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Philosophy of Landscape in Fedor Stepun's Model of Socio-Cultural Development

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Abstract. The manifestation of the significance of geographic specificity in the formation and development of society is the most crucial research vector in the study of socio-philosophical doctrines. The tradition of conceptualizing the meaning of geography in the history of Russia was significantly contributed by Sergey Solovyov and Vasily Klyuchevsky. Fyodor Stepun also correlated geographic conditions and social practices within the philosophy of landscape, which he successfully integrated into his socio-philosophical doctrine. This research paper is undertaken to reveal the essential principles of Stepun's social philosophy and to determine the features of his argumentation, which he used to interpret the mechanism of the socio-cultural process. Comparing the landscapes of Europe and Russia is Stepun's favorite method to focus on entirely different systems of social practices formed in different natural conditions. The limited/unlimited opposition is the foundation of Stepun's landscape philosophy. Stepun emphasizes that religion plays a significant role in forming the existence of social beings. Religion creates and maintains the unity of society, without which it is impossible to include geographic space in social practices. Religion forms a collective social subject from a multitude of individuals and collective formations and from their various activities — a unity tradition: a culture that has its strategy for the social development of the landscape. Stepun believed that the loss of religion's functionality as an instrument of social cohesion leads, in the long term, to the death of culture. Orthodox politics will help in the conditions of Russia's infinite space to ensure social cohesion and thus incorporate the landscape into social area. This policy knows the unique role of religion in socio-cultural development. Thanks to the Orthodox policy, it is possible to integrate the Russian landscape into the economic system effectively.

Keywords: Russian Abroad, society, religion, social unity, Christianity, Eastern Orthodox politics

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Introduction

The spatial consciousness of a modern European person, formed based on the subject-object dualism elaborated in René Descartes' philosophy, assumes the attitude of man to nature as an object — a material for the realization of own interests, the realization of needs [1. P. 465—466]. The Earth is seen as a space which should be adapted to human existence, included in social practices¹. In the European philosophy of the New Age, Charles Montesquieu and Johann Herder played a defining role in correlating social development with natural conditions².

In the history of Russian thought, the most critical role in the interpretation of history in terms of the New European subject-object dualism, expressed in the interaction of man with the natural space, was played by Sergey Solovyov and, later, Vasily Klyuchevsky³. Prior to Solovyov, historians paid attention to the natural features of Russia. However, Solovyov considered them in combination with other factors and substantiated their influence on the features of social organization, including economic, political, cultural and household features [4. P. 59—60]. He laid down the understanding of the territory as a condition of identity formation. He shaped the problem field of the Russian paradigm of geosociology (for further reading regarding the latter ref. [6]). Because of Solovyov, climatic conditions, the specificity of the landscape, and the proximity of water bodies become the most critical factors in substantiating the historical patterns of socio-cultural development of Russia⁴.

¹ Herder eloquently describes this situation when discussing anthropogenesis: “Nature raised man from the earth — it elevated him, and he became the ruler of the Earth” [2. P. 105].

² Montesquieu deduced the specificity of the laws of morality, law and religion depending on the laws of nature [3. P. 165]. Unlike Montesquieu, Herder believed that geographical features create conditions for the development of society but do not determine human activity [2. P. 182].

³ Sergey Solovyov proposed the idea of land gathering, which became the basis of Russian statehood, and connected the state's development with the territory's expansion [4. P. 58]. Vasily Klyuchevsky named external nature one of the three forces (along with personality and society) forming human dwelling: “External nature is observed in historical life as the nature of the country, where the known human society lives, and is observed as a force, as it affects the life and spiritual structure of people” [5. P. 40].

⁴ In this regard, D.N. Zamyatin's judgement about Russia is appropriate: “The Cartesian sin and greatness of Russia is the recognition of its own expanse as the basis of national existence” [7. P. 68].

In keeping with this tradition, Fyodor Stepun⁵ linked the peculiarity of socio-cultural development to natural conditions. He referred to the concepts of *landscape* and *paysage*⁶. He was trying to put them in the context of socio-philosophical narratives and, through them, to comprehend the principles of the functioning of society. In this study, I plan to answer the question of how Stepun integrates the concept of the landscape into his socio-philosophical teaching and relates it to the peculiarities of socio-cultural development.

The Role of Landscape in Actualizing Freedom

Stepun, already in his early work, drew attention to the fact that the comprehension of space affects human existence. The extent and openness of the terrain determine the actualization of a person as a participant in this world and the evaluation of their role in the development of society. In 1912 he published a short article *Towards the Phenomenology of the Landscape*, in which he analyzed the peculiarities of space comprehension in Russia and Europe [10]⁷.

Europe is characterized by orderliness in society — a consequence of the limited space of nature. For instance, Stepun writes that human hands create the roads of Tuscany but are involuntarily subordinated to “the basic essence of Florentine nature, — its completed formality” [11. P. 805]. European person discovers the possibility of expressing their aspirations in form, in the pursuit of compositional balance — finding meaning in aesthetic harmony with the world as an active participant in world existence. Their efforts determine how the world will change and the composition’s form. In contrast to Europe, Russia is characterized by the ability to observe large spaces. The main features of Russian nature are “immense distances, endless expanses, a clear aesthetic of uncreatedness and shapelessness” [11. P. 807]. Man is aware of himself being a grain of sand in front of the immensity of nature, its omnipotence; he realizes the infinity, the immensity of the world beyond his control. Expanse does not allow the Russian man to realize himself as a participant in the formation of the world.

⁵ Fyodor Avgustovich Stepun (1884—1965) was a famous writer and philosopher of the Russian Abroad of the first wave who left Soviet Russia by train in 1922. During the foreign period of his life and work, he developed a philosophical and religious concept in which he substantiated the importance of religion in forming social unity. He criticized the teachings of the Bolsheviks and believed that Soviet Russia would embody totalitarianism. On the pages of *Novy Grad* magazine (1931—1939), co-founded by F.A. Stepun along with I.I. Bunakov and G.P. Fedotov, he presented an alternative way of Russia’s development — the way of Christian politics [8. P. 74—80].

⁶ The terminological peculiarity of the series of articles *Thoughts about Russia*, directly related to the problematics of this paper, is that Stepun uses the concept of “landscape” in a broad sense, putting in this word the characteristics of the landscape: “Russian spaces are truly expanses: expanses uncluttered by any forms, expanses flooded by the spills of forests, fields, swamps and rivers” [9. P. 318]. Stepun precedes the discussion of the specificity of the Russian landscape by mentioning geographical determinism, the representatives of which derive “...the properties of the national character from geographical and climatic conditions” [9. P. 318].

⁷ In what follows, I will cite this work from the edition [11].

Stepun further deepened the contrast between Europe and Russia established in his article by linking the specificity of the landscape to the development of social phenomena. Beginning with a work on the philosophy of Oswald Spengler (1922) [12], Stepun pointed out that the variants of social organization differ depending on natural conditions. Nature acquires the status of one of the indicators for determining the peculiarities of the formation of social phenomena. In Stepun's opinion, every culture can only cognize itself, i.e., comprehend the principles of interaction between people and the functionality of social institutions in given natural conditions⁸ [12. P. 14].

In the cycle of essays *Thoughts about Russia* (1923—1928) [9], he contrasts the models of socio-cultural development formed in the European and Russian landscape conditions. Stepun connected the specificity of landscape inclusion in social practices with the system of regulations and algorithms in the conditions under which human freedom is realized. Due to the limitedness of the landscape, freedom for a European person is an opportunity to actualize oneself as a participant in socio-cultural development. The European nature's formalization makes each person want to take part in ordering the world around him/her. The geography of European spaces influences the affirmation of the significance of each person and his desire to bring something new into the formation of society's being.

Unlike the European, the Russian man lacks “intellectual creativity and law-abiding industriousness” [9. P. 317], because the form is not a prerequisite for the Russian person's self-actualization in the world, fitting himself into the universe's composition. In the Russian landscape, “all forms are absorbed by formlessness; the meaning of the expanse is in infinity...” [9. P. 319]. Under the influence of nature, an individual does not realize himself as a creator, remaining passive. He does not feel himself to be the master of life. He grasps the fragility of his

⁸ I would like to disagree with W.G. Szczukin, who, discussing Stepun's philosophy of landscape, notes that the idea of the influence of landscape on human thinking and creativity most likely dates back to Friedrich Ratzel's school of anthropogeography [13. P. 152]. Agreeing with the undeniable influence of Ratzel on the development of geographical thought, W.G. Szczukin's remark is less applicable to Stepun's doctrine. Ratzel believed that culture is related to population density: poor settlement indicates a low level of development of the people and its savagery [14. P. 11]. Wild peoples are “peoples who are more under the pressure of nature or dependent on it than the peoples of culture” [14. P. 14]. Stepun seeks to justify not the savagery of the Russian man but his otherness — his difference from the European. Unlike Ratzel, he writes about the prospects of Russia's development, not about the past of its territory. One should also pay attention to the appearance in Stepun's reasoning for assessing Russian culture as superior to European culture. He called Russian culture primary and European — secondary [15. P. 498]. Stepun undoubtedly fell under the charm of Spengler's ideas about the decline of the Western world and considered Spengler's idea of the dying of Europe in the context of his philosophical doctrine, in which he defends the paramount importance of religion in the formation of social unity [15. P. 498]. However, we should not talk about the consonance of ideas, rather than the use of Spengler's developments in Stepun's philosophy, because he does not apply Spengler's terminology and does not accept his justification, built on the opposition of culture and civilization as stages of socio-cultural development [16. P. 325, 342]. It is fair to register Stepun's philosophy of space as a contribution to the Russian tradition of geosociology.

achievements, his skills in front of the force of the elements: “Bread can be sown, but it cannot be grown. Meadows, beautiful in spring, can always be burned and overstayed in the rains by the time they are mowed” [9. P. 216].

A Russian man has never considered the land his own, nor did he strive to take care of it [9. P. 320]. He did not intend to arrange his existence in the landscape, to assert himself as an active participant in nature and culture. As W.G. Szczukin noted, in Stepun’s philosophy, the “Limitless” and monotonous Russian landscape for centuries has accustomed our fellow countrymen to the idea that any civilized human effort on this no man’s or “God’s” land is, in principle, doomed to failure. A decisive, definitive transformation of nature into culture along the lines of what has been done in the West by virtue of the victorious humanism there, on this Earth is impossible, pernicious, or, at least, sinful” [17. P. 65].

Stepun concludes that the set of social practices in the conditions of Russian space should be formed on different principles than in Europe [9. P. 318—319]. To do this, it is vital to determine how a person can include the boundless natural space in the social being. In the next section, I will analyze how Stepun throughout his work, from the “Novograd” series of articles to his most recent publications⁹, connects the functionality of religion as a social institution with the peculiarities of including landscape in social life.

The Role of Religion in Shaping Society

Religion is a tool for forming a system of social practices through which man creates and develops the sphere of his being¹⁰. Religion is the only source of timeless truth that allows it to form social unity, i.e., to reconcile all possible contradictions in society and to provide identification of spheres of human activity (economy, law, morality, science, art, etc.) as sides of a single process of development of society as a whole [21. P. 538]. Social integrity is a condition for forming the strategy of including natural space in the system of social practices. Because of religion, society (collective social subject) creates a single collective object — culture [21. P. 538]. Its creation in certain local natural conditions implies including natural space in social practices — molding social space.

However, according to Stepun, social unity in the natural space of Europe and Russia is shaped differently. In Europe, the following strategy is to include the natural landscape in the sphere of social being. Each person in a limited natural space can realize himself as a co-creator of social being, provided that he relies on the timeless religious truth in his activity (for further details, ref. [26. P. 87]). Man

⁹ Stepun laid the foundations of the doctrine of Christian politics in the *Novograd* cycle of articles: *The Path of the Creative Revolution* (1931) [18], *About the Man of ‘New City’* (1932) [19], *The Idea of Russia and the Form of its Disclosure* (1934) [15], *Longed for Russia* (1936) [20], and *About Freedom* (1938) [21]. After World War II, Stepun continued to develop the doctrine of Christian politics in the sketches of the book *Bolshevism and Christian Existence* (1962) [22—24] and one of his most recent articles, *Nation and Nationalism* (1965) [25].

¹⁰ It should be noted that Stepun, in analyzing religion, focuses only on Christianity.

identifies himself as an element of the collective social subject, as an important participant in forming social space, able to make a unique contribution to culture. Because of religion, man comprehends the will and understands that he can exercise freedom under conditions of social unity. The effective improvement of Europe became possible under conditions of a system of social practices that were formed owing to religion [19. P. 450]. The rejection of religion in forming social unity leads to the loss of human identification as a participant of society and the subsequent degradation of freedom to meaningless arbitrariness. The modern growth of European prosperity is the development of the *bourgeoisie*, which has “the rationalist roots of the late Enlightenment” [19. P. 450] and is associated with the businesslike manner and rationality of everyday life, creating and maximizing conveniences. An individual preserves the focus on the transformation of the environment but on the conditions of the bourgeoisie [19. P. 450] loses the religious truth and the concept of culture as such: “In nature, neither indifference, nor beauty, nor faith exists... Absurd and senseless: everything is carried into the distance, but there is no distance in life — no distance of dreams, no distance of risk, no distance of faith” [20. P. 515]. Stepun believes that the development of the bourgeoisie in Europe relates to the fact that religion has lost its functionality as an instrument for forming and maintaining social unity. It was 1) reduced to law in Catholicism; 2) reduced to morality in Protestantism [9. P. 325]. Both variants contain temptations and can lead to detrimental consequences in the development of culture. Catholicism generates the temptation of clericalism, i.e., the desire to maintain social unity by legislative prescriptions [19. P. 447]. Protestantism contains the temptation of apoliticism, which leads to autonomization and atomization of individuals — their striving to actualize free will without considering the goals of social and cultural development [19. P. 447—448]. Both European variants of religion’s justification entail the destruction of social unity and the loss of memory about own historical tradition [20. P. 515], which in perspective, will lead to disintegration of society and loss of the sense of socio-cultural development in Europe¹¹. Europeans will lose the notion of interaction with the landscape, thereby allowing the threat of alienation: the landscape can be occupied and adapted by peoples of other cultures¹², applying their traditions of attitude to the land.

In the conditions of Russia’s limitless space, according to Stepun, religion provided the possibility of being a society unlike that in Europe.

The sense of human, shaped by nature could be rationalized through piety, expressed through religiosity. Religion did not push, as a European, the Russian man to agile transformative activity concerning the world but transformed the sense of insignificance before nature into subordination to social power [24. P. 571]. Stepun believes that “Russian muzhik [peasant] never feels himself the master of his life, he always knows that there is a real Master over his life — God”

¹¹ One can see Spengler’s influence in these arguments. Stepun admits that he uses Spengler’s idea of the gradual death of Europe [15. P. 497—498].

¹² Stepun feared that Europe would be occupied by *young* non-European peoples [15. P. 498—499].

[9. P. 216]¹³. Legitimizing the omnipotence of power through religion played a crucial role in social cohesion: people realized themselves as participants of the collective social subject, grounding their existence as its elements [9. P. 323]. A person's activity makes sense only in the status of a constituent element of the activity of the whole society. Stepun noted that, unlike the European, the Russian man sought to bring something new through his activity only as a constituent element of the collective subject, which is reflected in the mentality: “the honor and love of the Russian people belong not to the hero who goes his way of his own free will and in Promethean pathos tries to determine the fate of his neighbor, but to the quiet saint who, forgetting about his feelings, lives only to be the window through which God looks at people and they at God” [23. P. 585].

Stepun believed that the Russian man's relationship to the land had not formed in its entirety, and the landscape was not included in the social space because the history of Russia had yet to form a unified interpretation of the functionality of religion in the life of society. The Non-possessors (followers of Nilus of Sora), who proposed to separate religion and politics, and the Josephites (followers of Joseph Volotsky), who believed that the church should actively participate in state administration, tried to qualify the role of religion [27. P. 403]. Noting the tentativeness of the comparison, Stepun draws parallels between 1) the Josephites and Catholicism because of the aspiration to draw the church closer to state power (the temptation of clericalism); 2) the Non-possessors and Protestantism because of the church's detachment from public life and the aspiration to detach itself from politics (the temptation of apoliticalism) [27. P. 402—403]. Stepun did not explicitly mention similarities in his criticism of the two versions of Orthodoxy with the branches of European Christianity. Nevertheless, using similar reasoning, he came to the same verdict. Both interpretations of the role of the Orthodox Church in society deprive it of its primary function as a social institution, that is, forming social unity. Stepun believed religion could ensure society's unity only if it overcame the confrontation between the currents of Orthodoxy [27. P. 404]. Christian policy involves the separation of the state from the church, which at the same time serves as a guide for the righteousness of state paths of development and provides a link to church life and national culture [27. P. 404]. The application of Christian politics will allow shaping of a model of socialization of individuals, which includes a system of social practices to include the landscape in the social space [18. P. 426—427].

The commonality of land is a condition for organizing economic life in Russia. Stepun suggests removing land from private ownership so that all people would be only its users [20. P. 530]. This would allow everyone to consider each personal plot of land as a fragment of the unified Russian land and allow developing respect for it. An individual working on his plot projects the attitude of the whole society

¹³ I agree with W.G. Szczukin that “the Mystical God whom Stepun mentions <...> was nothing but the spiritualization of the beauty and power of this plain — the blue of the sky, the infinity of horizons, the leisurely flow of rivers, the bottomless blackness of the frosty night” [13. P. 159].

(collective social subject) to the whole Russian land. In the framework of the conciliar community provided by religion, other people identify themselves as such workers of the land and, in its use, are oriented to the public good. If the institution of religion is abandoned in justifying the feasibility of freedom, social unity will be lost. In the economic development of the landscape, this will lead to the loss of identification of the personal plot of land with the entire Russian land and the subsequent destruction of the set of algorithms and regulations of social practices associated with including the natural landscape in the social space. Stepun's doctrine of Christian politics allows us to build a system of relations with the landscape in the conditions of Russian boundlessness of space, to form a tradition of thrifty nature management, and to substantiate a social system corresponding to the boundlessness of nature.

Stepun's conceptualization of the peculiarities of space comprehension relates to religion's functionality in forming social unity. I have reflected on reconstructing the European and Russian ways of forming social space in *Table*.

The Role of Religion in Society Formation

The Role of Religion in the Formation of European Society	The Role of Religion in the Formation of Russian Society
Humans are aware of their will and, thanks to religion, understand that they can realize it only within society.	Humans identify themselves through religion as an element of social wholeness, allowing them to grasp and exercise freedom.

Both options presented in the table consider religion's functionality in forming social unity as a condition of comprehending natural space, and its inclusion in the system of social practices.

Conclusion

In his teaching on Christian politics, Stepun developed the ideas of geographical determinism of Sergey Solovyov and Vasily Klyuchevsky, linking the specificity of the relationship between man and land to the quality of socio-cultural development. In contrast to the classics of historical thought, Stepun considered the influence of the landscape on the history of Russia and derived a universal criterion for assessing the prospects of socio-cultural development. Analyzing the significance of geographical peculiarities in Stepun's socio-philosophical doctrine provides an opportunity to actualize a new problem vector in the history of Russian philosophy abroad. The study of the comprehension of natural space in the context of the formation and development of society can serve as a tool to substantiate the specificity of the functionality of social institutions and collective formations. Stepun formed a model of socio-cultural development in which landscape became a significant parameter in the development of the system of social practices.

Forming the strategy of including land space in social practices is a condition for the viability of culture. Actualizing freedom, man forms the sphere of his being, and this process implies mastering natural space and its inclusion into the system

of social practices. Stepun considers man's landscape development as one of the indicators of the unity of society. Zealous economy, including land use, testifies to the functioning of the system of social phenomena. The tradition of landscape development in Stepun's doctrine testifies to the systematic functioning of society.

According to Stepun, religion plays a unifying role, shaping social unity and ensuring the formation of a system of social practices to incorporate the natural landscape into society. The formation of social space depends on the specificity of the religious interpretation of social practices in which the person embodies his freedom. Depending on the conditions of nature, two opposite variants of social space formation are possible: 1) from individual freedom through religiously secured social unity to actualize the limited spaces of Europe; 2) from the social unity formed by religion to the individual's awareness of his freedom in the conditions of Russian vastness. These variants of the formation of social being construct different traditions of relating to the landscape: 1) the land is a limited European space in which a multitude of individuals exercise their freedom, while religion makes it possible to unite their trajectories of creative development into a single socio-cultural process; 2) the land is boundless Russian space, which can only be understood as an object of activity and included in social practices through religious unity with other people, as elements of society (collective coexistence). The denial of religion as a tool of social being leads to a loss of social unity and the subsequent death of culture. People do not identify with a particular society or cultural tradition and lose the strategy of including the landscape in social practices.

The problematization of the inclusion of geographical space in social being served as a research perspective, which allowed us to justify the variability of socio-cultural development, and the lack of a single scale of criteria for evaluating the society. Europe and Russia develop in different ways, in the conditions of the natural landscape differently, justifying the functionality of social institutions (religion, law, etc.) and collective formations (institutions, communities, organizations). The established model of relations with the land is a fundamental condition for the formation and development of the sphere of social being.

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Аннотация. Анализ значения географических особенностей в бытии социума — важнейший исследовательский вектор в изучении социально-философских учений. В традицию концептуализации значения географии в истории России большой вклад внесли С.М. Соловьёв и В.О. Ключевский. Ф.А. Степун в русле развития связи географических условий и социальных практик разработал философию ландшафта, которую успешно интегрировал в собственное социально-философское учение. Предпринятый в настоящем исследовании анализ позволит установить важнейшие принципы социальной философии Степуна, выявить особенности его аргументации, используемые им для обоснования механизма социокультурного развития. Сравнение ландшафта Европы и России — это излюбленный приём Степуна, чтобы акцентировать внимание на формируемых в разных природных условиях совершенно различных систем социальных практик. Оппозиция ограниченное/безграничное становится фундаментом философии ландшафта Степуна. Он устанавливает корреляцию между величиной природного пространства и идентификацией отдельного человека в качестве участника социума. Степун отмечает, что религия играет определяющую роль в формировании социального бытия, поскольку обеспечивает единство общества, без которого невозможно включение географического пространства в социальные практики. Религия из множества индивидов и коллективных образований формирует коллективного социального субъекта, а из их разноплановой деятельности — единую традицию: культуру, имеющую собственную стратегию социального освоения ландшафта. Утрата функциональности религии в качестве инструмента социального единения, по мнению Степуна, приводит в перспективе к гибели культуры. В условиях российского безграничного пространства обеспечить социальное единство и таким образом инкорпорировать ландшафт в бытие социума поможет православная политика. Благодаря православной политике возможно эффективное включение российского ландшафта в систему хозяйства.

Ключевые слова: русское зарубежье, социум, религия, социальное единство, христианство, православная политика

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