S. Malakhov, 'Neudobstva s identichnost'iu', *Voprosy filosofii*, 1998, 2, pp. 43–53. For a debate on the issue of the distinctiveness of Russian thought in general, with contributions from M. N. Gromov, James Scanlan, N. K. Gavriushin and Andrzej Walicki, see *Voprosy filosofii*, 1994, 1, pp. 54–72; see also, for example, A. V. Gulyga, 'Russkaia ideia kak postsovremennaia problema', ch. 1 of his *Russkaia ideia i ee tvortsy*, Moscow, 1995, pp. 10–27; V. I. Mil'don, 'Russkaia ideia v kontse XX veka', *Voprosy filosofii*, 1996, 3, pp. 46–56; Evert van der Zveerde (Zweerde), 'Konet russkoi filosofii kak russkoi?', *Voprosy filosofii*, 1998, 2, pp. 127–35.

approach can further illuminate both Chaadaev's acknowledged role as initiator or catalyst⁵ and key strands in the subsequent tradition. The protean nature of Chaadaev's thought, well beyond the immediate context of Slavophiles and Westernizers, is often alluded to.⁶ His role, however, is not primarily as articulator of the positive content of the Russian idea; rather, the questions he poses and the way he presents the problem prefigure much of subsequent Russian thought in this area and, albeit often paradoxically, define many of its parameters.

Russian thought and Russian identity, definition and consciousness

Russian thought is of course only one among the range of contexts within which the theme of Russian identity can be and is explored and expressed. Equally, Russian thought is generically diverse and hard to define, and expresses itself through philosophy, *publitsistika* and literature. One way to distinguish or differentiate this theme as it is articulated in Russian thought, as opposed to other contexts, is to consider the relationship between ideas about Russian identity and the distinctive character of Russian thought in general. As noted at the outset, these were linked from the very start by Chaadaev. Chaadaev posed the question of Russia's identity between East and West in terms of ways of thinking or the 'two great principles of intelligent nature, imagination and reason' (I, p. 96).⁷ Therefore the question concerns not just what Russian thinkers say about Russian identity, but also how this theme fits into Russian philosophical thought (and into the thought of the thinkers themselves).

The theme of Russian identity can be interpreted as fitting centrally into the historical problematics of Russian philosophical thought when the opposition between the West and Russia is presented, as it can be in the Russian tradition, as a debate or dispute about ways of thinking

⁵ For a witty rendering of Chaadaev's acknowledged role as initiator of these questions, see Dale E. Peterson: 'It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man possessed of a good education, Peter Iakovlevich Chaadaev, initiated modern Russia's search for a national identity' (Dale E. Peterson, 'Civilizing the Race: Chaadaev and the Paradox of Eurocentric Nationalism', *Russian Review*, 56, 1997, pp. 550–63).

⁶ See, for example, M. O. Gershenzon, *P. Ia. Chaadaev. Zhizn' i myshlenie*, in his *Griboedovskaia Moskva; P. Ia. Chaadaev; Ocherki proshlogo*, Moscow, 1989, pp. 107–220 (pp. 203–04); Andrzej Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth-Century Russian Thought*, trans. Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka, Oxford, 1975, p. 83. In the context of an illuminating study of Pushkin and Chaadaev, Isupov formulates Pushkin's role as 'the substance of Russian national thinking', while Chaadaev represents 'its tendency': K. G. Isupov, 'Pushkinskii analiz istoricheskogo protsessa i sinteticheskaiia istoriosofia P. Ia. Chaadaeva', *Pushkin: Issledovaniia i materialy*, 15, 1995, pp. 5–24 (p. 23).

⁷ P. Ia. Chaadaev, *Lettres philosophiques adressées à une dame*, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i izbrannye pis'ma*, ed. Z. A. Kamenskii et al., 2 vols, Moscow, 1991, I, pp. 86–205 (p. 93); in Russian translation: *Filosoficheskie pis'ma*, *ibid.*, pp. 320–440. Translations here and subsequently are my own (concerning the two versions of Chaadaev, French and Russian, see note 21 below). Further references to this edition will be given in the text, citing volume and page numbers only.

or kinds of truth, between the orientation towards universal rational truth, on the one hand, and living truth on the other. Two recent studies, both of which locate Chaadaev at the origin of the articulation of this issue, provide different but interestingly complementary frameworks. On the one hand, in the interpretation of Boris Groys, the Russian tradition of thought from Chaadaev through the Slavophiles and beyond becomes the Other in relation to the Western model, as represented above all in Hegelian historicism. At the same time this tradition can be seen as parallel to those tendencies in post-idealist European thought from Schopenhauer onwards which discover the unconscious as unobjectifiable Other. In particular, Chaadaev's move of excluding Russia from the universal history of reason can be reinterpreted so that it comes to dispute such a history as imperfect, since not in fact universal; this in turn allows for the evaluation of Russia and the West to be reversed, as happens in Slavophilism and Chaadaev himself.⁸ On the other hand, P. V. Kuznetsov places the whole issue of philosophical and reflective thinking in Russia — starting with Chaadaev and his unrealized mission to introduce such thinking — in the context of the recurrent confrontation between Western philosophy and an apophatic consciousness or 'Russian silence'. The apophatic tradition or so-called 'negative theology' comes from the Greek patristic view of truth as ontological and only to be attained through the spiritual path of ascent from human knowledge (*znanie*) to the highest apophatic not-knowing (*neznanie*). In its culmination in hesychasm, earthly historical existence is viewed as essentially already completed, and so in inheriting this tradition Russian consciousness finds itself in a position of extra-historical existence (as it does in relation to the Hegelian model according to Groys).⁹ The issues raised here of course go far beyond the scope of this study; they are crucially important and far-reaching for Russian thought in general.

In this context it is worth considering the mode by which Russian identity might be comprehended or known. Key notions here are

⁸ Boris Groys, 'Russia and the West: The Quest for Russian National Identity', *Studies in Soviet Thought*, 43, 1992, pp. 185–98 (on Chaadaev, pp. 187–88) — in Russian: 'Poisk russkoi natsional'noi identichnosti' in A. Ia. Sharov (ed.), *Rossia i Germaniia: Opyt filosofskogo dialoga*, Moscow, 1993, pp. 30–52. Groys notes that 'Russia, from the point of view of Russian philosophy, is not a part of the West, and therefore by its very existence restricts Western aspirations to the universality of thought. It is this restriction that, indeed, constitutes, in the eyes of Russian philosophy, its own specific philosophical calling' (p. 185).

⁹ P. V. Kuznetsov, 'Metafizicheskii nartsiss: P. Ia. Chaadaev i sud'ba filosofii v Rossii', *Voprosy filosofii*, 1997, 8, pp. 175–91 (pp. 175–76, 181–86); also, with a slightly expanded title 'Metafizicheskii nartsiss i russkoe molchanie: P. Ia. Chaadaev i sud'ba filosofii v Rossii' in A. A. Ermichev and A. A. Zlatopol'skaia (comp.), *P. Ia. Chaadaev: Pro et contra. Lichnost' i tvorchestvo Petra Chaadaeva v otsenke russkikh myslitelei i issledovatelei. Antologiya*, St Petersburg, 1998, pp. 729–52.

'definition' and 'consciousness' or their opposites.¹⁰ Not surprisingly, for Chaadaev Russia scores negatively on both counts: Russia lacks any consciousness of historical identity, and, bemoaning the lack of disciplined logical thought and the syllogism in Russia, he identifies a strange vagueness (in Russian translation *neopredelennoe*) as one of the characteristic defects of Russian life (I, pp. 95, 328). However, whereas Western thought readily looks to 'definitions', the Russian word *opredelenie*, based on the root *predel* (limit, boundary), can be problematic in the Russian tradition. Indeed, for the Slavophiles definition is precisely a function of the one-sided, analytical rationality which they see as characteristic of the West. In 'O russkoi idee' (On the Russian Idea, 1909), Viacheslav Ivanov, for example, calls for 'national self-definition'.¹¹ But in *Vostok, Zapad i Russkaia ideia* (The East, the West and the Russian Idea, 1922), Karsavin notes that 'the Russian is afraid of sharp definitions and norms, vaguely sensing the limitation that is hidden in any definition'.¹² Yet he also talks of the desirability of defining the Russian idea as the task of Russian culture, even if 'this is not fully possible on account of our very potentiality'.¹³ Bearing in mind the frameworks outlined above, two (or more) related tensions or discontinuities may lie here: that between definition of the idea and the nature of the identity, which may include indefinability, and that between potentiality and realization. Similarly, both in the leading essay 'Dusha Rossii' (The Soul of Russia, 1915) of his collection *Sud'ba Rossii* (The Destiny of Russia, 1918) and in *Russkaia ideia* (The Russian Idea, 1946) Berdiaev asserts the freedom of the Russian soul in terms of its boundlessness, a feature which in *Russkaia ideia* he compares to the boundlessness of Russia itself.¹⁴ Yet in 'Dusha Rossii' he also calls for the organizing principle of Logos and form to impose itself on Russian formlessness, while recognizing that this principle has always been seen as something 'as it were not Russian, foreign'.¹⁵

If 'definition' is an ambivalent term, then the notions of 'consciousness' and 'self-consciousness' (*soznanie* and *samosoznanie*), which have a very widespread currency not only in the Westernizer tradition but also

¹⁰ Concerning the shifts and disturbance created by the current use of *identichnost'* alongside or instead of the established terms *samosoznanie* and *samoopredelenie*, see Malakhov, 'Neudobstva s identichnost'iu' (see note 4 above).

¹¹ V. I. Ivanov, 'O russkoi idee' in Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, ed. D. V. Ivanov and O. Deschartes, 4 vols, Brussels, 1971-87, III, pp. 321-39 (p. 322).

¹² L. P. Karsavin, *Vostok, Zapad i Russkaia ideia* in Karsavin, *Sochineniia*, comp. S. S. Khoruzhii, Moscow, 1993, pp. 157-216 (p. 215).

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

¹⁴ See N. A. Berdiaev, 'Dusha Rossii' in *Sud'ba Rossii*, in Berdiaev, *Russkaia ideia: Osnovnye problemy russkoi mysli XIX veka i nachala veka: Sud'ba Rossii*, Moscow, 1997, pp. 221-428 (pp. 226-51 [pp. 235-37]); and idem, *Russkaia ideia. Osnovnye problemy russkoi mysli XIX veka i nachala veka*, *ibid.*, pp. 3-220 (p. 5).

¹⁵ Berdiaev, 'Dusha Rossii', pp. 238-39.

from the Slavophiles to the Eurasians, should be recognized as problematic too. This is because consciousness itself, or at least the way it may be articulated or experienced, is not neutral in terms of the opposition outlined above between universal, rational truth and living truth. Belinskii, for example, contrasts Eastern 'contemplation' and Western 'consciousness'.¹⁶ Khomiakov opposes a scientific, formal and limited knowledge of Russia to a 'consciousness which is life itself', and yet also speaks of the people's 'life which has never risen to consciousness'.¹⁷ Similarly, but also contrastingly, the Eurasians highlight a lack of consciousness of the 'Russian-Eurasian idea' in the post-Petrine period among those, the ruling élite, who were called to realize it.¹⁸ An interesting example of the ambivalence of consciousness is provided by Dostoevskii: in relation to Russia, for example in 'Riad statei o russkoi literature' (A Series of Articles on Russian Literature, first published in *Vremia*, 1861), he emphasizes consciousness as a sign of Russia's entry into her mission, yet elsewhere, when opposing consciousness and life, he characterizes it as a 'sickness' (as exemplified in the hero of *Zapiski iz podpol'ia* [Notes from Underground, 1864]).¹⁹ Finally in this connection it is worth noting Solov'ev's suggestion in one of the articles from *Natsional'nyi vopros v Rossii* (The National Question in Russia, 1888, 1891) that in the spirit of the Russian language the word *soznanie* is linked to the thought of a negative attitude to oneself, to self-judgement.²⁰ In this sense, Chaadaev's negative view of Russia could be for Solov'ev precisely the necessary beginning of 'consciousness'.

¹⁶ V. G. Belinskii, 'Rossiia do Petra Velikogo' in Belinskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, ed. N. F. Bel'chikov et al., 13 vols, Moscow, 1953–59, v, pp. 91–152 (p. 98).

¹⁷ A. S. Khomiakov, 'Mnenie inostrantsev o Rossii' in Khomiakov, *O starom i novom. Stat'i i ocherki*, comp. B. F. Egorov, Moscow, 1988 (hereafter *O starom i novom*), pp. 82–103 (pp. 96, 99).

¹⁸ See *Evraziïstvo. Opyt sistematicheskogo izlozheniia* in I. A. Isaev (comp.), *Puti Evraziï. Russkaia intelligentsiia i sud'by Rossii*, Moscow, 1992, pp. 347–415 (p. 381). This is the first publication of Eurasian writings in a collection (it is interesting, for example, that there is no Eurasian representation in Maslin's compilation *Russkaia ideia*). It contains a contrasting combination of *Iz glubiny* (*De profundis*), the collection of articles by Berdiaev, Bulgakov, Struve, Frank and others put together in 1918 in the aftermath of the Revolution as a sequel to *Vekhi* (1909), and some of the key Eurasian texts from the 1920s. These are articles by the movement's leading light, N. S. Trubetskoi, from the first Eurasian publication, *Iskhod k Vostoku* of 1921, and the collective publication of 1926, *Evraziïstvo*, which is the last ideological statement of the movement before the split in 1927 over its political programme. For the major publication of Trubetskoi, with an introductory article by the 'last Eurasian', Lev Gumilev, see N. S. Trubetskoi, *Istoriia. Kul'tura. Iazyk*, comp. V. M. Zhivov, introductory articles by N. I. Tolstoi and L. N. Gumilev, Moscow, 1995.

¹⁹ F. M. Dostoevskii, 'Riad statei o russkoi literature. I. Vvedenie' in Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh*, Leningrad, 1972–90, xviii, 1978, pp. 41–70 (p. 56); on consciousness as sickness, see, for example, his notebooks of 1864–65: 'Zapisnaia tetrad' 1864–1865 gg.' in *ibid.*, xx, 1980, pp. 196–97.

²⁰ V. S. Solov'ev, 'Samosoznanie ili samodovol'stvo' in *Natsional'nyi vopros v Rossii*, II, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, I, *Filosofskaia publitsistika*, comp. N. V. Kotrelev, Moscow, 1989, pp. 592–604 (pp. 592–93).

Solov'ev's appeal to the spirit of the Russian language invokes an interesting dimension to the expression of Russian identity in Russian thought, namely the question of language. This is starkly and paradoxically highlighted in Chaadaev, who identified the fact that 'we are so to speak alien to ourselves' (I, p. 92) as characteristic of the Russian condition — and wrote predominantly in French.²¹ Pushkin had bemoaned the lack of a 'metaphysical language' in Russian in 1823,²² and in terms of a competition between philosophical and literary discourse in Russian for the role of bearer of ideas Chaadaev's writing in French could be said to cede priority at the very outset. Khomiakov no doubt had Chaadaev (among others) in mind in 'Mnenie inostrantsev o Rossii' (Foreigners' View of Russia, 1845), which has a companion piece 'Mnenie russkikh ob inostrantsakh' (Russians' View of Foreigners, 1846), when he asserted that the originality and character of a people can only be truly expressed in the native popular language and is not accessible either to foreigners or to those who have been isolated from that language.²³ Ironically, the Slavophiles themselves relied significantly on the translation from German of key philosophical concepts. But the issues Khomiakov raises in these articles — concerning language of expression, reaction to foreign views of Russia, the addressee, whether Russian or foreign, and emigration — have a diverse and interesting resonance as factors which form part of the problematics of Russian thought about Russia. Chaadaev is far from the only example. While Chaadaev was addressing himself in the first instance to his fellow Russians, Gertsen's articles on Russia during the years after his arrival in Europe, published first in French, were addressed to a foreign audience and sought to counter Western misconceptions and assert a positive role for both Russia and the

²¹ Chaadaev's play on identity and perspective through language continues throughout his life, so that his late view of Russia in '“L'Univers” 15 Janvier 1854' is expressed not only in French but also, as it were, by a Frenchman. In 'Apologie d'un fou', Chaadaev expresses surprise at the furore over the First Letter and claims — somewhat disingenuously — that in translation it is far less 'harsh' than in the original French (I, p. 302). It is in fact an interesting question whether his work should be quoted from the original French or the Russian translation, given that the reception of his ideas through publication has been primarily in the latter; however close and good the translation, differences in nuance and wording are unavoidable and can be highly significant (see note 86 below).

²² A. S. Pushkin, 'O prichinakh, zamedlivshikh khod nashei slovesnosti' in Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v desyati tomakh*, ed. B. V. Tomashevskii et al., 4th edn, Leningrad, 1976–79, VII, 1978, pp. 14–15 (p. 14).

²³ Khomiakov, 'Mnenie inostrantsev o Rossii', p. 97.

'thinking Russian' (as represented, of course, by Gertsen himself).²⁴ Later Solov'ev's *L'Idée russe* (*Russkaia ideia* [1888]) and *La Russie et l'Église universelle* (*Rossia i vselenskaia tserkov'* [1889]), which show clear affiliations with Chaadaev in the vision of the Catholic Church's universal role, were also first published in French.²⁵ In this century a significant body of Russian thought about Russia, including Eurasianism, was formulated in post-revolutionary exile.

In the rest of this study I would like to abstract and project forward three key paradigms in Chaadaev's thought, considering the first at some length and the other two more briefly. First, there is the way that Chaadaev formulates the problem of Russian identity: in its most general statement this is presented in terms of Russia, the East and the West, not just Russia and the West. Secondly, there is a set of oppositions that flow in large part from the theme of Russia and the West (and East): these concern continuity and discontinuity, especially in respect of time, and Russian concepts of unity. Thirdly, and in conclusion, there is pride and humility: again this flows out of the first two, but it comes down more to a psychological and evaluative dimension which also engages the personalism of Russian thought. These paradigms provide a triple perspective which, in their way, can all be shown to inform the exploration of Russian identity in Russian thought. At the same time, in outlining their articulation in Chaadaev and in tracing strands of their subsequent development, one can also cast light on the way in which, in the context of the generic diversity of Russian thought, the theme of Russian identity may be tied more or less closely to its philosophical problematics.

Russia between East and West

In his *Lettres philosophiques* Chaadaev crystallized the problem of Russia's identity and destiny within an overarching historiosophical scheme. In

²⁴ See, for example, A. I. Gertsen, 'Le Peuple russe et le socialisme. Lettre à Monsieur J. Michelet' in Gertsen, *Sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh*, ed. V. P. Volgin et al., Moscow, 1954–66, vii, 1956, pp. 271–306 (in Russian: 'Russkii narod i sotsializm', *ibid.*, pp. 307–39). Another example of a response to a 'misguided' Western view is Dostoevskii's early formulation of Russian universality in 'Riad statei o russkoi literature', which begins with an extended polemic against such views ('Riad statei o russkoi literature', pp. 41–53). The question of the role of foreign perceptions, either to be echoed or rejected, in the Russian exploration and articulation of Russian identity has a long and varied history: it includes travel and other writings about Russia (in the 1840s and 1850s especially those of Custine and Haxthausen), the rosy view of Russia's future role as expressed by Voltaire, Herder and others, and so on.

²⁵ Vladimir Soloviev, *L'Idée russe*, Paris, 1888; *idem*, *La Russie et l'Église universelle*, Paris, 1889. It is curious that two of the three thinkers in the collection *Rossia glazami russkogo. Chaadaev, Leont'ev, Solov'ev*, comp. A. F. Zamaleev, V. D. Komarov and A. I. Novikov, St Petersburg, 1991 (hereafter *Rossia glazami russkogo*), are represented by texts written originally in French.

so doing his thought sets the framework for the 'Russian idea' along the lines subsequently defined by both Solov'ev and Berdiaev as God's thinking about Russia.²⁶ In the First Letter, dated 1 December 1829 and through a mistake of the censor published in 1836, Chaadaev was famously pessimistic in his judgement of Russia as outside time and humanity. In addition, although the First Letter was published on its own (in Russian translation), leading to a hostile public reaction and the official declaration of Chaadaev as mad, it is important that it actually forms part of a cycle of eight Letters which grow out of the particular into a whole philosophical exploration of history, reason, knowledge and faith (and it is this broader picture which dominates in the *Lettres philosophiques* overall, although in Chaadaev's thought thereafter the reverse applies). In other words, the relation of thought about Russia to the wider philosophical preoccupations of Russian thought is already present.

Chaadaev placed his consideration of Russia in the dual context of his views on Christianity and Europe, and of the problem of Russia and the West. As already mentioned, however, his overarching view encompasses the East too. When he poses the problem he does so in terms of both East and West, stating that Russia belongs to neither and has the traditions of neither (1, p. 89).²⁷ Employing a nice image of a passive, reclining, proto-Oblomovan posture, Chaadaev writes that Russia is 'situated between East and West, resting with one elbow on China and the other on Germany' so that 'we should have combined within ourselves these two principles of intelligent nature — imagination and reason, and unite in our civilization the histories of the whole globe' (1, p. 96);²⁸ instead, Russia is in isolation, seemingly forgotten by Providence. It is worth repeating that here, at the outset of the exploration of Russian identity, the problem is posed philosophically, in terms of spiritual principles or ways of thinking. Equally significant

²⁶ Berdiaev, *Russkaia ideia*, p. 4; Solov'ev, *Russkaia ideia in Rossiia glazami russkogo*, pp. 311–39 (p. 312).

²⁷ A global sense of East as well as West is in fact a general feature of Chaadaev's thought: on the East in Chaadaev's thought, see E. V. Rashkovskii and V. G. Khoros, 'Problema "Zapad-Rossii-Vostok" v filosofskom nasledii P. Ia. Chaadaeva' in L. B. Alaev et al. (eds), *Vostok-Zapad. Issledovaniia. Pervody. Publikatsii*, Moscow, 1988, pp. 110–42. It is also worth noting that Chaadaev's conception of the East is significantly broader than the Orientalism of the time in Russian Romanticism: see, for example, Monika Greenleaf, *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion: Fragment, Elegy, Orient, Irony*, Stanford, CA, 1994, pp. 108–55; Greenleaf draws on Edward Said's study *Orientalism* (New York, 1978) which can also be related in interesting ways to conceptions of the East in Russian thought, not least in the effect of a location 'between East and West'.

²⁸ The protean idea of 'between East and West' is echoed in the titles of such collections as L. I. Novikova and I. N. Sizemskaia (eds), *Rossiiia mezhdru Evropoi i Aziei: Evraziiskii soblazn. Antologiia*, Moscow, 1993; and N. G. Fedorovskii (comp.), *V poiskakh svoego puti: Rossiia mezhdru Evropoi i Aziei. Khrestomatiia po istorii rossiiskoi obshchestvennoi mysli XIX i XX vekov*, Moscow, 1994, 2nd, revised, edition, Moscow, 1997.

is the fact that it is posed openly in terms of East and West, and that Russia's potential unifying role is theoretically asserted, even though in practice the assumption is clear that Russia should ideally be part of the West. Nevertheless, the protean nature of Chaadaev's thought is shown in the fact that both particularist (neither East nor West) and universalist (both East and West) versions of Russia's identity are present. If one projects forward from Chaadaev to the early twentieth century, then one overarching (though not all-encompassing) framework for Russian thought about Russia may lie precisely in a movement or shift from Chaadaev's assumption that Russia must be part of the West back to his initial statement both of what Russia is and what its role should have been: that is, from Russia and the West to Russia as Eurasia — neither Europe, nor Asia — in the ideology of Eurasianism, or Russia as East–West in the formulation of Berdiaev.²⁹

The narrative unfolding within this framework, however, is not a matter of straightforward progression; rather, one might say that it is marked by retardation.³⁰ Put schematically, the points in the paradigm may be characterized as follows: the West is clearly defined,³¹ more or less a fixed term, Russian identity is preserved and/or potential (and unarticulated),³² and the East can be a floating, loose or relative term, open to broad and narrow, more or less overlapping, interpretations. Thus, while the East is broadly conceived by Chaadaev, there is of course a recurrent specific sense of it as the Christian East, Orthodoxy, although such a definition has an obviously relative and partial dimension.

The initial operating distinction is Russia and the West. For Chaadaev, in contrast to the continuity and unity of the West, Russia is

²⁹ See, for example, the opening statement of *Iskhod k Vostoku*, ed. O. S. Shirokov, Moscow, 1997, p. 52; and Berdiaev, *Russkaia ideia*, pp. 4–5. If Chaadaev's significance lies very much in the questions he poses and the way he presents the problem, then it is interesting to note a similar interpretation by Florovskii of Eurasianism (after he had split with the movement): 'The fate of Eurasianism is the story of a spiritual failure. One must not ignore the truth [*pravda*] in Eurasianism. But at the outset it needs to be stated plainly that this is a *truth of the questions* posed, not a truth of the answers given, a truth of the problems, not their resolutions' (G. V. Florovskii, 'Evraziiskii soblazn' [1928], in *Rossia mezhu Evropoi i Aziei*, pp. 237–65 [p. 237]). Indeed, the whole quotation is strikingly applicable to Chaadaev. For a collection of Florovskii's writings on Russian identity and thought, see Georgii Florovskii, *Iz proshlogo russkoi mysli*, Moscow, 1998.

³⁰ Thus in Riasanovsky's interpretation Eurasianism as a total outlook represents a more or less unexpected break with the past in terms of the Russian intellectual tradition: see Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, 'The Emergence of Eurasianism' in *Collected Writings, 1947–1994*, Los Angeles, CA, 1994, pp. 126–51 (p. 136); see also his 'Prince N. S. Trubetskoi's *Europe and Mankind*' and 'Asia through Russian Eyes' in *Collected Writings*, pp. 112–25, 169–90.

³¹ The sense of the West as defined, with implications of closure, may be one of the reasons why Russian thought tends so often to see the West as on the verge of death, perhaps most memorably expressed in Ivan Karamazov's statement that in going to Europe 'he would be going to a cemetery' (F. M. Dostoevskii, *Brat'ia Karamazovy* in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, xiv, p. 210).

³² See Groys, 'Russia and the West', p. 188.

shifting, unrooted, cut off, lacking past and future — a ‘lacuna in the intellectual order’ (I, p. 97). In this way, paradoxically, Chaadaev sets in motion thought about Russia by positing not something, but nothing. From a certain point of view, such a move is the opposite of what both intuitively and logically might be expected, although nothingness is also one step from potentiality. This should also be seen in terms of the frameworks for interpreting Russian thought outlined earlier. Yet at the same time the illuminating force of what Chaadaev says can be shifted from the content to the framework. In ‘Apologie d’un fou’, written in apology but also self-justification after the publication of the First Letter, the fundamental feature of Russia does not change, but its value switches from negative to positive: Russia as a ‘blank piece of paper’ is pure receptivity and potentiality and, now that ‘the words Europe and the West’ have been written on it by Peter’s ‘strong hand’, ‘the future is ours’ (I, pp. 293, 301). The significance of this move from ‘nothing’ to potentiality is very great. In essence, for example, Chaadaev here articulates Dostoevskii’s thesis concerning Russian universality as receptive openness to all cultures.³³ And in general the value switch within Chaadaev is itself very distinctive of Russian thinking about Russia in the broadest contexts, which may switch from pessimism to optimism, and/or from a sense of inferiority to one of superiority.

In both the *Lettres philosophiques* and ‘Apologie d’un fou’ Chaadaev himself seems clear in his view that Russia — if it is to be part of history — must join with the West, not the East. This view, however, does not follow directly from his initial formulation of Russia as neither East nor West. The space that Chaadaev opens allows for reinterpretations or other interpretations. This gets under way in his own thought, which in general moves from apparently monologic certainty in the *Lettres philosophiques* to a position that is increasingly dialogic and shifting. The change is marked by Chaadaev himself: whereas in a letter to Pushkin of 18 September 1831 he speaks of his ‘one thought’ (II, p. 69), in a letter to Aleksandr Turgenev of August–November 1843 he defends himself by saying that he is ‘not one of those who voluntarily remains fixed on one idea’ and that he had often ‘changed his opinion on many things’ (II, p. 187). His own revised belief in Russia’s future role is already evident before ‘Apologie d’un fou’ in a letter to Turgenev of 1 May 1835 (II, p. 92). But it is also revealing that in this intermediate period, and especially in a long letter to Turgenev of October–November 1835, Chaadaev further problematizes Russia’s relation to Europe.

³³ This idea is already clearly formulated by Dostoevskii in ‘Riad statei o russkoi literature’, but is most famously presented in the Pushkin Speech (Dostoevskii, ‘Riad statei o russkoi literature’, pp. 54–55; and idem, ‘Pushkin: Ocherk’ in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, xxvi, pp. 136–49).

In this letter he states that 'we are not the West', 'we have a different civilization' from Europe and 'have no reason to run after others' (II, pp. 96, 98); he suddenly feels that Europe has rejected Russia, so 'we no longer belong to Europe' and 'from this day forth our universal mission has begun' (II, p. 99). Yet he dismisses the suggestion that Russia's role should be to civilize the East and repeats his belief that 'the day will come when we will be the intellectual focus of Europe' (II, pp. 98–99).³⁴ In 'Apologie d'un fou', however, when Chaadaev condemns the emergent Slavophilism and champions Peter the Great and hence Russia's orientation to the West,³⁵ he locates Russia in the east of Europe but states: 'we have never formed part of the East. The East has a history which has nothing in common with that of our country' (I, p. 297). Once again, as in the *Lettres philosophiques*, Chaadaev presents East and West in the broadest terms as not mere geography, but alternative spiritual principles and ways of thinking, only now the comparison is presented a little differently: the East focused the mind or spirit on inner contemplation, while the West directs it outwards to engage with the world. Both are highly valued, but what the East began the West has assimilated and expanded (I, pp. 295–96). By implication, therefore, if the future lies with Russia, then Russia can indeed combine East and West (although this is not spelled out). It is interesting that in the paragraph which condemns the 'new school' of emerging Slavophilism (I, pp. 296–97) Chaadaev seems to use the term East in the same broad sense as in the paragraphs surrounding it which have just been considered. There is certainly rhetorical or satirical looseness here, which arises in part from his well-known propensity for pastiche: Chaadaev sweepingly includes Russia's 'beliefs', that is, Orthodoxy, as received from this broadly conceived East. But, aside from rhetoric or satire, it is striking that the alternative to a Western-orientated view of Russia is posited in a way that is far broader than the Slavophile version; its implications await subsequent exploration.

Although East and West are still presented in terms of spiritual principles in 'Apologie d'un fou', Chaadaev also introduces concessions (or contaminations) which presage future diversification in the exploration of Russian identity in Russian thought. Identity is no longer

³⁴ Kozhinov, in seeking to assert that after the First Letter Chaadaev came to view Russia's path as in opposition to the West (contrary to standard interpretations), quotes at length from this letter but without the final sentence here (see Vadim Kozhinov, *Sud'ba Rossii: vchera, segodnia, zavtra*, Moscow, 1997, pp. 344–48; in this book Kozhinov returns to the same title as for his collection of essays published seven years earlier: Vadim Kozhinov, *Sud'ba Rossii: vchera, segodnia, zavtra*, Moscow, 1990).

³⁵ In a striking instance of nominalism, the lexical ambiguity inherent in the phrasing 'orientation to the West' leads Sergei Kliuchnikov to assert the contrary truth of an orientation to the East for Russia (Sergei Kliuchnikov, 'Vostochnaia orientatsiia russkoi kul'tury', introductory article to Sergei Kliuchnikov [comp.], *Russkii uzел evraziistva. Vostok v russkoi mysli. Sbornik trudov evraziistsev*, Moscow, 1997, pp. 5–70 [pp. 5–7]).

presented solely in terms of such broad principles. First, in championing Peter the Great, Chaadaev cedes space or even priority to the political ruler and the autocracy. Peter still moves history by thought and the idea (I, pp. 291–92), but is not purely the kind of thinker envisaged as having this role in the First Letter: ‘there is a certain number of thinkers [...] who give impulsion to the collective consciousness of the nation and set it in motion’ (I, p. 95). Towards the end of ‘Apologie d’un fou’, Chaadaev cedes even more: Russian history is created by ‘the profound action of power, the constant influence of the soil and almost never that of the public will’ (I, p. 303).³⁶ Whereas ‘Apologie d’un fou’ may be optimistic about Russia, it is worth noting how pessimistic are its implications for a thinker such as Chaadaev. Although Chaadaev does have in mind the Russian people’s capacity for humble submission, it would be wrong to see an adumbration of *pochwennichestvo* here: by ‘soil’ he means the physical conditions of Russia and its geography. This is a second area of concession, which adumbrates future geographical and geopolitical diversification in the exploration of Russian identity. More precisely, Chaadaev only goes so far as to open up the possibility of such a concession. In the main body of the text Russia’s size and geographical location is ‘a purely material fact [...] geographical [...] but that is all’ and Russia’s real history will begin only when it is imbued with the idea it is destined to realize (I, p. 295). In the final paragraph, however, at which the text breaks off unfinished,³⁷ the geographical fact is reiterated in an open, even enigmatic way:

There is one fact, which dominates our movement through the centuries, which runs through all our history and comprises in a sense all its philosophy, which manifests itself in all the epochs of our social life and determines their character, which is both the essential element of our political greatness and the true cause of our intellectual impotence — and that is the fact of our geography. (I, p. 304)³⁸

In the Slavophile model the West is clearly defined as rationalist, one-sided and external, while Russia is inner and organic. The terms of this dichotomy are extraordinarily durable (and relate to the frameworks introduced earlier). I would like to focus here on just two

³⁶ Naturally, this may be read in the context of Chaadaev’s difficulties with the authorities, but it is notable that he has already defended their role, at least to some extent, in the letter to Turgenev of 1835 which problematizes Russia’s relation to Europe (II, p. 96).

³⁷ The text exists in two versions, one of which excludes this final paragraph (see commentary in I, pp. 742–43).

³⁸ In quoting this sentence in his essay ‘Petr Chaadaev’, Mandel’shtam added ellipsis at the end, thereby accentuating the enigmatic open-endedness: see Osip Mandel’shtam, ‘Petr Chaadaev’ in Mandel’shtam, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, ed. S. S. Averintsev and P. M. Nerler, Moscow, 1990, II, pp. 151–56 [p. 154]; on Mandel’shtam and Chaadaev, see Clare Cavanagh, ‘Synthetic Nationality: Mandel’shtam and Chaadaev’, *Slavic Review*, 49, 1990, pp. 597–610.

points. First, there is a tension in Slavophile thought between the assertion or naming of what Russia represents and a delay or resistance to articulation. Thus, for Khomiakov, while the character of Russia is asserted, it is not yet articulated or even known: 'We do not know Russia', he says in 'Mnenie inostrantsev o Rossii', while in 'Po povodu Gumbol'dta' (Concerning Humboldt, 1848) the ability to express Russian thought and the essence of Russia is still a long way off.³⁹ The second point concerns the formulation of the opposition between the West and Russia, fundamentally still in terms of spiritual principles or ways of thinking, in one of the purest formulations of classical Slavophilism — Kireevskii's article 'O kharaktere prosveshcheniia Evropy i o ego otnoshenii k prosveshcheniiu Rossii' (On the Character of European Culture and its Relationship to Russian Culture, 1851). The dichotomous nature of the Slavophile worldview is nowhere more fully exemplified than in the concluding presentation of Europe and Russia, which takes the form of an extended, page-long, almost endless series of oppositions, twenty-four no less.⁴⁰ This is followed by a lengthy summary (prefaced by 'in a word!') which eventually reduces the oppositions to just two: duality (*razdvoenie*) versus wholeness (*tsel'nost'*), analytical, abstract rationality or understanding (*rassudochnost'*) versus a reason (*razumnost'*) which is understood as integral reason linked to living truth.⁴¹ So extended and all-encompassing are the oppositions that the model seems to become not so much the West and Russia, as the West and not-West, where the initial and seemingly defining role in the opposition is still the West; or even it is the opposition itself which is defining. There is a kind of double play on duality: the West is characterized by duality, but at the same time the whole construction rests on the duality of the opposition between the West and Russia.

In the Slavophile opposition of Europe and Russia the East is principally a term which is synonymous with Orthodoxy and can be elided with Russia. Definitions of the East as something other than the Christian East can be found in Russian thought of this period, but they do not amount to any consistent, let alone prominent, use of the term. In the Westernizer tradition Asia and China could stand for stagnation, oppression and backwardness, although Gertsen's desire not to show

³⁹ Khomiakov, 'Mnenie inostrantsev o Rossii', p. 88; A. S. Khomiakov, 'Po povodu Gumbol'dta' in *O starom i novom*, pp. 196–221 (p. 221).

⁴⁰ Walicki identifies this article as Kireevskii's 'clearest and most systematic exposition of the Slavophile philosophy of history': Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy*, pp. 134–50; see also Groys, 'Russia and the West', pp. 189–90; for an exposition of the dichotomous base of the Slavophile worldview, see N. V. Riasanovsky, *Russia and the West in the Teaching of the Slavophiles: A Study in Romantic Ideology*, Cambridge, MA, 1952.

⁴¹ I. V. Kireevskii, 'O kharaktere prosveshcheniia Evropy i o ego otnoshenii k prosveshcheniiu Rossii' in Kireevskii, *Izbrannye stat'i*, comp. V. A. Kotelnikov, Moscow, 1984, pp. 199–238 (pp. 234–35).

any inferiority complex before Europe leads him to assert that 'we do not blush that we come from Asia [...] we are part of the world between America and Europe'.⁴² There are eloquent moments when Dostoevskii towards the end of his life invokes Russia's Asian dimension or even mission: 'To Asia!' and 'we are Asians as much as Europeans',⁴³ but these are still occasionalisms to be understood within the context of his complex attitude towards Europe.⁴⁴

The clear separation of Russia and the West is achieved by Danilevskii and Leont'ev, who can be seen as preparing the ground for Eurasianism. In Danilevskii's *Rossiiia i Evropa* (Russia and Europe, originally 1869) the copulative 'and' of the title becomes inverted in his geopolitical assertion of the Slav culturo-historical type, led by Russia, as separate from Europe;⁴⁵ in *Vizantizm i slaviansstvo* (Byzantinism and Slavdom, 1875), however, Leont'ev is even equivocal about Slavdom.⁴⁶ While it is true that the first of the four categories that comprise Danilevskii's culturo-historical types is the religious,⁴⁷ the centre of gravity in his formulation of the problem of Russia and Europe has shifted far from an opposition of spiritual principles or ways of thinking: the philosophical dimension of cultural identity has receded to the background here (and the distance from Kireevskii is striking). Within a broad culturo-historical framework the 'Eastern question' is focused on the geopolitical one of the period, while more generally Danilevskii rejects absolute conceptions of East and West as artificial and treats the problem as historically relative.⁴⁸

Leont'ev, like Danilevskii, may not be especially concerned with different ways of thinking, but the spiritual principle of Byzantinism is central to his thought. What defines Russia for Leont'ev is the Byzantine principles of autocracy, Orthodoxy and the religious-ethical view which does not trust in anything earthly, in happiness and our capacity for moral perfection in this life: 'It is the most powerful antithesis to the idea of all-humanity in the sense of earthly all-equality, earthly all-freedom, earthly all-perfection and all-satisfaction.'⁴⁹ On the other hand, his thought also advances an aesthetic theory of culture whereby the highest value is maximum diversity within unity. These

⁴² A. I. Gertsen, 'Prolegomena' in Gertsen, *Sobranie sochinenii*, xx, pp. 50-79 (p. 54) (in the original French in *ibid.*, pp. 22-49).

⁴³ Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, xxvii, pp. 62, 83 (these are among notes from 1880-81).

⁴⁴ See V. V. Zen'kovskii, *Russkie mysliteli i Evropa. Kritika evropeiskoi kul'tury u russkikh myslitelei*, Moscow, 1997, pp. 114-24.

⁴⁵ N. Ia. Danilevskii, *Rossiiia i Evropa*, Moscow, 1991 (1871 edition).

⁴⁶ K. N. Leont'ev, *Vizantizm i slaviansstvo* in Leont'ev, *Izbrannoe*, comp. I. N. Smirnov, Moscow, 1993, pp. 19-118 (pp. 42-57).

⁴⁷ Danilevskii, *Rossiiia i Evropa*, p. 471.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-56, 71-72, 301-06.

⁴⁹ Leont'ev, *Vizantizm i slaviansstvo*, p. 19.

two elements come together, negatively, in contemporary Europe (Leont'ev, like Chaadaev, highly valued Europe's cultural flowering in the past). If Chaadaev can be characterized by Eurocentric messianism, Leont'ev presents a Eurocentric apocalypse. His thought is pessimistically centred on the dual negative that contemporary Europe embodies, as exemplified with rhetorical flourish by the title of his essay 'Srednii evropeets kak ideal i orudie vsemirnogo razrusheniia' (The Average European as Ideal and Instrument of Universal Destruction, 1884).⁵⁰ Leont'ev here expresses in perhaps its most extreme form a characteristic antipathy among Russian thinkers, shared by Chaadaev, Gertsen, Dostoevskii, Berdiaev and others, towards Western bourgeois, middle-class values. European bourgeois liberal egalitarianism, leading inevitably to a unified Europe which Leont'ev foresaw with dismay,⁵¹ is based on the principle of general happiness leading to sameness, a simplification whereby all become alike. The centrality of this idea means that, although Leont'ev values the East, his articulation of an Eastern orientation for Russia may be rather fanciful or vague. For example, in 'Srednii evropeets' he is prepared to consider the benefits of being infected by a mixture of the Chinese state and Indian mysticism so as to avoid the effects of the average European;⁵² while towards the end of the essay he talks vaguely about Russia's 'Eastern future' and says that 'one can certainly dream and be concerned about an original Russian, Slav or new Eastern culture and it is acceptable even to search for it'.⁵³

A further instance of the variability and partiality of the term East is evinced by Solov'ev's 'Tri sily' (Three Forces, 1877): the three forces are here the West, the East equated with Islam, and Russia and Slavdom which alone can offer mankind a synthesis.⁵⁴ In the poem 'Ex oriente lux' of 1890, Solov'ev asks of Russia: 'Which East do you want to be: / The East of Xerxes or of Christ?',⁵⁵ while subsequently the East for him had become the threat of 'panmongolism'.⁵⁶ The general question about 'Which East?' is pertinent. It could, for example, be asked of Berdiaev (who himself asks it of the Eurasians).⁵⁷ In his essay 'Problema Vostoka i Zapada v religioznom soznanii VI. Solov'eva' (The Problem of East and West in the Religious Consciousness of VI.

⁵⁰ K. N. Leont'ev, 'Srednii evropeets kak ideal i orudie vsemirnogo razrusheniia' (hereafter 'Srednii evropeets') in Leont'ev, *Izbrannoe*, pp. 119–68.

⁵¹ See Leont'ev, *Vizantizm i slaviansstvo*, pp. 111–13.

⁵² Leont'ev, 'Srednii evropeets', p. 147.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 162–63.

⁵⁴ Solov'ev, 'Tri sily' in *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, 1, pp. 19–31.

⁵⁵ In *Iskhod k Vostoku* Florovskii echoes these lines but turns them against the West which according to him has taken over the principle of arbitrary individual power — the 'East of Xerxes': Georgii V. Florovskii, 'Khitrost' razuma' in *Iskhod k Vostoku*, pp. 99–119 (p. 114).

⁵⁶ Both the poems 'Ex oriente lux' and 'Panmongolizm' are included as part of a section entitled 'Lyrical Digression' in *Rossia mezhdru Evropoi i Aziei*, pp. 233–34.

⁵⁷ N. A. Berdiaev, 'Evraziitsy' (1925) in *Rossia mezhdru Evropoi i Aziei*, pp. 292–300 (p. 297).

Solov'ev, 1911) Berdiaev asserts that the problem of East and West is fundamental not only in Solov'ev's own thought but that 'Russian national self-consciousness was born' in the posing of this problem and that nineteenth-century Russian thought constantly battled with it.⁵⁸ But at this stage Berdiaev does not follow Chaadaev's posing of the problem, instead East essentially means the Christian East. When in the concluding section he reaches Solov'ev's 'panmongolism', however, he defines this as the 'extreme East' which Russia has to overcome within itself in the cause of unifying East and West in Christian all-humanity.⁵⁹ Subsequently, in the collection *Sud'ba Rossii*, in his response to the Eurasians' 'particularism' and prioritizing of the Turanian element in Russian culture in the article 'Evraziitsy' (The Eurasians, 1925), and finally in *Russkaia ideia* he talks of Russia as 'East-West'. In typical Berdiaevan style he suggests a sweeping scope to the terms: Russia occupies the place of mediator between East and West and is 'the unifier of the two worlds';⁶⁰ on occasion more precisely, however, Russia is still the Christian East.⁶¹ A final variation on the theme (at least as far as this study is concerned) is Karsavin's *Vostok, Zapad i Russkaia ideia*, written before he joined the Eurasians: West and East are defined in the broadest terms as the Christian and non-Christian cultural worlds, the latter therefore covering everything from Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism to Hellenic and pagan religion.⁶² Yet when the focus switches to within the Christian cultural world, that is, to Russia and the West, some slippage occurs and Russia and Orthodoxy are referred to not just as the Christian East but also simply as the East, whose task is to overcome Western tendencies to limit the Christian truth of all-unity, including, characteristically, the tendency to one-sided rationalism.⁶³

Bearing in mind how Berdiaev's interpretation of Russian thought locates Chaadaev at its origins,⁶⁴ and also the auto-reflexive angle of this interpretation, his notion of Russia as East-West, unifying the two worlds, can certainly be seen as a realization of the universalist aspect of Chaadaev's original posing of Russia's destiny. But East-West for a

⁵⁸ Nikolai Berdiaev, 'Problema Vostoka i Zapada v religioznom soznanii VI. Solov'eva' in Berdiaev, *Sobranie sochinenii*, ed. N. A. Struve, 4 vols, Paris, 1983-90, III, *Tipy religioznoi mysli v Rossii*, 1989, pp. 214-41 (p. 218).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 238-39.

⁶⁰ See Berdiaev, 'Dusha Rossii', pp. 226-28, 244-45; 'Evraziitsy', pp. 294-96; *Russkaia ideia*, pp. 4-5.

⁶¹ Berdiaev, 'Dusha Rossii', p. 227.

⁶² See Karsavin, *Vostok, Zapad i Russkaia ideia*, pp. 168-78.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 195-216 (p. 211).

⁶⁴ See Berdiaev, *Russkaia ideia*, pp. 31-34.

thinker like Berdiaev is not geographical,⁶⁵ as it is for the Eurasian movement.⁶⁶ Interestingly, therefore, in terms of a framework that goes from Chaadaev to Berdiaev and the Eurasians, it is the notion of the Eurasian geographical entity as an organic cultural whole, the 'continent-ocean',⁶⁷ which completes or answers the point at which Chaadaev's 'Apologie d'un fou' so enigmatically breaks off: the 'geographical fact'. At the same time, as noted at the outset, Chaadaev's initial framework of Russia's actual situation as neither East nor West is repeated in Eurasianism, but with a reverse or revised interpretation. Russia's cultural identity lies not to the West but to the East in the Eurasian multi-ethnic space: 'Russian people and people of the nations of the "Russian world" [*liudi narodov Rossiiskogo mira*] are neither Europeans nor Asians. Fusing with the native element [*stikhiia*] of culture and life surrounding us — we are not ashamed to recognize ourselves as Eurasians.'⁶⁸ Moreover, in keeping with the way that identity may be linked to ways of thinking, Florovskii offers yet another exposure of the one-sidedness of Western rationalism, which though lifeless has the cunning to reinvent itself.⁶⁹ In general, from the diverse initial collection *Iskhod k Vostoku* to the attempt at a systematic exposition in *Evraziistvo*, with its view of the Eurasian peoples united under the Orthodox Church and the state, the Eurasian model echoes but typically inverts Chaadaevian motifs in a number of interesting ways, while drawing very much on both the Slavophiles and Danilevskii and Leont'ev.⁷⁰

Continuity, discontinuity and unity

In Chaadaev's thought the problem of Russia and the West is bound up with the second paradigm which I would like to consider (more briefly), namely that of continuity and discontinuity. In fact the opposition of continuity and discontinuity may be read as one of the fundamental themes in Chaadaev. It is a theme which is central to the question of Russian identity and has the broadest ramifications in the Russian context, but has wider philosophical implications too. The argument in the First Letter begins with the assertion that 'only that

⁶⁵ Berdiaev, 'Dusha Rossii', p. 245; as mentioned earlier, in *Rusaskaia ideia* (p. 5) Berdiaev does relate the freedom of the Russian soul to the boundlessness of Russia itself, but this is physical geography, rather figuratively understood at that.

⁶⁶ Concerning the ideological interpretation of geography, see M. Bassin, 'Russia between Europe and Asia: The Ideological Construction of Geographical Space', *Slavic Review*, 50, 1991, pp. 1–17.

⁶⁷ See *Evraziistvo*, p. 377; see also Petr Savitskii, 'Kontinent-ocean. (Rossiia i mirovoi rynok)' in Savitskii, *Kontinent Evraziia*, comp. A. G. Dugin, Moscow, 1997, pp. 398–419.

⁶⁸ *Iskhod k Vostoku*, p. 52.

⁶⁹ Florovskii, 'Khitrost' razuma'.

⁷⁰ See S. S. Khoruzhii, 'Transformatsiia slavianofil'skoi idei v XX veke', *Voprosy filosofii*, 1994, 11, pp. 52–62.

teaching which is based on the highest principle of unity and the direct passing on of truth in the continuous succession of its servants can be in harmony with the true spirit of religion' (I, p. 87). While the unity of continuity corresponds to the truth, Russia for Chaadaev is characterized by exclusion from this continuity and Russian life is a model of discontinuity, or the continuity of discontinuity.⁷¹ One of the signs of discontinuity lies in the lack of a capacity or habit for consistent or logical thinking (I, p. 94); curiously, however, for all the clarity of expression in the *Lettres philosophiques*, Chaadaev's thought proceeds more cyclically than in a rigorous straight line. Some of his most eloquent and famous passages are devoted to this theme of discontinuity: 'Take a look around [. . .]. One might say that the whole world is in motion. Nobody has a definite sphere of existence [. . .] there are no rules for anything [. . .]; there is nothing constant, nothing stable: everything moves on, everything passes, without leaving any trace either outside or inside us' (I, p. 90). Chaadaev develops this idea throughout. One related motif is that of the Russian way of life as rootless and nomadic (I, p. 90), which provides another instance of the reversal of his model in Eurasianism, where a defining positive feature of the Eurasian type is precisely its nomadic character.⁷² This motif is also present in Dostoevskii's interpretation of Pushkin's Aleko as a wandering, rootless intellectual, which is both negative and positive in its valuation, while the wanderer figure and wandering tradition in Russia are a key positive for Berdiaev.⁷³

But the theme of continuity and discontinuity is especially important in respect of time (and hence can be related to the extra-historical situation of Russia in the frameworks for interpreting Russian thought outlined at the outset). Chaadaev presents Russia as having no link with either past or future, which creates a fundamental problem of identity, of alienation: 'Our memories go back no further than the day before; we are so to speak alien to ourselves. We proceed through time in a truly singular way, so that with each step we take forward our past experience disappears without recall' (I, p. 92). In brief, 'we are situated as it were outside time' (I, p. 89). This condition, which makes of Russia a negative exception, a lesson to the world of how not to be, persists in 'Apologie d'un fou': 'The history of any people represents not only a sequence of facts that follow on from each other, but also a chain of ideas that are linked to each other [. . .]. This is precisely the history that we do not have' (I, pp. 293-94). But in keeping with the re-evaluation of receptivity as an avenue to the future, such a lack of

⁷¹ Among the manifestations of discontinuity one can certainly include the fate of the Russian tradition of thought in this century.

⁷² See *Eurazïstvo*, p. 378.

⁷³ See Dostoevskii, 'Pushkin', pp. 137-38; Berdiaev, 'Dusha Rossii', pp. 235-37.

history is now a positive, and Russia is a great country whose role is known only to Providence.

There are of course many echoes and some powerful strands in Russian thought and culture that can be related to this idea. Russia becomes the positive, not negative, exception, which feeds into the Russian Messianic tradition. Temporal discontinuity, or the position of standing outside time, also leads to an eschatological world view; from such a point, the potential shifts out of time, forwards or backwards, emanate Utopias.⁷⁴ More specifically, the motif of continuity and discontinuity is very pertinent to the classical Slavophile model, which subsumes it within the internal/external opposition, so that the inner continuity of the Russian tradition has been preserved despite the external discontinuity of the Petrine reforms. The Chaadaevian diagnosis is applied to the Europeanized stratum of Russian society, who have no past because uprooted from the people, and so is turned back on its originator. The Slavophile inheritance of Chaadaev's idea can, however, be more ambivalent and surprisingly close to Chaadaev himself. In his early article 'O starom i novom' (On the Old and the New, 1839) Khomiakov makes a positive out of the lack of a past, in a way which as it were displaces Chaadaev's scheme from Petersburg to Moscow: 'Moscow was a new city, which had no past and no definitive character, it was a mixture of different Slav families, and this is its worth.'⁷⁵ Similarly, in 'Po povodu Gumbol'dta' he writes: 'custom does not exist for us and our eternally changing way of life is not even capable of turning into custom [. . .]. There is no past for us, yesterday is the distant past'.⁷⁶ The Chaadaevian formula is also repeated in Gertsen, both in the assertion that 'the past of the Russian people is dark, its present is terrible, but it has rights to the future' and in his paean to the thinking Russian élite who are free and independent because 'we have nothing'.⁷⁷

In a striking example of the protean paradoxes of Chaadaev's own thought, while he stresses unity through continuity, he also looks towards the realization of the Kingdom of Heaven both in the epigraph — 'Thy Kingdom come' — and in the final sentence of the *Lettres philosophiques*, where he points towards 'the resolution of the universal drama, the great apocalyptic synthesis' (I, p. 205). In Berdiaev's interpretation, this eschatological motif is central to the Russian

⁷⁴ For a wide-ranging study of Russian Utopianism, see Leonid Heller and Michel Niqueux, *Histoire de l'utopie en Russie*, Paris, 1995.

⁷⁵ A. S. Khomiakov, 'O starom i novom' in *O starom i novom* (see note 17 above), pp. 41–56 (p. 52).

⁷⁶ Khomiakov, 'Po povodu Gumbol'dta', pp. 213–14.

⁷⁷ Gertsen, 'Russkii narod i sotsializm', pp. 308, 333.

idea.⁷⁸ Subsequent — and strikingly similar — articulations of the motif of discontinuity in time can be found in the thought of Berdiaev himself and also in Ern, with his understanding of discontinuous or catastrophic progress as opposed to the linear progress of Positivism.⁷⁹

On the other hand, Chaadaev also articulates a vision of unity. Unity, of course, through its subsequent reworking in Khomiakov's *sobornost'*, Solov'ev's all-unity (*vseedinstvo*) and beyond becomes one of the dominants of Russian thought. *Sobornost'*, though usually rendered as 'conciliarity', has also been interpreted as 'symphony': at the centre of the Eurasian view as outlined in *Evraziistvo* lies the notion of *sobornost'* as symphony, a unity of multiplicity in the personality at the levels of the individual, the cultural entity and the Church.⁸⁰ As with continuity and discontinuity, though central to the question of Russian identity, this theme has far wider philosophical implications, from gnoseology to the person to cosmology. Chaadaev's formulation follows on directly from his assertion of truth in continuity: 'the true spirit of religion [. . .] lies wholly in the idea of the fusion of all moral forces that there are in the world into one thought, one feeling, and in the progressive establishment of a social system, or Church, which should bring about the reign of truth amongst people' (I, p. 87). This formulation, whether taken as a whole or deconstructed, is extraordinarily protean in the context of subsequent Russian thought, of widely differing tendencies. In particular, Chaadaev foregrounds the key and constant terms: 'all', 'whole', 'one' and 'fusion' (Leont'ev is a rare voice in his antipathy to the prefix 'all-'), although a significant disjuncture with subsequent versions lies in the fact that wholeness is here merely adverbial.

From among all the subsequent versions of unity, a particular parallel is often noted between Chaadaev's and Solov'ev's vision of a theocratic Utopia that rests on the trinity of the Catholic Church headed by the Pope, representing continuity with the past, the Russian autocracy transformed from a national to a universal mission, representing the present, and the free voice of society, the prophets, representing the future.⁸¹ The parallel deserves some further attention. Interestingly, Solov'ev's model, which he himself dismantled in his apocalyptic vision of 'Kratkaia povest' ob antikhriste' (A Short Story of the Antichrist, 1900), represents a certain synthesis of the *Lettres philosophiques*, in which

⁷⁸ Berdiaev, *Russkaia ideia*, p. 5. For a study of Berdiaev's thought on Russia, with a critical approach to its eschatological tendency, see N. Poltoratskii, *Berdiaev i Rossiia (Filosofia istorii Rossii u N. A. Berdiaeva)*, New York, 1967.

⁷⁹ See N. Ia. Berdiaev, *Smysl istorii. Opyt filosofii chelovecheskoi sud'by*, 2nd edn, Paris, 1969, pp. 222–48; V. F. Ern, 'Ideia katastroficheskogo progressa' in *Bor'ba za Logos*, in Ern, *Sochineniia*, comp. N. V. Kotrelev and E. V. Antonova, Moscow, 1991, pp. 9–294 (pp. 198–219).

⁸⁰ *Evraziistvo*, pp. 356–58.

⁸¹ Solov'ev, *Russkaia ideia*, pp. 335–39.

alongside the unity and continuity of Christian Europe in Catholicism Chaadaev posited the role of special thinkers or prophets, with 'Apologie d'un fou' where the Russian tsar — following Peter the Great — leads the nation along the path of universal history. It is interesting also that the Russian aspect of Solov'ev's temporal continuum is the present (where in the First Letter Chaadaev had located Russia as permanently stuck). As Zen'kovskii pointed out, however, Solov'ev's theocratic Utopia did not evoke any response in the Russian soul.⁸² Instead, it can be seen as a prime example of thought about Russia as auto-reflexive, yet another manifestation of the pervasive pattern of triune unity in Solov'ev's thought. This points to a striking difference between Chaadaev and Solov'ev: while Chaadaev's thought can be interpreted auto-reflexively too, his posing of the question of Russian identity is provocatively central to the Russian tradition of thought and does not cease to evoke a response to this day.

Pride and humility

In conclusion, the third and final paradigm which I would like briefly to consider is that of pride and humility. This paradigm provides an overarching evaluative and psychological dimension, and it is embodied in the figure of Chaadaev in a very interesting way. It engages the way his personality informs his thought, something which in itself can be characteristic of the Russian tradition as thought grounded in life. Ern, for example, emphasizes the 'personalism of Russian philosophy', that is, 'the significance of the personality of its creators'.⁸³ The image of Chaadaev in Russian culture, in his own time and subsequently, was and is associated with pride and especially the pride of the intellect, and so by extension with the West. In this way the question of pride and humility fits into the whole problematics of philosophical thought in Russia,⁸⁴ and in this way too, Chaadaev's persona is in a certain sense projected through the history of Russian thought and culture.⁸⁵

There is no lack of pride in the *Lettres philosophiques*, as when Chaadaev speaks approvingly of the knowledge of which the human mind is proud (I, p. 98), and especially when, at the end of a paragraph in which he speaks of the special role played by the few thinkers in

⁸² Zen'kovskii, *Russkie mysliteli i Evropa*, p. 132.

⁸³ V. F. Ern, 'Nechto o Logose, russkoi filosofii i nauchnosti. Po povodu novogo filosofskogo zhurnala "Logos"' in *Bor'ba za Logos*, pp. 71–108 (pp. 88–91). Ern's opposition of Western *ratio* and Eastern *logos* was disputed by Semen Frank (see S. L. Frank, 'O natsionalizme v filosofii' and 'Eshche o natsionalizme v filosofii' in Frank, *Russkoe mirovozzrenie*, comp. A. A. Ermichev, St Petersburg, 1996, pp. 103–12, 112–19).

⁸⁴ See Kuznetsov, 'Metafizicheskii nartsiss'. As Kuznetsov points out, two striking and opposing interpretations of Chaadaev's pride are given by Mandel'shtam and Rozanov ('Metafizicheskii nartsiss', pp. 176–77).

⁸⁵ Compare Mandel'shtam's famous image of Chaadaev's imprint on Russian culture as 'engraved in glass' ('Petr Chaadaev', p. 151).

society, he asks rhetorically: 'And now, I ask you, where are our wise men, where are our thinkers? Who is there who has ever thought for us, who is there who thinks for us today?' (I, p. 96). In 'Apologie d'un fou', however, following the official declaration of him as insane and the hostile public reaction, Chaadaev, albeit unwillingly, has to eat humble pie: the work is written in self-justification but also in apology, and it is striking how this ties into his reassessment of Russia. Russia's self-denying receptivity is the quality that offers a glorious future,⁸⁶ and the Orthodox Church is similarly praised for its humility (I, pp. 294, 302). Indeed, the issue of pride and humility runs right through Chaadaev's thought in respect of both Russia and his own personality (the problem of personal pride is addressed, for example, in an unsent letter to Turgenev of 1843 after a painful split between the two: see II, pp. 156–58).

The resonance of the opposition of pride and humility in Russian thought about Russia is very great, and has wider ramifications too.⁸⁷ Humility is central to the Slavophile view of Russia, and the opposition of pride and humility is prominent in Khomiakov's articles on the Russian opinion of foreigners and vice versa, as, for example, when he criticizes the 'proud self-satisfaction' of enlightened people whose knowledge of Russia is narrowly scientific and formal.⁸⁸ Pride and humility are central to Dostoevskii's Pushkin Speech, with its call to the 'proud' Aleko to 'humble himself'.⁸⁹ One of the most striking excursions into this topic is made by Berdiaev in his unprecedented attack on the holy cow of humility in *Sud'ba Rossii*,⁹⁰ while the traditional opposition of pride and humility — back with its usual evaluation — recurs in the Eurasians' view of the one-sidedness of the West.⁹¹

For Chaadaev, however, there is the problem of the pride involved in the assertion of national specialness, which may rest on the quality of humility, and this is a note that comes increasingly to the fore. An extended exposition of this issue can be found in a letter to Viazemskii of 29 April 1847 (with an addition on 10 May) in relation to Gogol's

⁸⁶ In Gershenzon's translation, which continues to be used, the point that nations such as Russia 'should resign themselves [doivent se résigner] to seek the elements of their further progress other than in their history, other than in their memory' is rendered as 'should humbly seek . . .' (*dolzhny smirenno iskat'*), making the highly marked motif of humility explicit (see I, pp. 294, 528).

⁸⁷ An interesting example of such a resonance in a wider context is Bakhtin's interpretation of pride and humility in *K filosofii postupka*: 'The tacit premise of ritualized life is not at all humility, but pride. One must humble oneself to personal participation and responsibility' (M. M. Bakhtin, *K filosofii postupka*, in Bakhtin, *Raboty 20–kh godov*, Kiev, 1994, pp. 6–98 [p. 50]).

⁸⁸ 'Mnenie inostrantsev o Rossii', p. 96.

⁸⁹ 'Pushkin', p. 139.

⁹⁰ This theme is prominent in 'Dusha Rossii' but reaches its apotheosis in the essay on Rozanov 'O "vechno bab'em" v russkoi dushe' (*Sud'ba Rossii*, pp. 252–62).

⁹¹ See *Evraststvo*, p. 362.

Vybrannye mesta iz perepiski s druž'iami (Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends, 1847), where Chaadaev inveighs against a general national self-satisfaction and opposes to it the true value of humility (see II, pp. 198–206). As with the opposition of Russia and the West, there is a double play or inversion going on: Western pride is opposed to Russian humility, which is then the source of pride. And so, finally, the problem of pride and humility relates to the question which is posed by Chaadaev himself in 'Apologie d'un fou', namely the relationship — and tensions — between love of one's country and love of the truth: 'Love of one's country is a fine thing, but there is something even finer and that is love of the truth' (I, p. 289). This takes us back to one of the most general issues in Russian thought, the issue of truth: different kinds of truth and different approaches to the truth. In this way the interpretation of Russian identity in Russian thought is no less significant for the problem of Russian identity in general than it is for the tradition of Russian thought, and the place that Russian identity has played in it, and may continue to do so.⁹²

⁹² The title of the Second Russian Philosophical Congress (June 1999) was 'XXI vek: Budushchee Rossii v filosofskom izmerenii' (see *Voprosy filosofii*, 1998, 8, pp. 187–89).