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The Expulsion of Reason. To the 100th Anniversary of the "Philosophical Steamer"

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Russia Abroad: 100 Years After the "Philosophical Steamer"

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Abstract. The article provides a historical and philosophical analysis of the deportation of many Russian intellectuals abroad in 1922. It is known that such a vicious deed on the part of the Soviet authorities, in fact, turned out to be an act that saved many Russian intellectuals either from starvation or from repression and death in the camps. It is also widely known that the cultural activities of Russian emigrants after their arrival in the West were varied and intense. The article also emphasizes that expulsion and its significance for the destinies of the country and the emigrants themselves remained a "blank spot" for a long time. It was only in the 1990s that research into the events of the 1922 exile, both in Russia and abroad, started to change. The author draws attention to the fact that the very nature of examination of the expulsion of the Russian intelligentsia has also changed over the years. At the beginning of studies in the 1990s, it was purely archival works aimed at recovering emigrants' cultural heritage and returning "forgotten" names. Over the last decade, we may observe a more critical reading of this heritage, supposing a more precise reconstruction of facts and contexts and a broader analysis of the significance of events in the history of the early 1920s. The study of the various cultural activities of the Russian émigré intelligentsia allows us to strike a conversation on Russian philosophy, its peculiarity and originality, the mutual influences of the Russian and European philosophical traditions, and the meaning and significance of Soviet philosophy relevant again.

Keywords: Russian philosophy, philosophers' steamer, national identity, cultural heritage, Sergey Horujy

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The expulsion of many outstanding intellectuals from Bolshevik Russia in the Fall of 1922 assumed a symbolic meaning already at that time and in the consciousness of the forced émigrés. Although they held different theoretical and political positions, they did not recognize themselves as "state criminals" [1. P. 128], those intellectuals—particularly the philosophers among them—found a solid element of self-identification in the very fact that they were expelled due to their opinions. To cherish and to develop religious philosophy and non-materialist traditions of thought, which were condemned in the homeland as "idealist" and "bourgeois," thereby reactionary and enemy became the "mission" and the "task" of émigré philosophers [2. P. 39—51; 3]. By presenting themselves as the representatives of "authentic" Russian philosophy, they felt as they were entrusted with the tasks of restoring a continuity with the past, which the revolution had dramatically interrupted, and of being ready to reconnect with the homeland when the new regime would collapse. Meanwhile, they would become ambassadors of true Russian culture and its religious spirit in secularized Europe. Before the departure of the "Philosophical Steamer," the well-known Moscow *starets* Alexei Mechev emblematically blessed Nikolai Berdyaev and acknowledged the importance of his "positive mission in Western Europe" [4. P. 204].

It is well known that the émigrés' cultural activity after their arrival in the West was immediate and intense. In Prague, Paris, Berlin, new institutes, cultural centers, publishing houses, journals appeared. Precisely the supposed "specific" characteristics of Russian thought, restricted and banned by the revolution, became the center of the Russian émigré philosophers' reflections—which cannot be seen as a paradox. The more or less fantastic building of "national" identity and devotion to the myth of the lost homeland are pretty characteristic of any diasporic literature. The circumstance that the first broad histories of Russian philosophy were written by émigrés, who were interested in the definition of the "Russian" specificities as such to establish and reinforce their own identity within the new context, had a significant impact on the orientations of Slavic studies abroad.

However, the specific episode of the 1922 expulsion has remained a "white spot" in Russian history for a long time, not just in the Soviet Union. In 1979 Michel Heller published their first essay on this topic [5], but Western historians' attention mainly focused on the broader picture of Russian emigration and its cultural relevance [for ex. 6, 7]. During *perestroika*, the "Philosophical Steamer" became the symbol of the forced Russian emigration. When, in the new ideological conditions, Russian society and Russian culture faced more and more openly the issue of "white spots" within official history, the episode was interpreted as an

ultimate fracture between the authentic traditions of Russian philosophy, which continued abroad, and a simple simulacrum of philosophy at home. In the words of Sergey Horujy, the author of a famous article on this topic in *Literaturnaia Gazeta* in 1990, the "Philosophical Steamer" meant the end of philosophy in Russia: "that which we have since then called by this name is in reality only one of the agencies of the totalitarian machine" [8. P. 208]. From this perspective, the Soviet period became a parenthesis to be erased or a crack to be filled. Horujy himself wrote that "it was necessary to find again a space for thought and coordination within it or, in other words, to restore a context; and that means to go back to where everything shattered, to see what we were going to do, what we did, what remained to be done... And only then we can move on, *after a break*" [8. P. 7].

At that time, the recovery of the cultural inheritance of émigrés became a central theme of public discussion. The "erased" names of those who had been expelled came back home on the pages of journals and books as well as in a public debate. For example, the preface to a collection of essays by émigré philosophers, published in 1990, declared that "now it is time to openly speak about the teachings of the philosophical reflections of Russia Abroad." Without the émigré philosophers, "it is impossible to understand the originality and integrity of our national culture and national spirituality" [9. P. 7]. The editors of the 1991 Russian edition of Zen'kovskii's *History of Russian Philosophy* wrote that "today has come 'the time to collect the stones,' the precious stones of 'the eternal in Russian philosophy'" [10. P. 7]. In other words, in the early 1990s, we saw "the metaphorical return of the Philosophical Steamer to Russian shores" [11. P. 41—44].

Since then, many pages have been written about the "Philosophical Steamer." First, there appeared some collections of documents [for ex. 12, 13, 14], which proved the complexity of the choices and steps that led to the expulsion, provided new data on the actual number of people involved and their profiles, and clarified the legal context of the measure. In the last decades, a more rigorous critical reading has emerged, involving a more precise reconstruction of facts and contexts and a broader analysis of the meaning of the events within the history of the early 1920s. [for ex. 15, 16, 1]. At the same time, new perspectives in studying philosophy in Russia during the Soviet period have emerged [17; 18].

A century after the departure of the steamships *Oberbürgermeister Haken* and *Preussen* from the banks of Neva, the whole phenomenon of Russian emigration still presents reasons for interest and occasions for renewed reflections, starting from the very definition of the so-called "Russia Abroad" and its significance for Russian philosophy. In the 19th century, figures such as Alexander Herzen and Mikhail Bakunin continued to be influential within Russian culture while writing abroad. After 1922, however, a community of émigré intellectuals determined to embody and represent the "real" Russia, different from the Bolshevik one, which, according to them, had "occupied" the homeland. The rift had its roots in the secular question of the nature of Russia and Russian thought, whose identity the émigrés found in values, themes, theoretical perspectives much more than in linguistic practices or geographical positioning.

Today, the question arises in new terms for scholars more and more interested in the historical formation of identities, their connections and reciprocal intersections, and the discursive practices through which they are realized. Alyssa DeBlasio recently pointed out that "when we employ the term 'Russian philosophy' (...) we are not referring to any single discipline, national tradition, or geographical location; instead, we are referring to a historical network of intersections that cut across boundaries of style, genre, discipline, identity, and language" [19. P. IX]. Russian philosophy can be described as a "cultural field"¹, which, in Russia as elsewhere, cannot be defined once and for all but has to be understood historically as a concrete and changing space of relations in a given institutional, social and political context. The "philosophical field" involves institutions, rules, conventions, and categories, in a certain historical hierarchy, which produces and authorizes discourses and activities conceived as 'philosophical'; it is a space of relations and conflicts, where groups and individuals compete both for power on the social, political, 'academic' level, and for truth, which all the actors within the field consider the ultimate aim of philosophical thinking. Semen Frank pointed out that "philosophers can be mystics and rationalists (in the strictest meaning of this term), empiricists and skeptics, but if they are philosophers and want to build a philosophy, then all of them present arguments and demonstrations, apply the divine art of dialectics, i.e., they all operate with abstract concepts and base themselves on the rules of logic" [25. P. 107]. Since they all act in the common field of philosophy, groups, and individuals develop attitudes and engage in practices that are recognized as belonging to the "philosophical field," which aims at universality since philosophy as such conceives itself as an undertaking basically common to the entire community of rational beings.

The context of emigration is fascinating in order to investigate such a complex network of connections: it unhinges "national" borders by creating an ideal image of the lost homeland, as well as by establishing new and different relations with the whole of European philosophy; it builds transnational institutions, such as universities, journals, and publishing houses, but also groups, seminars, and informal circles; and it intertwines the philosophical discourse with the religious, theological, political ones, constantly challenging their definitions. Far from being a definite and stable reality, Russian philosophy abroad continues to be refracted in readings and interpretations. Since, when the texts produced in emigration came back to the motherland and entered into dialogue with the post-Soviet cultural context and its expectations and theoretical questions, "diasporic narratives were routinely subjected to deformation and manipulation, reminiscent of the processes that frequently accompany texts when they are read by foreign audiences in translation" [26. P. 8].

¹ Here I am referring to the idea of the "cultural field" developed by Pierre Bourdieu [20–22]. See also the idea of "philosophical culture" by Evert van der Zweerde [23; 24].

The fact that the philosophy of Russia Abroad is still a fruitful research field is testified to by the essays published in this issue, different in terms of themes, approaches, and methods, but all marked by original perspectives.

Kåre J. Mjør, in his article "*Nothing Genuinely Valuable in this World Is Lost*": *Georgii Fedotov as Theologian of Culture*, analyses G.P. Fedotov's work not just within the Russian émigré context, but in a pan-European context, by comparing his positions with Paul Tillich's. Thereby the author provides an innovative example of analysis that overcomes the traditional comparison between contexts, mostly regarded as "linguistic" or "national" areas, and inquiries into reception, more or less provable. Here he very effectively addresses the study of Russian thought in a "global" perspective through a methodological reconsideration of the very notion of "context."

G. Fedotov is the subject of A.A. Gaponenkov's and A.S. Tsygankov's essay as well. In their "*The Biblical Theme in G.P. Fedotov's Historical Monographies*," they highlight Fedotov's hermeneutic method, particularly his studies on Russian religiosity. Based on his textual analysis, Fedotov combined historiographical rigor and religious dogmatics, contributing to the redefinition of philosophical discourse in relation to biblical exegesis.

In *The Fate of N.O. Losskii's Book "History of Russian Philosophy" and the Polemic Around It in the 1950s*, by analyzing different sources, many of which unpublished, E. V. Serdyukova inquires the development of Lossky's historical interest in Russian philosophy and the debate raised by the English publication of his volume in 1951. The problem of the definition of the canon of Russian philosophy is examined in different contexts: the English-language scholarly community, the Russian émigrés, and the "official" scholarly milieu in the Soviet Union.

N.O. Losskii was also one of the key figures, along with I.I. Lapshin, of the Russian Philosophical Society in Prague, which is the subject of V.V. Sidorin's essay, "*Philosophical Society at the Russian Free University in Prague: based on A.V. Florovsky's Materials in the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences*." The study of institutions here proves to be an essential element for a new approach to the history of philosophy, as a history of the production and transmission of philosophical discourse.

T.N. Rezvykh, in her article "*Simon L. Frank on J.W. Goethe's Spiritual Personality*," addresses another giant of Russian philosophy. Here she examines an interesting point of intersection with the broader European culture by analyzing Goethe's interpretation by Frank and the impact of the figure of Goethe on Frank's thought over the years. The essay offers new insights into Frank's connections with present and past European philosophy based on a comprehensive textual survey.

The relationship between an author's original thinking and the context where he formulates it is the center of I.I. Evlampiev's attention in his essay "*The Birth of Christianity from the Spirit of the Roman Empire*." Here, the cultural context where F.F. Zelinskii lands in his flight from Bolshevik Russia is considered a field of

possibilities in terms of stimuli and opportunities and limits and conditions. In particular, according to Evlampiev, Polish Catholicism would have conditioned how Zelinskii formulated his views on the roots of early Christianity.

But "Russia Abroad" as a concept extends far beyond the first wave of emigration from Bolshevik Russia. A.A. Lagunov and I.S. Baklanov devote their essay "*Christian Eschatology and Social Utopias*" to Alexander Schmemmann on the centenary of his birth. The article argues the reasons for considering him a representative of Russian philosophy abroad, although he never had a direct experience of Russia. The object of nostalgic reflection here is a fantastic homeland and the original devotion of the first émigrés to their "service" of tradition.

The rich selection of essays is completed by the publication of significant archive materials, from Paris, Moscow, New York.

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Русское зарубежье: 100 лет после «Философского парохода»

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Аннотация. В статье произведен историко-философский анализ факта высылки в 1922 г. значительной части русской интеллигенции за границу. Известно, что такой варварский акт со стороны советской власти, на самом деле оказался актом, который спас многих русских интеллектуалов либо от голодной смерти, либо от репрессий и гибели в лагерях. Также хорошо известно, что культурная деятельность русских эмигрантов после их прибытия на Запад была разнообразной и интенсивной. В статье подчеркивается

также тот момент, что факт высылки и его значение для судеб страны и самих эмигрантов долгое время оставался, что называется, «белым пятном». И только в 90-е гг. ситуация с исследованиями события изгнания 1922 г. как в России, так и за границей стала меняться. Также автор статьи обращает внимание на то, что и сам характер исследований высылки русской интеллигенции с годами меняется. Если вначале исследований в 90-е гг. преобладали чисто архивные работы, направленные на восстановление культурного наследия эмигрантов и возвращение «забытых» имен, то в последнее десятилетие мы наблюдаем более строгое критическое прочтение этого наследия, предполагающее более точную реконструкцию фактов и контекстов, а также более широкий анализ значения событий в истории начала 1920-х годов. Анализ разнообразной культурной деятельности русской интеллигенции за границей позволяет вновь сделать актуальным разговор о русской философии, ее специфике и своеобразии, взаимовлиянии русской и европейской философских традиций, о смысле и значении советской философии.

Ключевые слова: русская философия, «философский пароход», национальная идентичность, культурное наследие, Хоружий

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