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## RUSSIAN EURASIANISM – HISTORIOSOPHY AND IDEOLOGY

**ABSTRACT.** I attempt to answer the question about the place of Eurasianism in the Russian intellectual tradition. I reconstruct its historiosophical assumptions as well the political ideology following from them. I share the opinion of certain historians that Eurasianism is interesting for a variety of reasons, but I disagree with those who see in it nothing more than a synthesis of standard ideas often found in the history of Russian thought. Eurasianism's originality includes its acknowledgment of the positive contribution of the Mongols to the history of the Russian state, the radicalism of its critique of the West, the innovativeness of its theory of revolution, as well as the absence, unusual for Russian thinkers of the period, of an eschatological sensitivity.

**KEY WORDS:** anti-Westernism, historiosophy, political ideology, polycentrism, Russian Eurasianism, Russian intellectual tradition, Tartar roots of the Russian State

### THE LAST LINK

There is no absence in Russia today of circles and publications with various degrees of influence defining themselves quite simply as Eurasian. In the ideological void that resulted from the collapse of communism, the perspective of reanimating Eurasian concepts has proved tempting for many – because the Eurasians themselves considered that they were the creators of an ideology which – whenever the possibility was to arise – should take over from Bolshevik communism. They did not want to smash the totalitarian and monolithic colossus that had been created by the Bolsheviks, but simply to breathe a new Eurasian soul into it. Their conception constituting the last link in the history of Russian nationalist ideologies sanctioned by historiosophies (or equally in the history of Russian historiosophies sanctioning nationalism) naturally impresses all those nowadays who desire to maintain Russia's



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‘otherness’; an ‘otherness’ threatened as if as a result of ‘the opening up’ to western influences.

It is worth noting here that for various reasons this is not a phenomenon so distanced in time, so removed ‘historically’, as proposed by the classicists of the Russian renaissance – such as (here I’ll choose at random) Berdyaev’s catastrophism or Merezhkovskii’s millenarianism. Some of those from among the founding fathers of Eurasianism were to live to see virtually our contemporary period: Petr Savitskii died in 1968, while Petr Suvchinskii in 1985. Although they were active as thinkers and ideologists only in the inter-war period, this is not, I feel, an unimportant detail. Of more significance is the fact that after the war for several decades there were active two eminent historians, who were correctly considered to be the heirs of Eurasianism – in emigration Grigorii Vernadskii (1887–1993), one of the leading representatives of this current in the 1920s and 1930s; and in the Soviet Union Lev Gumilëv who spoke of himself as the last Eurasian. Note this last phrase, as it appears to be extremely characteristic: Gumilëv belongs to a past which has still not become the past. Eurasianism, in remaining a historical phenomenon, does not allow itself to be totally placed within the boundaries of a historical ‘yesterday’. It becomes as a result doubly attractive for those politicians and ideologists quoting it; the risk that they will be suspected of a desire to reactivate an anachronism is relatively small, less than in the case of quoting other historiosophies that developed within post-revolutionary émigré circles.

A closer inspection of the Eurasians’ position can therefore have a practical significance – its popularity is not without influence on the existing political views prevalent in Russia. The historian of ideas who is not guided by motives of this type may be interested in Eurasianism for other reasons. We have already said that this was the last of Russian historiosophies that sanctioned nationalism. We shall add that it is also a historiosophy whose position within Russian history appears most singular. Its continuances head temporally towards our day yet its roots are located in the nineteenth century. If the last Eurasian was Lev Gumilëv, then the title of the first – in accordance with the consensus of researchers – is merited by Konstantin Leont’ev. In adhering to the past Eurasian-

ism did not isolate itself, however, from the Russian religious-philosophical thought with which it was contemporary. There were, amongst the creators of Eurasianism, scholars of various specialities – naturalists, historians, linguists – typical Russian *intelligents* speculating over the fate of their country. There was, however, a certain time when at least one eminent representative of the Russian renaissance felt himself closely tied to their circles. This concerned Lev Karsavin who at one time claimed the role of philosophical legislator for Eurasianism.<sup>1</sup> The sources of Eurasianism were therefore numerous and varied, involving a variety of personages, styles of thought, inspirations. Given this situation the question of this current's relationship to the concepts and ideas characteristic of the Russian historiosophical tradition is unavoidable. Does it appear, against the background of earlier concepts and those contemporary with it, to be a typical creation or, contrariwise, something highly original? And what modifications do commonly held views and ideas undergo upon their acceptance by Eurasians?

Within the literature on the subject one can encounter the conviction that against the background of émigré thought Eurasianism was the most traditional current.<sup>2</sup> “The ideas that were elaborated by Eurasians – writes one of the authorities on the subject – such as anti-Westernism, nationalism, Orthodoxy, prophetism, likewise the presence of an apocalyptic tone, are closely related to the traditions of Russian thought.”<sup>3</sup> This is not, however, a universally held view. Certain researchers express a completely opposite view, claiming that Eurasianism was “. . . the only fundamentally new examination of Russian history and culture that appeared within Russian émigré circles.”<sup>4</sup> We will soon discover which of these viewpoints is closer to the truth. This article is meant as a presentation of the views of the Eurasians, coupled with an attempt to determine what their dependence was on the Russian historiosophical tradition. We will naturally concentrate in our considerations on historiosophy, which is not to say that the ideology, to which it was at one moment subjected, will be ignored.

## THE TRAP OF EUROPEANIZATION

The foundation of Eurasian historiosophy was the conviction that Russia was historically different, that it lay between Europe and Asia and belonged to neither of these worlds. This theory was nothing new; on the contrary, it was connected to Leont'ev's ideas and to Spengler who was well known to the Eurasians. In wanting to have their say on the matter they had as a consequence to conceive this historical difference in a novel way, to look elsewhere for its source and essence. I would say that they aimed to achieve this via two routes. On the one hand, they criticized Western civilization (in their terminology the Romano-Germanic civilization); on the other hand, they undertook a fundamental, or even iconoclastic, reinterpretation of national history.

Many advocate the view that working out an original concept for Russia-Eurasia would not have been impossible had these thinkers limited themselves to the second of the points just mentioned. However, the psychological basis for Eurasianism was to a great degree a deep resentment for Western civilization as experienced by the creators of the movement, twenty-year-old, at that time unknown, émigrés from Russia. 'Eurasianism – someone was to say – was born in the course of an argument with a Parisian concierge'. There is much malice here though also a some truth. Criticism of the West was certainly not the consequence of affirming the original culture of the Eurasian continent; most would have already advocated that the affirmation of Eurasia appears initially as the by-product of radical anti-Westernism. This is not an interpretation that I want to abide by. It is difficult, however, not to notice that the history of Russian Eurasianism begins with Nikolai Trubetskoi's *Evropa i chelovechestvo*<sup>5</sup> a book devoted in its entirety to criticism of the West. It was only thereafter that the famous almanacs appeared: *Iskhod k Vostoku*;<sup>6</sup> *Na putyakh*;<sup>7</sup> *Rossiia i latinstvo*.<sup>8</sup>

Trubetskoi's book, written in an extremely lucid way, based on simple though ingenious argumentation, made a strong impression on contemporaries. The author's chief intention was to describe the regularity and paradoxes of the process of Europeanization, i.e. the adoption by non-European peoples of the technological and intellectual achievements of Romano-Germanic culture.

According to Trubetskoi, Romano-Germanic Europe had managed to implant in the world the idea of the pre-eminence of its own culture. In essence, however, there were no reasons why its values should be considered universal and higher than others. What is interesting is that not only does Trubetskoi – in the spirit of Leon-tievian polycentrism – defend the rights of all historical cultures that lie beyond Europe, but he argues with the view concerning the cultural inferiority of primitive people; the very term ‘primitive’ appears for him highly unsuitable. The fact that we do not perceive the richness and complexity of primitive cultures is no proof that we are superior to them.

Hence the pre-eminence and universalism, and also the cosmopolitanism and openness of Western culture, turn out to be ideological fictions manipulated by the latter with great skill. The West’s exceptional perfidy lies in its imposition of its system of values upon others, in this way pushing them toward Europeanization, creating out of them unconscious partners for the sake of expanding and strengthening the domination of Romano-Germanic nations. Attempts at Europeanization lead to backwardness: nations which undergo this process are condemned to remain backward since they are subject to the strength of the dialectics and paradoxes of the process of Europeanization itself.

Let us start from the fact that successful Europeanization would have to be based on the adoption of alien values and subsequently their creative transformation, a transformation in the spirit of Western culture that is their source. According to Trubetskoi, this is impossible without the ethnic ‘mixing’ of the indigenous people with Romano-Germans. Even if this theory were to be false (Trubetskoi had no doubts that it would), there were other circumstances hindering independent creativity. Already the very adoption of foreign values constitutes an effort that absorbs huge provisions of social energy. Besides which, not all social strata Europeanize equally quickly, which leads to the separation of the intelligentsia from the people, internal conflicts intensify and, obviously, the creative potential of the Europeanizing collectivity is all the more diminished. Equally significant is its low self-esteem, which is a consequence of the fact that its works are perceived by Europe, as the highest authority, as the deformation of prototypes. Finally,

a nation in the course of Europeanization remains easy plunder for the economic and military expansion of the Romano-Germans. In the desire to make up for backwardness in various fields there takes place periodically a mobilizing of forces for a subsequent Europeanizing effort; in the long run this simply results in increased backwardness.

How does one escape from the trap of Europeanization? An uprising on the part of all peoples exploited by the West is (unfortunately Trubetskoi seems to say) impossible. All that is left is to adopt the achievements of Romano-Germanic culture without adopting its endemic 'egocentrism'. Europeanizing nations will not fall then into psychological dependence on the West and will avoid the complexes paralysing their abilities; a selective reception of the works of Western culture is also possible. The initial condition is, however, the mental transformation of the intelligentsia, which is always a factor of 'bad' Europeanization. This is possible when the faults of Romano-Germanic civilization are spelt out. In order to neutralize Europe's absolute and cunning hegemony, one must first and foremost make it known that it is not a benefactor.

The view held by certain historians of ideas<sup>9</sup> – including the author of this article – that the history of Eurasianism begins with Nikolai Trubetskoi's *Evropa i chelovechestvo* could call forth certain, seemingly well-founded misgivings that cannot be left without explanation. Trubetskoi does not use the term 'Eurasia'; what is more he writes in one place that not only forms of nationalism, but equally proposals in the form of Panslavism and Panmongolianism "merely obscure the essence of the problem,"<sup>10</sup> for "there exists only one true opposition between Romano-Germans and the rest of the nations of the world, between Europe and humanity."<sup>11</sup> Assertions such as these appear to be very distant from the Eurasian position. I believe, though, that it would be mistaken to overestimate their significance; they belong rather to anti-Western rhetoric reinforcing anti-Western, though not dualist, historiosophy. In other fragments of the work, as we have already suggested, Trubetskoi clearly speaks out for cultural polycentrism. The non-European world is not here something uniform, but instead a multiplicity of various wholes. The author of *Evropa i chelovechestvo* is here fully conscious of the cultural independence

of Russia, which he expresses in, among other passages, fragments devoted to Peter the Great and his designs for Russia. We shall add also that only on the basis of such an interpretation of Trubetskoi's views does his participation among the authors of the almanac *Iskhod k vostoku*, which appeared a year after *Evropa i chelovechestvo*, not appear to be incomprehensible.

As far as Trubetskoi's criticism of the West is concerned, it was taken on board by Eurasians and incorporated in their historiosophy. The only modifications are to be found in the addition of certain themes which in no way diminish its radicalism. There appears amongst Eurasians a criticism of Catholicism which is lacking in Trubetskoi. I will withhold from summarizing it as it does not differ from the typical Russian arguments against 'Romists'.<sup>12</sup> Another element missing in Trubetskoi is the criticism of the Western idea of human rights devised by Karsavin and which is undoubtedly more interesting than routine anti-Catholicism. The dissemination of nationalist ideologies leading to a tribal war of all against all was in his opinion the result of the struggle for the rights of the individual so important in the history of Europe. At a given moment the prerogatives of the individual are transferred to the people, this bringing about a quasi-person mercilessly fighting for position and influence.<sup>13</sup>

#### THE RUSSIAN NATIONAL MYTH AND THE INTERPRETATION OF REVOLUTION

Radical anti-Westernism was, for the Eurasians, an extremely important impulse; their most original creation, however, was the concept of Eurasia. The defense of the theory that in the historical and cultural plane of things Russia is a distinct Eurasian continent demanded the overcoming of numerous difficulties. A reinterpretation of national history would have been incomplete without the creation of a new concept of the Russian nation. It followed from the treatment of Eurasianism as a distinct quality, not arrived at inadvertently in the guise of a hybrid – or even a synthesis – of European and Asian elements.

The innovative aspect of the Eurasian interpretation of Russian history was closely connected with a complete reassessment of

opinion concerning the role which the Tatars had played in the country's history. As opposed to Peter the Great's reforms the period of the so-called 'Tatar yoke' had not been the subject of fundamental arguments during the ideological and historiosophical disputes that had taken place in pre-Revolutionary Russia. It was only the Eurasians who raised the matter, advancing a theory as to the existence of historical continuity between pre-Petrine Russia and the empire of Genghis Khan. It was their belief that the Mongol Empire was the first state within whose borders all of Eurasia was contained, stretching from the Ukraine and Belarus to Siberia. The Tatar occupation was for Rus a period of characteristic political education, while the Tatar khans played such an significant part in the construction of the Muscovite state that they deserve to be recognized as its joint creators.<sup>14</sup> In taking into consideration these circumstances the Eurasians maintained that the Muscovite state was a conscious continuation of the Mongol political idea.<sup>15</sup>

This was not, obviously, a completely new theory; Western historians had broached similar claims earlier. It was, however, a new iconoclastic theory for Russian soil. And here the Eurasians' anti-Westernism was revealed – in arguing for Mongolian roots for Russia, in mythologizing its Tatar past they ostentatiously boasted about what many European historians and political writers wanted to see as Russia's blemish. They transformed a topos willingly exploited by anti-Russian propaganda into a Russian national myth.

This would probably not have been possible had it not been for the original views concerning the genesis of the Russian people with which they explained the latter's ethnic and cultural specificities. According to the Eurasians, Russians are neither Slavs nor Turanians. They had formed as a people over a long process in the course of which various ethnic groupings, inhabiting Eurasia from time immemorial, mixed, joined together, and mutually influenced one another. The Greater Russian element played a significant role in this process; this nationality [*narodnost'*] became the 'centre' of cultural and ethnic synthesis, incorporating the culture of other groups and conveying their own to them. It is not surprising then that within the limits of the people so evolved, as something broader and richer than the Great Russian ethnic substratum, there exist infinite regional differences.<sup>16</sup> Although it is difficult to miss them, they



should not be overemphasized, as do the adherents of national self-determination. The latter programme is threatening because it leads to the disintegration of the Russian nation, but it is also utopian as it is impossible to remove the historical processes spread over the centuries.

The Eurasianism of the Russian people and Russia itself – according to the authors of interest to us here – was something lasting and irreducible. Ignoring this fact, ‘Russian’ actions – although characterized by great force – were in essence utopian in character, and as is the case with utopias they had to lead to catastrophe. The utopia was rooted in the reforms of Peter the Great (regardless of his intentions); the catastrophe, the historical Nemesis, in the Bolshevik Revolution.

Peter the Great’s revolution from above meant the renunciation by Russia of the ‘Mongolian Imperial Idea’. The tsar reformer started a process of Europeanizing the country which was to last for the whole of the nineteenth century. We already know the phenomena and paradoxes which accompanied it – we, after all, know the general model for such a process as constructed by Trubetskoi (undoubtedly on the basis of what he himself had considered to be the Russian experience). Let’s note simply that amongst the phenomena accompanying Europeanization, the disintegration of traditional society into an alienated upper stratum living by its own ideas and the people who preserve their Eurasian identity constituted the greatest threat for the creators of Eurasianism. Some of them considered that from the moment the said division existed Russia was condemned to revolution, because no political reform, no – as Florovskii was to say – “movement of borders between the authorities and society”<sup>17</sup> would be able to put an end to it. The figure of Peter aroused, however, a certain controversy. While some saw literally nothing positive in what he did, others maintained that Peter had been a leader desiring to maintain Russia’s culturally distinctive character: his intention was only to transfer from Europe everything that might turn out useful in order to then ‘turn one’s back on it’ (this intention failed because the tsar died leaving no heirs worthy of him).<sup>18</sup> A tragic turn in the history of Russia was therefore either the succession of an arbitrary individual

without concern for the organic character of the historical process, or . . . a fatal coincidence.

The interpretation of revolution as presented by the Eurasians caused a real scandal in émigré circles. The theory regarding the national and folk nature of revolution was especially irritating. According to the Eurasians, the Bolsheviks were not a group of professional revolutionaries who managed to seize power, but rather unconscious agents of the will of the masses “who preserve an Eurasian identity and understanding of ‘Petersburg’ Russia as an alien creation.” The Bolsheviks themselves, not understanding the sense of events, considered that they were, to some extent, spokesmen of Europeanization, and the programme of forced industrialization for the country was also perceived in this way. The political (dictatorship), economic (monolith), and ideological (Marxist communism) innovations of the Soviet authorities led to the severing of all links with Europe. From the point of view of Eurasians, Russia’s isolation was in every respect welcome; especially as the new authorities clearly intended to establish order close to their structural ideal (about which more in a moment). Also the foreign policy of the Soviet state appeared to be bringing symptomatic changes: in central Asia and the Far East they were involved on a scale unmatched in the history of pre-Revolutionary Russia.

Far less controversial was another characteristic feature of the Eurasians’ position – the clear tendency to examine the revolution as an event devoid of a universal historical sense. Whatever they would say about the crisis of the West, the catastrophic character of the epoch or the general tendencies of the contemporary period, they treated revolution as an event of ‘local’ rather than global significance. “It did not bring – wrote Georgii Florovskii – any all-embracing revelations. The Russian revolution is a Russian matter – in relation to its own origin, sense, and objective significance; and what is manifested in it is Russian truth, truth about Russia.”<sup>19</sup> The revolution was, therefore, not an epoch-making event, although it opened up a new epoch in the history of Russia. Even a superficial knowledge of the controversy over the historical sense of the revolution, running for several decades within intellectual émigré circles, allows one to state that this was an isolated position. Berdyaev, Vyatcheslav Ivanov, Frank, Merezhkovskii, and many, many others

considered it a certainty that the revolution was an event of a universal significance, influencing the fate of humanity.

The Bolshevik victory, within the perspective of the history of Russia, represented, however, not only 'a return to the East'. It could not have taken place had Russia itself not survived as a state. According to the Eurasians, it was the Bolsheviks themselves who saved its unity and – in the short term – guaranteed its survival. The collapse of 'Petersburg Russia' had unleashed amongst the peoples and ethnic groupings inhabiting it strong tendencies for independence which were defeated chiefly thanks to the new ideology and its mythologizing of the internationalist proletariat and class solidarity. This was, however – precisely because of Marxism's falsehood and the artificiality of Bolshevik myths – only a temporary solution; Russia, in order to survive, needed a new ideology reflecting its national character, rooted in its traditions, mentality, and culture.

#### IDEOLOGY AND IDEOCRACY

The distinction I have adopted between historiosophy and ideology – the first having been dealt with above, the second to be dealt with below – may raise significant doubts. It is easy to see that the historiosophy of the Eurasians contains many ideological moments, even if, in spite of the appeals for academic neutrality<sup>20</sup> made by some of them, it doesn't shun, to put it mildly, assessment. It is not, however, in the shape presented by us so far, a project for political reconstruction. Such a project appeared only at a later moment, as a result of the ongoing politicization of the entire movement (by no means pleasing to all of its adherents). Eurasians, in talking about ideology, have in mind as a rule the historiosophy created by them together with the vision of the new Russia. Therefore, in our view, only the final formulation and elaboration of this vision constitutes the ideologicalization of their position. In wishing to present the ideology of the Eurasians, we must examine the project for political structure which they advanced for Russia.

More than likely the most important element was the conception of an ideocracy, i.e. an ideological state. For the Eurasians this was the structure of the future: they prophesized the arrival of a century of ideocracy (undoubtedly affiliated to the subsequent anti-

Western motif, for ideocracy was the anti-theory to parliamentary democracy, which was associated with the West). The first modern ideocracy was Soviet Russia, a state, for the reasons cited above, deprived of a future and condemned to an ephemeral existence, even though conveying ideas about the possibilities for the new order (the Eurasians did not hide their surprise regarding its achievements that grew as a result of the promulgation of the five-year plans). As far as 'post-Bolshevik' Russia was concerned it was presented in their plans as a country retaining Soviet political and economic institutions though possessing a new ideology. They intended it to remain with a monolithic economy and retain the institution of a single party, though it would be already a Eurasian single party. Eurasian ideologists believed that they would be able to create in this way a classless society. They claimed quite seriously that the route to this is concentrating power in the hands of a 'classless ruling elite', the selection for which would take place exclusively on the basis of 'ideological criteria'.

It is not easy to answer the question as to whether post-Bolshevik ideocracy would be at the same time a theocracy. On the one hand, Eurasians, when driven hard by polemicists, attempt to avoid this term; they declare an aversion to religious coercion.<sup>21</sup> Nor is there room for discussion concerning the handing over of state power to Orthodox hierarchies. On the other hand, they write incessantly about the necessity for religious rebirth, the need to create an Orthodox culture, and the subordination of all areas of life to religion. Trubetskoi – to limit ourselves to one example – uses the wide ranging term fideocentrism, demanding from his fellow countrymen that they subordinate, as they have apparently done for centuries in India, the whole of social life to the requirements of religion.<sup>22</sup>

Considerations concerning Orthodoxy's place in the future Russian ideocracy were for sure one of the weaker points in the Eurasian doctrine. At times one has the impression that its creators touched on this problem area only to increase the number of questions which they were not able to deal with, or to suddenly propose doubtful answers and diagnoses. An evident example is the theory defended by many of them concerning the Eurasian nature of the Orthodox faith and the natural gravitation of other religions of Eurasia towards Orthodoxy; the theory seems designed to sustain

dreams for the ideological-religious unity of Russia and to appease opponents of denominational coercion. More or less sympathetic critics of the Eurasians have seen perfectly the inadequacies in their religious conceptions. They have drawn attention not only to its vague character, but to the tendency to instrumentalize religion, to treat it superficially as well as to concentrate on the most external, ceremonial customs (*bytvoi*), and not the spiritual aspects of Orthodoxy.<sup>23</sup>

The ideologization and politicization of Eurasianism led finally to its decomposition. The circle broke into two camps engaged in an unrelenting struggle with each other: the anti-Bolshevik (Savitskii, V.N. Il'in, N. Trubetskoi) and the pro-Bolshevik grouping that formed around the paper '*Evrasia*' (Karsavin, Efron, Sviatopolk-Mirskii). The latter group tried, understandably unsuccessfully, to strike up a dialogue with the Soviet authorities. With time the Eurasians became less intellectually productive, and increasingly they used up their energy in typically damning émigré squabbles.<sup>24</sup>

Having presented the Eurasians' position in this way it is time to answer the questions raised at the very start. The task at hand will be all the easier if we first of all examine several interpretative generalizations.

Let us begin by placing Eurasianism against the background of two currents in the philosophy of history, whose separation in the first half of the twentieth century constituted one of the most important symptoms within the crisis of historiosophy as a philosophical discipline, for in both cases we are dealing with clear attempts to move into a new, non-philosophical type of discourse. The first of these is religious-eschatological in nature, and its classics are the Russian 'catastrophizing' specialists in the philosophy of history: Berdyaev, Frank, and Rozanov. The second may be called naturalistic, relatively historicist, and is represented by the creators of the great synthesis, Spengler and Toynbee. Eurasianism stands close to this latter current, for although it is not an historicism, it is difficult to minimize its naturalistic and scientific preferences. Eurasians keenly refer in their considerations to the findings of linguistics, climatology, geography, and ethnology; they are fond of geopolitical research; they display a sensitive bent for treating culture as a creation of climatic and spatial conditions. Naturalism,

though of a different type, was characteristic for their precursor, Konstantin Leont'ev. In Leont'ev this was balanced however by original and far outmoded eschatologism which one searches for vainly in his twentieth century pupils.

The banality and meagreness of eschatologism within the Eurasians' historiosophy remains closely linked with their ignorance of such a pervading question for Russian thinkers as that regarding the sense of history. As is known the introduction of the eschatological perspective enabled the preservation of faith within a sensibility to history through the simultaneous rejection of millenarianism. Eurasians equally reject millenarianism, yet remain completely insensitive to the problem of eschatology. Characteristic here are not their statements in which they avoid the matter, but those in which – something unheard of in Russian thought of that time – it plays a secondary or tertiary role, falling afoul of intellectual, theological, and linguistic routines.<sup>25</sup> This eschatological reserve is striking and easily noticed despite the abundant catastrophic rhetoric.

It is not difficult to find an explanation for this. Eschatological distress is missing in the Eurasians, for they are not oppressed by the question of the sense of history; this question does not oppress them for in point of fact they know the answer (although they probably have never couched it *expressis verbis*). They concentrate on the fate of Russia which, thanks to the Bolshevik revolution, regenerates in the direction of a destiny which they had not even envisaged. In this conception – and for Eurasians this is after all the most significant conception – history undoubtedly has meaning. One may look toward the future with hope; they accept – on the whole *implicite* though this is not essential – that there exists in history an impersonal regulating mechanism. It is this that explains why the Eurasian nature of the Russians could not be forced relentlessly, pushing them towards the domains of the West. The workings of the mechanism are closely tied to the already mentioned permanence of predispositions characteristic for concrete ethno-cultural subjects. The cunning of historical reason, of which the Bolsheviks become the victims, turns out to be finally the cunning of the Eurasian nature of Russians themselves.

Such is the standard position for the theoreticians of Eurasianism. Not all, however, accept it with approbation. Georgii Florovskii devotes considerable attention to the question of historical necessity. He formulates his position in a polemic with the leader of the *smenovekhovstvo*, Ustryalov, as well as with the poets, Blok and Belyi, who sympathized with the revolution, though this does not mean that his criticism does not apply to the views of many eminent representatives of the Eurasian current. Florovskii reproached the adherents of the thesis of historical necessity for dealing in the cult of strength as well as in the naive belief that events head via the shortest route to a happy finale. He writes about the need to work out a third historiosophical standpoint free of vestiges of historiosophical voluntarism and fatalism; he does not sketch it out, however, not even in the most general terms, though when he shifts to an analysis of concrete historical events, he expresses himself in a tone quite close to that of other Eurasians. Who is to say whether he does not adopt their assumptions.<sup>26</sup>

We have mentioned that Eurasianism had much in common with the naturalist current in contemporary philosophy of history; we have also said that its creators often succumbed to more or less naive scientism. None of this means, however, that their historiography is totally devoid of a metaphysical background. Even if such was the case at the start of the twenties, then the situation changed as soon as Lev Karsavin, an eminent representative of the Russian philosophy of all-unity, declared himself to be an adherent of Eurasianism. Karsavin's philosophy of existence combines the metaphysics of all-unity with hierarchical personalism: all created existences, from the smallest to the largest, possess a potential personal character: this potential actualizes itself (in the temporal plane always only partially) through participation in *Logos*; besides individuals [*individual'naya lichnost'*] there exist symphonic individuals [*simfonicheskaya*, respectively *sobornaya lichnost'*] who stand higher in the ontological hierarchy (but not in the axiological hierarchy!), e.g. the Church, nation, state. The usefulness of this philosophy as the ontological background for Eurasian historiography was limited however. Superficially, it became a perfect sanction equally for polycentrism treating nations and cultures as distinct, unique and equally valuable objects; as for the Eurasian

conception of the Russian people, in the thought of which it was a cultural and ethnic unit within a multitude. In reality the only well-justified sanction was the last, for as opposed to the Russian nation which within the historiosophy of the Eurasians is really harmonious unity in multiplicity, humanity, as a result of the dramatic conflict between Europe and the rest of the world, could not be described as a symphony of cultures.<sup>27</sup>

With regard to the question of innovation, and the relatively secondary standing, of Eurasianism in the face of the Russian historiosophical tradition, there is no way to provide a short answer; the answer must be elaborated upon, and in a sense the whole of the present text constitutes an answer. If, however, I were to answer as concisely as possible, I would say that Eurasianism is rather a new quality than merely a new configuration of well-known ideas. One can therefore grasp it as something entirely made up of three kinds of elements: new ideas and concepts; ideas that appear in the Russian intellectual tradition yet are radicalized by Eurasians, as well as significant omissions.

The thesis concerning the Eurasianism of Russians, and the Tatar roots of their statehood is undoubtedly innovatory in character in relation to the indigenous historiosophical tradition. The idea of ideocracy is an original idea, one that does not appear in earlier Russian political thought. It is equally difficult not to note the independence and originality of the historiosophy of revolution worked out by the Eurasians. What distinguishes their diagnosis from those of others of the same time is not only the thesis concerning the support of the Bolsheviki by the people and the 'local', no longer 'universal', nature of revolution, but also the conviction in its fundamentally reactionary character (the return to Eurasian identity). Equally the concept of the Russian nation as a symphonic unity of collective individuals (peoples and ethnic groupings) is a novel thought, although it could not have come about were it not for the ontology of *sobornost'*, developed and elaborated since the days of Khomyakov.

Amongst the ideas that belong to the Russian intellectual tradition, and radicalized by the Eurasians, we have to mention, in the first place, anti-Westernism. Regardless whether we see here the *spiritus movens* of the entire Eurasian historiosophy (and, as we



have recalled, the defense of such a position would not be a hopeless undertaking) or simply as one of its themes, it would be difficult not to agree with the views that consider Eurasians to be the most severe critics of the West in the history of Russian letters.<sup>28</sup>

The Slavophiles and their successors – among whom I include Dostoevskii, Danilevskii, and Leont'ev – in criticising Europe constantly displayed a fascination with its culture. It is true that, on the whole, they considered its splendour to be irretrievably past; it occurred to them, however, to hold a different position as regards the dependency between the rebirth of Russia and the healing of Europe. Konstantin Leont'ev, highly considered by the Eurasians, an uncompromising critic of Western liberalism, and the creator of catastrophic historiosophy, often said that the future Byzantine Russia should pay off its debts to Europe, by saving it from sinking into the depths of social egalitarianism. It is difficult to imagine any of the Eurasians saying something similar. In their view there exists between Europe and Russia a chasm impossible to bridge – in a way similar to that which exists between Europe and the rest of humanity. As a consequence there is no way one can talk of a community of historical destiny. If it is not condemned to conflict, then this is only because one can ignore Europe, 'one can turn one's back on it.'

The Eurasians were never able to harmonize their anti-Westernism, which was a product of the radicalization of Slavophile and post-Slavophile anti-Westernism, with cultural polycentrism, which also needs to be viewed as more radical than the polycentrism of Danilevskii or Leont'ev (the difference here is not however as striking as it is in the case of criticism of the West). The radical criticism of European culture, which always reveals itself as a scheming aggressor according to its very nature, appears to be out of keeping with the theory of the equal standing of cultures. This theory, however – if one ignores for a moment the criticism of Europe – was formulated in a more radical form than in the letters of nineteenth century thinkers: we already know that there was an attempt to deny the difference between primitive and historical cultures, pointing out the richness of the former. The bold polycentrism of the Eurasians underwent deformation under pressure from their radical anti-Westernism.

The originality of the Eurasians' conception is forejudged, however, not only by the presence of themes and formulations not

met in other Russian historiosophies, but also in the absence of typical themes. For these reasons, what I have called above their eschatological reserve acquires significance; indeed a unique position against the background of Russian thought in general and surely unmet amongst the émigré philosophers of history discussing the phenomenon of revolution. An original feature is equally the absence of the question concerning the meaning of history, always going at full steam with the momentary, though intense despair as to its meaning, and tormenting at the time other Russian thinkers. Maybe these are all weaknesses in the Eurasian position, though they would be weaknesses of their position alone, for which reason they are rather striking from the position of an historian of ideas.

It would be absurd of course to claim that Eurasianism is a creation totally independent of the Russian intellectual tradition, that besides this it has nothing in common with the proposals of then contemporary Russian authors. In the course of these arguments we have pointed out repeatedly that it does represent something different (we have spoken at least of the significance of Leont'ev as the precursor to the current, and about anti-millenarianism bringing the Eurasians closer to the thinkers of the Russian renaissance engaged in historiosophy). What is more, the characterization above of the 'original' traits of Eurasianism allows one to realize its dependence upon tradition: it has to be dependent given that several of its elements appear as the product of a radicalization of ideas that had appeared earlier. This raises the question, however, of the scale of this dependence. As it turns out we could discuss this only so long as we remain on the level of the most general of descriptions: then, importantly, Eurasianism appears to us as another Russian historiosophy combining anti-Westernism with cultural polycentrism. Similarities manifest themselves at a certain level of generalization only. It is enough, however, to step down from this level of generality, or rather of vague characteristics, to be able instantly to perceive the entire characteristic nature of the Eurasian position.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Cf. S.S. Khoruzhyi, "Karsavin, evrazistvo i VKP," *Voprosy filosofii* 1992, 2, p. 79, pass.

- <sup>2</sup> C. Khachaturian, "Istoki russkoi revolucii," *Slavia Orientalis*, 1993, 3, p. 414.
- <sup>3</sup> L. Suchanek, "Rossiya, Evropa i Vostok v kontseptsii evrazitsev," *Slavia Orientalis*, 1994, no. 1.
- <sup>4</sup> M. Raeff, *Rossiya za rubezhom. Istorija kultury russkoj emigratsii*, M., 1994, p. 190.
- <sup>5</sup> Kn. N. Trubetskoi, *Evropa i chelovechestvo*, Sofia 1920.
- <sup>6</sup> Savitskii, P. Suvchynskii, G.V. Florovskii, N.S. Trubetskoi, *Iskhod k vostoku. Predchuvstvia i sversheniya. Utverzhdenie evrazitsev*, Sofija, 1921.
- <sup>7</sup> Savitskii, P. Suvchynskii, G.V. Florovskii, N.S. Trubetskoi, G. Florovskii, P. Bitsilli, *Na putyakh. Utverzhdeniye evrazitsev. Kniga vtoraya*, Berlin, 1922.
- <sup>8</sup> *Rossiya i latinstvo*, Berlin, 1923.
- <sup>9</sup> Cf. V. Zen'kovskij, *Russkie mysliteli i Evropa*, Paris, p. 158.
- <sup>10</sup> N. Trubetskoi, op. cit., p. 82.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Cf. N. Berdjaev, "Evrazitscy," *Put'*, 1925.
- <sup>13</sup> Cf. T.N. Ochirova, "Evrazistvo i puti russkogo istoricheskogo samosoznaniya," *Seriya Literatury i Yazyka*, 1993, no. 4, vol. 52, pp. 37–38.
- <sup>14</sup> Cf. E. Lo Gatto, *Pagine di storia e di letteratura russa*, Roma, 1928, p. 45.
- <sup>15</sup> Cf. Evrazistvo, *Opyt sistematicheskogo izlozheniya*, Paris, 1926, pp. 37–38.
- <sup>16</sup> E. Lo Gatto, op. cit., pp. 450–446.
- <sup>17</sup> G. Florovskii, "O patriotizme pravednom i grekhovnom," *Na putyakh*, op. cit., p. 269.
- <sup>18</sup> N. Trubetskoi, op. cit., p. 78.
- <sup>19</sup> G. Florovskii, op. cit., p. 278.
- <sup>20</sup> Cf. N. Trubetskoi, op. cit., p. 42.
- <sup>21</sup> Cf. P. Savitskii, *V bor'be za evrazistvo*, Paris, 1931.
- <sup>22</sup> Cf. N. Trubetskoi, "Religii Indii i khristianstvo," *Iskhod k vostoku*, op. cit., p. 191.
- <sup>23</sup> Cf. P. Savitskii, op. cit., p. 161.
- <sup>24</sup> Cf. S. S. Khoruzhyi, op. cit., pp. 82–83.
- <sup>25</sup> Cf. L. Karsavin, "Tserkov', Lichnost' i gosudarstvo," *L. Karsavin, Sochineniya*, Moskva, 1993.
- <sup>26</sup> Cf. G. Florovskij, op. cit.
- <sup>27</sup> Cf. S. S. Khoruzhyi, op. cit., pp. 81–82.
- <sup>28</sup> Cf. T. Ochirova, op. cit., p. 35; V. Zen'kovskii, op. cit., p. 167.

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