International Archives of the History of Ideas 212
Archives internationales d'histoire des idées

Thomas Nemeth

The Early Solov'ëv and His Quest for Metaphysics

Springer

The Early Solov'ëv and His Quest for Metaphysics

ARCHIVES INTERNATIONALES D'HISTOIRE DES IDÉES

INTERNATIONAL ARCHIVES OF THE HISTORY OF IDEAS

212

THE EARLY SOLOV'ËV AND HIS QUEST FOR METAPHYSICS

Thomas Nemeth

Thomas Nemeth

The Early Solov'ëv and His Quest for Metaphysics

Springer

Thomas Nemeth
Old Bridge, NJ, USA

ISSN 0066-6610
ISBN 978-3-319-01347-3 ISBN 978-3-319-01348-0 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-01348-0
Springer Cham Heidelberg New York Dordrecht London

Library of Congress Control Number: 2013951014

Printed on acid-free paper

Springer is part of Springer Science+Business Media (www.springer.com)

Contents

Introduction

As is so readily acknowledged by even its own offspring, the Russian philosophical tradition extends back only into the nineteenth century, by one reckoning even as late as the 1880s. The reason for this was and is itself the subject of some dispute. Suffice it to say that one prominent participant ascribed it to the lack of appropriate institutions, another to Russia's linguistic isolation and yet another to its autocephalous Orthodox religion. All of these conjectures have some merit, however unconvincing and inconclusive we may ultimately find each to be taken either singly or collectively. What is striking to even the casual observer of this era is that although rigorous secular philosophical argumentation arose in Western Europe already in the first half of the seventeenth century, we find nothing comparable in Russia until the nineteenth century. Philosophy as understood today, in short, took hold in the West during what is commonly dubbed the "Age of Reason," whereas in Russia philosophical reflections emerged in earnest and at the very earliest only with the advent of the Russian Romantic era, a period which is commonly dubbed the Russian "Golden Age." The consequence of this for its further evolution could not be more telling. Whereas philosophy in the West appealed to reason and logic to guide its efforts, philosophy in Russia was dominated by faith and even in some instances by a vaguely defined mystical intuition and only secondarily by reason. Likewise, many of their respective concerns sharply diverged. Although philosophers in the West at the time were riveted by epistemological issues, particularly those arising from the remarkable developmental pace of the natural sciences, philosophers in Russia exhibited less interest in these matters but all the more in the role and significance of their fundamental religious convictions in the face of the secularization of the quest for Truth. Whereas Descartes, Leibniz and Locke had scientific training, Russian philosophers came to philosophy often enough with a theological background.

Another predominant concern among Russian philosophers was the place of their own nation and its way of life among the other nations of the world – a rather odd preoccupation from the Western viewpoint, arguably revealing more about a widespread sense of insecurity among the country's educated elite than a description of reality. To speak of *German* Idealism, *British* Empiricism and *French* Existentialism

is common enough among Western philosophers, but by and large the concerns of these schools of thought were and are not thought to be limited to just their respective peoples. The national designations of these philosophical schools refer to the ethnicities of their chief exponents but not that the respective concerns were limited to that ethnic group. Surely, neither John Locke nor David Hume conceived empiricism as having to do solely with the people of the British Isles and that the French, for example, could not for whatever reason recognize its veracity. Likewise, the French Existentialists did not envision the absurdity of human existence to be limited to the French and some purportedly distinctive French way of life. Save, arguably, for a brief period in its recent history, German philosophers did not concern themselves with whether their nation had a unique destiny in world history, let alone with whether the consumption of beer and sausages while wearing lederhosen would safeguard the *Volk* from the pernicious ways of other peoples. Yet virtually all textbook treatments of Russian philosophy, be they Russian or Western, accept the so-called Slavophile Controversy – whether Russia had a distinctive and unique "spirit" and therefore developmental path – as one of, if not, the major topic in nineteenth century Russian *philosophy*! If the issues bantered about in the Slavophile Controversy were part and parcel of philosophy, Whitehead was certainly wrong in holding that the European philosophical tradition consists of a series of footnotes to Plato. Additionally, and even more astonishingly and inexcusably, all major historians of Russian philosophy, with a single possible exception, fail to ridicule and condemn this identification.

Another odd difference between the emergence of philosophy in the West and in Russia – odd in that it is contrary to what we might expect – is that whereas modern Western secular philosophy emerged outside academia (Descartes, Locke, Leibniz), in Russia, apart from such "philosophical" dilettantes as Herzen and Kirevskij, Chaadaev and Khomjakov, philosophy was institutionalized from the outset with Jurkevich in Moscow and Vladislavlev in St. Petersburg, both of whom were products of insular theological institutions. Much can and often is made in histories of Russian philosophy of the positivism and ethical-nihilistic espousals of several mid-century disgruntled young radicals, Chernyshevskij, Dobroljubov and Pisarev. Yet despite their enthrallment with natural science at the expense of other intellectual activities, none of these was trained as a scientist, and their rejection of absolute moral values was a product of neither extensive anthropological research nor a detailed critique, say, of Kant's practical philosophy. In short, much of secular Russian "philosophy" prior to Solov'ëv was not philosophy, and the rest, with but few exceptions, was theology in disguise.

This is not to say that Russian philosophers were totally at odds with the West in either their interests or their methodologies. As we will see in the pages to follow, the incipient Russian philosophical community, in fact, was certainly not averse to handling much the same problems as in the West. Indeed, one aim of the present work is to show this as well as its limitations in the reflections of its arguably most famous and influential representative. Solov'ëv, in his first major work, for example, sketched a philosophy of the history of philosophy reminiscent of Hegel, albeit with a different intent and in doing so found immanent faults in all of his illustrious

predecessors. This work, in turn, led to a serious exchange with one of his countrymen concerning phenomenalism and the role of the *a priori*. The examples could be multiplied. Arguably, the most significant of these aborted exchanges came in response to Solov'ëv's doctoral dissertation. Unfortunately, despite the harsh but detailed objections from Boris Chicherin, Solov'ëv simply chose to ignore them and thereby the opportunity to explain and refine his own thought was squandered. In short, then, contrary to the impression conveyed by most histories there was in Russia at least during the last quarter of the nineteenth century an eager audience for philosophical debate that would be recognized as such even in Western Europe at the time.

The above concerns and features come together in the subject of the present study, arguably the first Russian philosopher worthy of that designation, certainly its first systematic secular philosopher. Clearly, many historians refer to Solov'ëv as a religious philosopher, and there certainly is a great deal of merit in doing so. However, another, himself a prominent figure within Russian philosophy, at least on one occasion denied Solov'ëv was even a philosopher at all, for he "was much more a theologian and a religious pamphleteer than a philosopher. Systematic theoretical philosophy as such was of comparatively little interest to him."[1] Undoubtedly, Solov'ëv's early works, as we shall see, treat epistemological issues only in a most cursory manner, and S. L. Frank not without grounds observed that towards the end of his life Solov'ëv, realizing the inadequate theoretical grounding of his general position, was engaged in remedying the situation. In reply, though, this need not mean that Solov'ëv was not a philosopher, just as the absence of a traditionally-framed epistemological study in, say, Heidegger and Frege, Nietzsche and Whitehead, makes any of them any the less a philosopher. My position is simply that with Solov'ëv philosophy in Russia became, on the one hand, a secular discipline independent of dogmatic theology – even though it shared many of the latter's concerns – and of politics, on the other, despite his frankly inept posturing. We do not find this in Solov'ëv's predecessors. With Solov'ëv, solutions to at least some traditional philosophical questions were offered to be judged in terms of their own cogency, i.e., were *meant* to be evaluated in a manner that would be recognized as philosophical by other philosophers, and not just theologians or representatives of a political faction. This is certainly not to say that Solov'ëv consistently and without interruption thought and wrote as a philosopher. A mere cursory glance over a list of his publications will reveal to everyone's satisfaction that he labored for a sustained period on issues far removed from the professional concerns of philosophers.

Despite his pursuit of metaphysical and, frankly, religious issues, Solov'ëv did offer treatments, some extensive, some much less so, of problems still germane to the philosophical endeavor today. Additionally, Solov'ëv's treatment initiated a

[1] Frank 1996: 423. This quotation is from an essay "Pamjati L. M. Lopatina" originally published in 1930. At another, later time with a broader understanding of philosophy, Frank remarked of Solov'ëv that he "is in the history of Russian thought the first – and up to now the most distinguished – independent Russian philosopher, the first manifestation of a Russian philosophical genius." Frank 1996: 392. The quotation is from an article entitled "Dukhovnoe nasledie Vladimira Solov'ëva" first published in 1950.

sustained conversation within Russia to which many other voices contributed until forcibly repressed by those who found free and critical inquiry of any sort jeopardized and therefore was dangerous to their political agenda. At no earlier date and with no earlier ethnic Russian do we find philosophical issues treated for their own sake and with such consistency over time as in Solov'ëv. That this was the case at least with regard to Solov'ëv forms another aim of the present work.

Certainly, Solov'ëv did not emerge as a fully formed original philosopher. Like so many before him, he too entered the intellectual arena with preconceptions and interests that he sought to defend chiefly related to his Orthodox faith, and his manifest appeal to an arational faith and intellectual intuition to resolve philosophical dilemmas is surely disquieting. It is this overall religious frame of mind coupled with notable impatience towards epistemological issues not just in Solov'ëv but in Russian philosophy in general that gave and still gives the impression to Western eyes that philosophy in Russia before the Bolshevik Revolution was synonymous with religious philosophy. However, the complexion of Russian philosophy could have been different, and there were missed and squandered opportunities for it to develop along other lines or at least develop more analytically. Of course, the suppression of all critical thought in the aftermath of the Decembrist Uprising in the 1820s was the first of these. Had the seeds planted during the early years of Tsar Alexander I's reign been nurtured by a more caring and tolerant regime than that of Nicholas I, the tentative Russian Enlightenment may have grown and prospered. Such was not to be the case. Suspicions aroused by the events of 1825 were climaxed some two decades later by an overwhelming fear of contagion from the European revolutions of 1848, which saw the effective elimination of philosophical education within Russia's secular institutions of higher education until the accession of Nicholas' son, Tsar Alexander II.

Another even more poignant missed opportunity for Russian philosophy was the Chernyshevskij-Jurkevich dispute over materialism in 1860. The origins of the quarrel actually lie in an essay by Pëtr Lavrov, a philosophical autodidact, dealing with the human individual and to which Chernyshevskij gave a lengthy, albeit polemical, reply. It, in turn, was roundly criticized by Jurkevich, then at the Kiev Theological Academy, who argued against the materialist reduction of psychic phenomena to physical processes. Admittedly, much in Jurkevich's argument was cast in Biblical terms that even to the Western reader at the time would have sounded antiquated. However, Jurkevich did bluntly repeat many of the standard irreductionist's claims that were intelligible to his opponents. He argued, for example, that physicalist renderings of mental occurrences, such as my perception of a color or my sensation of pain, make no headway in explaining my subjective impressions, just as a physiological description sheds no light on the introspective psychology of hearing music or making sense of audible words. The most that the natural sciences could possibly establish is a uniform correlation between nerve impulses and sensations or representations. Although the sciences could conceivably determine that an activity of some particular sort in my brain stands in a one-to-one correlation with certain mental states and sensations, we cannot logically conclude from this alone that the conscious mind must be located "in" the brain, let alone be reducible to it or to its functioning.

Whereas Jurkevich did not deny a certain efficacy to the physicalist model, he held that only a subjectivist model, relying as it does on introspection, can give a faithful account of sensing and thinking. For in general conscious states as such lack both spatial extension and the other properties that make, say, this table and chair before me intersubjectively sensible. Not for a moment does Jurkevich question the absolute privacy of inner states, as Wittgenstein later would. In a curious fashion, the former believes that the qualitative transformation of physical phenomena, say, of vibrations of air into sound, requiring the presence of a sentient being, is an additional argument against materialism. He adds, however, that the transformation occurs not in the subject but in the *relation* between the subject and the object. Thus, according to this conception sound and color are not properties of physical objects in themselves but arise *from* their interaction with us. Furthermore, owing to this interaction there is nothing alarming in saying that our mental representations are conditioned by necessary forms, which are introduced through the activity of our cognitive apparati with its intrinsic constitution. Here lies, in his view, the proper construal of the Kantian thing in itself. To speak of matter, a physical thing, as it is in itself apart from any relation to a cognizant being, is an untenable conceptual abstraction. To Jurkevich, the ancients already discerned that such an abstract thought amounted to nothing. This nascent critique of reductionism and abstraction heavily influenced Solov'ëv.[2]

Extending this irreductionism to the moral sphere, Jurkevich disclaimed what he took to be the modern view that the mind was a faculty devoted purely to the production of representations and had nothing to do with a recognition of duties. In this construal of modernity, the job of moral philosophy is description with the goal being the establishment of abstract laws comparable to those in the natural sciences. Jurkevich responded, however, that such specifications of moral duties and of the moral law do nothing to explain the cause of moral activity. Statements of what is consistent with the moral demands of reason cannot summon us to act.

Jurkevich applauded the materialist rejection of Kant's ethical formalism, which dispensed with human nature in moral deliberations. However, he also rejected on the same basis what he perceived as the materialist espousal of hedonism and egoism: These moral doctrines exclude any consideration of the happiness of others. The error of egoism lies not in its concern with the moral actor's emotions, but with its neglect of the actor's relations to other people. The utilitarianism accepted by other materialists is also to be rejected for going to the other extreme. In holding that the moral good is tied to usefulness, utilitarianism erects yet another abstract standard. It derives human needs from the concept of use instead of realizing that the latter stems from the satisfaction of needs.

Chernyshevskij's reply to Jurkevich barely deserves mention. Its very title "Polemical Gems" is indicative of its nature, for it failed to address any substantive philosophical issues. It fell to his lieutenant at the journal *Sovremennik* (*The Contemporary*) to maintain the assault on idealism. In a series of articles, albeit of

[2] Jurkevich 1861: 105. After Jurkevich's death, Solov'ëv penned a panegyrical essay largely summarizing Jurkevich's works that he knew.

a popular nature, M. A. Antonovich, in effect, lambasted philosophers at his country's religious institutions, calling them "old philosophers" who preached not philosophy but mysticism, as opposed to the "new philosophers" who do not believe in an absolute and do not expound on unconditional, eternal ideals. The old philosophers want to entangle and bind human thought by means of scholastic devices for the benefit of those who are concerned only with themselves.[3] Although Antonovich repeated many of the same theses that Jurkevich opposed and were actually from today's perspective quite moderate, their mere iteration in a politically-charged journal placed them largely beyond the pale of academic discussion. Antonovich continued expressing his views in the decades that followed but received little recognition for his efforts. His clarion call was largely abandoned except for a few revolutionaries who preferred even more explicit utterances.

The fault, such as it was, however, was not limited to just one side. Among the idealists, there was no Russian equivalent of Otto Liebmann or Friedrich Lange in Germany to issue a wake-up call in light of the dismal state of philosophical reflection that would lead to ushering in multifarious epistemological inquiries. In any case, Jurkevich now secure at Moscow University, even though isolated and unpopular with the left-leaning student body, dropped the topic of materialism after having penned two articles devoted to it. Still S. L. Frank in the next century opined that, "In the 1860s Jurkevich was the sole independent and original Russian philosopher."[4] After little more than a decade later, his health declined precipitously leading to a premature death. His fundamental orientation took to heart Hegel's earlier admonition in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that science need not concern itself with asking for the conditions of its possibility: "In order to know it is unnecessary to have knowledge of knowledge itself."[5] Epistemology, above all, must therefore be a meta-physical inquiry into our means of establishing the *veracity* of putative knowledge-claims. No psychological explanation of the forms, principles and structure of human thought per se in isolation from such veracity can illuminate the nature of knowledge. No phenomenological description or account of thought can inform us when to assert or deny something. For this reason, Jurkevich accorded scant attention to the theory of knowledge as conceived in the modern era.

Even if we see this Russian *materialismusstreit* as a scorned opportunity for philosophy to develop outside religious confines, Jurkevich's influence on Solov'ëv extended beyond the circumscribed issues of this dispute. A marked preference for a Platonic direction in philosophy is one that Jurkevich reinforced in his best-known student if such was needed. Unlike in modern philosophy, and in particular Kant, who Jurkevich considered to have launched a new era in philosophy, Plato, in Jurkevich's eyes, sought to uncover the principles that make veridical, and not just valid, knowledge possible. Plato, like Kant, spoke of appearances, though in a different sense. What is empirically given is contrasted not to isolated objects, as in Kant, but to

[3] Antonovich 1861: 364.

[4] Frank 1996: 423. It is unclear on Frank's criteria why he does not accord Jurkevich the rather dubious honor of being the first Russian philosopher.

[5] Jurkevich 1859: 11.

objects given in reason. The former, for Plato, are unclear forms or images of what truly exists. Whereas Kant saw reason divorced from experience as moving into the realm of shadows and dreams, Plato saw experience in much this way. Whereas Kant saw knowledge as a web of intuitions, Plato saw it as a web of ideas. Kant contended that only knowledge of appearances, of objects as they appear to us, is possible, whereas Plato held that knowledge of what truly is is possible, and only such knowledge is knowledge in the proper sense. Kant's vision was to secure useful information; Plato's was to secure truth. Thus, their respective conceptions of science are quite different. Science in the modernist understanding, according to Jurkevich, could not possibly illuminate the world as it truly is. In stark contrast to Kant's vision, the Platonic position glorified natural science as the means by which we uncover the world.

Despite his harsh assessment, Jurkevich was not short on praise for Kant's "critical" philosophy, which recognized that experience, on which we normally rely to provide knowledge, is itself a product of reason. Moreover, it was largely due to Kant's efforts that philosophy triumphed over common-sense realism and that of those sciences which posit sense objects as existing in an independent space and time.[6] Jurkevich praised Kant for recognizing that the forms of cognized objects, which we ascribe to the empirically given, are engendered by our cognitive faculty. To this extent, Solov'ëv believed Jurkevich had revealed the veridical kernel in Kant's idealism, while at the same time reconciling Plato with both Leibniz and Hume.

In Jurkevich's Platonic understanding, "realism," regardless of its form, seeks to know the essences of things, which exist independently of the cognizing subject. Realism recognizes a distinction between a thing's original, independent properties and those properties it has in its interaction with us as cognizing subjects. Idealism, on the other hand, denies the very possibility of such independent things with original properties. It holds that a thing has an essence arising from that thing's rational participation in an idea. Each thing occupies a place in the worldly order as a result of a division of a general concept not dissimilar from Plato's theory of ideas. Contrary to Hegel's position, this participation is not subject to some inner development. Nor, as in Hegel, does an idea come to a dialectical realization of itself and certainly not through some involvement in the phenomenal order. Hegel's position blurs, as it were, two separate realms: that of the ideal and that of the phenomenal or apparent. Rather, the realm of ideal being is quite separate from the realm populated with the empirical objects surrounding us. Had Jurkevich been aware of the burgeoning debate over psychologism in Western Europe, he certainly would have weighed in against it. Ideas, or essences, are not mind-dependent; they are neither created by nor strictly correlative to the human psyche. In grasping, or intuiting, the idea of a thing, we thereby intuit its essence, which exists in a realm separate from material objects not unlike Frege's position, although Jurkevich here is even more explicitly a Platonist. Kant was led to confining knowledge to the merely apparent alone on the basis of psychological theories that equated the spirit with consciousness. On the contrary, Jurkevich claimed – not surprisingly given his theological background – that

[6] Jurkevich 1865: 353.

the spirit (*dukh*) is a real, existing substance, possessing more states and activities than those of which we can be conscious. Similarly, the laws of knowledge are neither properties nor the result of cognitive activity.

Notwithstanding his hostility towards so much of modern philosophy, Jurkevich, nevertheless, never unequivocally dismissed any of his predecessors. We have already mentioned his attitude with respect to Kant. Jurkevich saw another philosopher in whom Solov'ëv was particularly interested in his early years, Schelling, as attempting to explain reality through a reconciliation of two different, if not opposed, metaphysical points of view. One of these, belonging to pre-Kantian thought, recognizes being as primordial, whereas the other is concerned with positing the activity of thought as at least methodologically fundamental. Although Jurkevich valued the ambitious nature of Schelling's synthesis, he did not believe the project could be accomplished in a system whose inner development is conceived as logically necessary. Similarly, Jurkevich was critical of Hegel while yet appreciative and indebted – often enough without acknowledgement. Needless to say, Jurkevich, unlike Solov'ëv, did not conceive either the general, broad span of human development or the history of philosophy as progressively developing towards some ultimate finality.

Although V. D. Kudrjavcev, who taught at the Moscow Theological Academy and was a contemporary of Jurkevich, played a virtually insignificant role in the public dispute over materialism, a brief overview of his overall position is germane here.[7] For one thing, Solov'ëv attended his lectures, albeit only for a brief time, while auditing classes at the Academy. Additionally, Kudrjavcev is generally hailed as the founder of Russian religious philosophy, a designation often also accorded to Solov'ëv. Indeed, a comparison of their specific positions shows notable similarities and dislikes.[8] Unlike Jurkevich, who concentrated on specific issues, Kudrjavcev did not hesitate to present his opinions on a broad range of philosophical issues, even though he conveyed most of them in elementary, and hence cursory and unoriginal, textbook fashion. Like Jurkevich, but unlike Solov'ëv, Kudrjavcev devoted considerably less attention to philosophical ethics. However, he did present criticisms of the leading secular moral systems.[9] Nevertheless, there can be no mistake in categorizing Kudrjavcev as a religious philosopher, if the designation "philosopher" is even appropriate. We must exercise caution, however, in any discussion of influence, since most of the tenets of Kudrjavcev's philosophical positions appeared in print – today our only reliable source – only years after Solov'ëv's attendance in

[7] See Kudrjavcev 1877. Kudrjavcev, in this article, his principal contribution to the "*materialismusstreit*," argues that the teleology evident in nature cannot be accounted for in a materialist scheme. Another relevant and interesting, if not amusing, contribution is his 1880 essay "Materialisticheskij atomizm," in which he rejects nineteenth century atomistic theories. See Kudrjavcev-Platonov 1894. Since this piece originally appeared as a supplement in a multi-volume Russian collection of the writings of the Church Fathers, it could hardly have reached a large audience.

[8] Particularly intriguing is the fact that in October 1874 Kudrjavcev gave a public speech on Comte and positivism, which would form one of the central concerns of Solov'ëv's *magister*'s thesis. See Kudrjavcev 1875.

[9] In this regard, see in particular Kudrjavcev 1893: 419–441.

his classes.[10] Certainly, it is possible that Solov'ëv heard Kudrjavcev's ideas being espoused while they were, so to speak, incubating. It is also just as possible that he heard no such thing and that the influence was, in fact, in the opposite direction.[11]

Kudrjavcev called his position "transcendental monism," though "transcendental" should not be understood in either the Kantian or the Husserlian sense.[12] Kant himself was a subjective idealist in Kudrjavcev's eyes. The appellation "monism" is more appropriate in that he viewed all things as interconnected under God, Who served as the guarantor of this unity. The existence of God is ultimately not subject to philosophical, or rational, proof, for logic cannot proceed from the conditioned to the unconditioned. This is not to say that philosophical proofs are valueless. They provide corroboration for faith and divine revelation. Indeed, the central concern running through all of Kudrjavcev's philosophical publications is asserting a role for philosophy with respect to religion with its Divine revelations and contemporary natural science with its ostensive applicability.

A similar train of thought lies behind Kudrjavcev's criticism of Descartes, whose methodology is faulted for its application to the entire cognitive sphere. What Descartes failed to recognize is that reason is not the sole avenue to truth. Besides the verities proffered by religion, empirical truths are supported by facts, i.e., by an agreement with reality. However, the validity of a factual statement cannot be determined by reason alone. This does not mean that the natural sciences are above critical reproach and should remain sacrosanct. Each contains operative concepts accepted on faith but whose fundamental significance stands in need of rational investigation. It is here that philosophy can serve a useful role. Additionally, important questions remain largely unanswered and even unaddressed by the sciences. Without necessarily transgressing into the religious sphere, we see that science cannot answer such problems as the origin of space, time and matter, let alone the goal of the ordered universe. Here again philosophy performs a vital task. The ultimate goal of science is neither merely the accumulation of isolated facts nor even of natural laws governing these facts and their connections. Rather, it lies in an understanding of their sense, the discovery of their inner principles and the clarification of how scientific facts emerge from these principles.

Kudrjavcev conceded the primacy of epistemology in the construction of a philosophical system, and in this he certainly differed with the early Solov'ëv. Even though he rejected Kant's stance, Kudrjavcev did not deny that a subjective element

[10] This is not to say that Kudrjavcev remained unpublished into the mid-1870s. Despite their number, his publications at this point were largely confined to religious matters. His most significant work in this regard was his doctoral dissertation in theology *Religija, eja sushchnost' i proiskhozhdenie* [*Religion, Its Essence and Origin*], which originally appeared serially in the journal *Pravoslavnoe obozrenie*. See Kudrjavcev 1874.

[11] Zenkovsky categorically denies any influence of Solov'ëv on the scholars at the theological institutions. Zenkovsky 1953: 532. Yet we should recall that Solov'ëv's first publications appeared in the same journal in which Kudrjavcev published, a journal that Dahm called "notorious as the pugnacious propaganda instrument for mysticism and religion." Dahm 1975: 223.

[12] Kudrjavcev 1893: 72.

enters into our representations of external objects, but this does not prevent us from acquiring valid cognitions of them. Kant was wrong in thinking that our external sensations and even the necessary and universal forms of space and time are merely subjective. The subjective element in cognition can always be isolated from the objective, thereby allowing us access to objects as they are in themselves. The very fact of science and that of scientific investigations testify to such knowledge. However, such claims, we should add, reveal the depth, or rather lack thereof, of Kudrjavcev's penetration into Kant's transcendental idealism. Kudrjavcev likens space and time, as subjective forms of sense cognition, to color and sound, all of which do not exist as such in things but arise in their relation to us. Nevertheless, even though our cognitive faculty applies space and time to objects, this does not mean that space and time are purely subjective. What is important to note here is that Kudrjavcev does not logically argue for his positions but merely offers them as obvious truths.

Whereas colors, tastes and smells can be abstracted from empirical objects, such cognitive objects as God, truth and the good cannot be. That they do not arise in any way from sense intuition or experience is clear from the fact that they do not have empirical characteristics. Taking his cue from Hume when it serves his own purposes, Kudrjavcev alleges, albeit without proof, that these qualities are universal and categorical and as such cannot be derived from experience. Moreover, since they cannot be obtained from experience nor by means of abstraction from experience, we human beings must have another faculty whose object is just these ideal beings. We will see in the following chapters that Solov'ëv too follows this path. However, Kudrjavcev believes, unlike Solov'ëv, that reason is just this faculty.[13] It is here that Kudrjavcev's Platonism becomes most pronounced. All scientific knowledge presupposes another, a higher, knowledge, a knowledge of ideas or essences. This is philosophical knowledge.[14] These ideas do not lie in a distinct sphere separate from our phenomenal world. Essences, rather, are present in every rational thing around us. There is no sharp border cleaving the empirical from the ideal. For this reason, philosophy, true to its own essence, cannot restrict its concern merely to essences, which are what an object ideally should be. In practice, then, philosophy is concerned with truth, namely, the agreement of the apparent state of affairs with the ideal, and thus the principles and goals of existence.

Kudrjavcev recognizes that philosophy is concerned with the ultimate questions. Its instrument is reason. Applied to the human being, this means that philosophy deals with what we ideally should be, that is, with our moral perfection. Life, however, cannot wait for philosophy, or science for that matter, to provide answers. It is here that religion steps in.

The most disconcerting feature of Kudrjavcev's reflections are not his answers to difficult questions and certainly not his ultimate resignation in favor of religious belief. Rather, it is his abandonment of rational inquiry in the face of difficulties. We find this time and again in his treatment of specific issues, and we will find this

[13] Kudrjavcev 1893: 118.

[14] Kudrjavcev 1901: 22.

repeatedly in Solov'ëv. Objecting to the materialism preached by many of his contemporaries, he abandoned a rational and scientifically-based analysis of their arguments. Much the same can be said of his treatments of a whole host of other philosophical problems. Kant's treatment of space as Kudrjavcev understood it, for example, could not possibly be correct even though the reasoning involved is flawless. "Thus, we must seek the weakness of Kant's theory of space and time not in his fundamental theses or premises, but in the conclusions he inferred from these premises."[15] Kudrjavcev may not have been the originator of this procedure, but it surely did get passed on either directly or indirectly to Solov'ëv.

No sketch, however brief, of the formative philosophical influences on Solov'ëv can avoid mentioning the early Russian Slavophiles, particularly Kireevskij and Khomjakov. We need not dwell excessively on this or attempt to add to or, arguably, subtract from what has already been written. In fact, the overwhelming consensus attributes much of Solov'ëv's early philosophy to his absorption of Slavophile doctrine. Konstantin Mochul'skij, to cite just one example, summarily opined that,

> Solov'ëv absorbed entirely Kireevskij's world-view. His dissertation bears the character of a disciple: its fundamental thesis, the synthesis of philosophy and religion, its view of Western philosophy as the development of rationalism, the idea of the integrity of life, of metaphysical cognition, of the necessity of combining Western thought with Eastern speculation were all expressed by Kireevskij. He even inspired Solov'ëv's plan of investigation: a critique of the Scholastics, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Schelling and Hegel.[16]

In opposition to Mochul'skij's slavish subordination of Solov'ëv to the early Slavophiles, we could adduce a veritable litany of differences between them. Walicki in his panoramic study of Slavophilism lists a number of important points of departure.[17] A. F. Losev, himself a noted Russian philosopher in the tradition of Solov'ëv, pointed out that in addition to their doctrinal disagreements, there was a difference in temperament between Solov'ëv and the Slavophiles. Whereas the former remained a nineteenth century philosopher who thought in terms of systematic categories, this could not be said of any of the latter. In terms of their philosophical outlook, Solov'ëv always maintained that Spinoza was his first love.[18] Moreover, his debt, as we shall see, to Kant, Schopenhauer and von Hartmann is something we could never so much as imagine of the early Slavophiles, with whom he was allegedly so enthralled.[19] Solov'ëv himself once commented on this subject in a reply to a lengthy article by Pavel Miljukov, a historian and later prominent politician, that even though its abstract merits supported tendencies that were not only incorrect but even pernicious for Russia early Slavophilism contained "the germ of the true

[15] Kudrjavcev-Platonov 1893: 236.

[16] Mochul'skij 1936: 54.

[17] Walicki 1989: 563.

[18] Losev 2000: 255.

[19] Sutton has also recognized that whereas Solov'ëv "found much in Slavophilism that was congenial to him," he "did not belong to their 'camp', nor indeed to any camp." Sutton. Vladimir Solov'ëv. 2000: 3.

understanding of Christianity, albeit hidden and crushed by other hostile tenets."[20] Perhaps most judiciously, Aleksandr Nikol'skij, in a pioneering study from 1902, already concluded that given the number of similarities between Solov'ëv and the Slavophiles one could not simply dismiss the idea that he belonged to the Slavophile camp. Yet for all that, they were just one source among others.[21]

The massive literature on Slavophilism in general and, to a lesser, though still considerable, degree, on Solov'ëv's relationship to that "camp" makes it arguably unnecessary and unwise for a philosophical study to dwell at length on those topics. Such an undertaking would require in any case a detailed exposition of Slavophilism, no representative of which wrote a substantial philosophical work comparable in length and depth to Solov'ëv's.[22] Moreover, our concern here is foremost with the latter and the veracity and cogency of the ideas expressed in his writings. While a study of the influences on the formation of an individual's thought can help illuminate what that individual intended and on occasion to whom an argument was addressed, the responsibility for the veracity and coherence of one's ideas rests with the individual expressing them. Regardless of whether Solov'ëv's position on a particular topic was influenced by some other individual or by some other work, we have to presume that he personally accepted the argument or thesis advanced under his own name lest we entirely forego individual culpability. Solov'ëv surely was a resolute opponent of positivism and all forms of reductionism. In this, he certainly was both a product and reflection of his era and locale. Seeking to combat these vociferous "isms," which dismissed metaphysics as a relic of a superseded stage in human thought, Solov'ëv sought to show their impotence in resolving a host of problems and our absolute need to embrace metaphysics in any search for truth. The title of the present study reflects the present author's view that Solov'ëv sought to reinstate a quest for metaphysics, however we may view its success and viability, and in doing so eradicate the threat posed by positivism. The spread of this "ism" in nineteenth century Russia, the study of which as one scholar has remarked has been notably neglected, is the subject of an appendix to this volume.[23]

Quite unabashedly the scope of the present study, being Solov'ëv's early philosophy, is restricted both thematically and chronologically. It was during the years from 1874 to 1881 that Solov'ëv was overtly interested in pursuing a career as a philosophy professor and with this aspiration penned most of his narrowly focused philosophical works. Abandoning hope for the desired professorship, Solov'ëv turned his attention more or less through the remaining years of the 1880s towards the role of the Russian state and people in Western Civilization, and his writings expressed open support for ecumenicalism and a reunification of the Christian churches. These are hardly topics for philosophical discussion despite the fact that

[20] Solov'ëv 1893: 154. This is in response to Miljukov 1893. For Miljukov's brief reply to Solov'ëv see Miljukov 1903.

[21] Nikol'skij 1902: 417.

[22] For a quite interesting and informative study of Solov'ëv's attitude towards Slavophilism, particularly its interpretation of Russian history, see Schrooyen. 2000.

[23] de Courten. 2004: 194.

they have garnished so much attention in the secondary literature. Owing to their topical irrelevance, they do not play a role in the present work. The reader will also find barely a mention of Solov'ëv's numerous poems and other occasional pieces that would later prove a valuable source of income for the cash-strapped philosopher. Those who seek information on such concerns and issues had best look elsewhere. They will find no shortage of source material – some good, some mediocre at best. The literature on Solov'ëv has grown dramatically in recent years, and has ballooned enormously in Russia since the end of the Communist era. I have purposely omitted a full discussion of these topics not because I seek to downplay their significance in Solov'ëv's life, and thereby create a ludicrously false portrayal, but because they have no place in philosophy as presently – and quite properly – conceived. Too long have studies in Russian philosophy, both in Russia itself as well as in the West, treated the topics of Russia's place in the world and religious questions as germane and endemic to Russian thought. They, thereby, disseminated the now widespread, though somewhat false, impression among Western students of philosophy that Russian thinkers never grappled with the same issues they have. Too long have studies, in fact, shied away from Solov'ëv's purely philosophical concerns and writings, leaving the study of his ideas, and Russian philosophy in general, in the hands of chauvinistic nationalists, religious zealots and outright mystics. No wonder, then, that Western students of philosophy have virtually no inkling of, for example, Solov'ëv's later proto-phenomenological rejection of Cartesianism, his defense of free will or his virtue ethics. However, in the interest of thematic unity and brevity I have also largely refrained from dealing with the philosophical publications stemming from the last decade or so of his life. While these are of great interest owing to their being pregnant with challenging ideas and directly confront many of the positions Solov'ëv's upheld in his early years, they stand in need of a separate and thorough investigation. In this sense, the situation with Solov'ëv is not too dissimilar from the way in which studies of Wittgenstein rarely deal in a single treatise with both his early and late philosophical reflections.

Nor will the reader find in the following pages an extended discussion of such well-known Solov'ëvian ideas as Sophia, the Eternal Feminine and even of his *religious* philosophy on the whole, understanding the latter as a perspective that accords primacy to non-secular concepts and categories even though these can be found in writings from Solov'ëv's early period.[24] The present writer could not possibly hope to depict Solov'ëv's position in these matters with the least bit of objectivity, let alone the compassion, understanding and impartiality that any serious study requires. The reader will also find that the only examination of Solov'ëv's belletristic writings herein is in the service of illuminating his philosophical thought and his philosophical biography. Although such an omission can be rationalized, the simple fact is that his ample excursions into poetry are of little interest per se to this writer and only rarely illuminates his philosophical stand. Although a competent psychobiographer might possibly find considerable raw material in the many poetic compositions that illuminate Solov'ëv's thought and personality, this avenue is

[24] For a complete definition of "religious philosophy," see Sutton. The Problematic Status. 2000: 538.

arguably best left to competent medical professionals. In any case, they again hardly fit into the scheme of rational argumentation.

There can be no question that religious concerns played a large role in Solov'ëv's formulations as well as in those of his predecessors and successors. One could conceivably argue that just as Kant's epistemology presupposed the veracity of Newtonian physics, so too did Solov'ëv's philosophical reflections presuppose the truth of Christianity. Notwithstanding Hume's pointed assaults on the certainty of many epistemic claims, Kant accepted modern Newtonian physics as an established fact and saw no need to argue specifically for it. In a similar fashion, Solov'ëv saw no need to argue specifically for the existence of God and for the basic tenets of the Christian faith. For him, they were as palpably true as the tenets of the scientific revolution were for Kant. During his adult years, Solov'ëv maintained a resolute conviction in the veracity of his religious beliefs, in the baseless nature of metaphysical skepticism and in a religious interpretation of world history. That from his viewpoint so many others within Europe shared his basic stance only solidified his position. However, Solov'ëv's solution to philosophical problems related to religious and metaphysical cognition bears little resemblance to what we find in either Kant or in the emergent European neo-Kantian traditions. Simply put, Solov'ëv located an untenable abstraction at the heart of transcendental idealism that, as we shall see, formed the focus of the major work from his early years.

Despite his obvious familiarity with the writings of Hegel, Schopenhauer and those of the latter's now largely forgotten disciple Eduard von Hartmann, there is no indication that Solov'ëv kept abreast of philosophical developments in Western Europe. Although he had a sufficient facility in reading German to prepare a highly competent Russian translation of Kant's *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, we would look in vain for even the slightest hint of a recognition of the contemporaneous neo-Kantian movement, which certainly was well underway during most of the period of Solov'ëv's philosophical creativity.[25] Although we are told he devoured philosophical texts already in his teen years, there is no clearly discernable indication that he had a more thorough grounding in the history of modern philosophy than what could be provided by survey textbooks. We would search in vain for evidence to lend credence to the secondary claim that he "possessed a wide knowledge of the development of western philosophy," if by "wide" we understand the in-depth knowledge expected of Western doctoral students.[26]

Whereas we can be rest assured that Solov'ëv had a quite reasonable competence in the French and English languages, his published works notably lack the scholarly apparatus that we normally associate with an intellectual of the first order. To his benefit (!),

[25] F. A. Lange's *History of Materialism* originally appeared in 1866 with several subsequent editions, thus well within Solov'ëv's lifetime. Additionally, a Russian translation appeared in 1881–1883. Hermann Cohen's works, *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung* and *Kants Begründung der Ethik*, which effectively launched the neo-Kantian movement, appeared in 1871 and 1877 respectively. Solov'ëv does not appear to have so much as noticed the publication of either or even the ballooning argument between Trendelenburg and Fischer that initiated Cohen's works.

[26] Copleston 1986: 212.

though, this may simply be a reflection of a certain laziness on his part rather than a reflection of any incompetence.[27] Even in his relatively late ethical opus, *The Justification of the Good*, he cites a German-language translation of Darwin's *The Descent of Man*, though Solov'ëv certainly knew English well enough to read Darwin in the original. In any case, there were already at least three Russian translations of it at the time, two under the editorship of the noted neurophysiologist I. M. Sechenov. In short, Solov'ëv simply did not go out of his way to insure scholarly accuracy of what he must have regarded as a secondary concern to the elaboration of his own views. As for French, he had a sufficient command of the language to write fluidly in it even though he requested others for whom it was a first language to edit as needed his writings in that language. What is inexcusable is the silence in the secondary literature to observe Solov'ëv's casual attitude towards scholarly standards.

Our estimation of Solov'ëv's thought need not be seriously diminished by our recognition of his disregard of now-accepted standards of punctiliousness. After all, Wittgenstein's acquaintance with the original texts that constitute the Western philosophical heritage was undoubtedly slight. From all indications, Solov'ëv's general knowledge of the history of philosophy must have been virtually encyclopedic compared to Wittgenstein's, and yet no one seriously challenges Wittgenstein's rank among the greatest twentieth century philosophers as a result.

My attempt, in effect, to sunder Solov'ëv's traditional philosophical concerns from his mysticism and even his religious philosophy in general, to "deconstruct" in van der Zweerde's terminology, is bound to raise eyebrows.[28] It should not and need not. It is not incumbent on the political philosopher to dwell at length on the intricacies of the empiricism of Locke and Mill when discussing their respective political philosophies, although in both cases the respective political theories were intimately connected with their overall philosophical positions. The former's *Two Treatises of Government* and the latter's *On Liberty* can be studied and valued as works in political philosophy without presupposing a detailed knowledge of, on the one hand, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* or, on the other, the *System of Logic*. Nevertheless, if we find Solov'ëv's excursions in epistemology, metaphysics and ethics severely flawed, have we then undermined his treatments of those other "higher" concerns? The present writer believes this is the case and that, as a consequence, those issues must be provided at a minimum with another foundation. Simply stated, his handling of those "higher" concerns rests on Solov'ëv's positions taken in dealing with the "lower-order" concerns, a definite and significant crack in which places the former in dire jeopardy.

---

[27] Sutton writes that Solov'ëv was self-taught in philosophy and theology and that he "had a prodigious capacity for learning and hard work." Sutton. Vladimir Solov'ëv. 2000: 4. It is this alleged capacity for hard work that I believe needs to be shown and that I question.

[28] van der Zweerde writes of at least three moves that must be made so that Solov'ëv's philosophical heritage can be appropriated and appreciated within the general philosophical culture: a de-nationalization of his philosophy, a de-russification of the perception of his thought and a de-christianization of his world-view. The present study is, in effect, an intended contribution along this path, albeit from a Western scholar. See Zweerde 2000: 41–42.

The volume before you, while in part itself constituting a study of a chapter in the history of Russian philosophy is also in part philosophical biography. Above all, my concern and aim throughout this study will be two-fold: (1) an analysis of Solov'ëv's philosophical positions and (2) an examination of the disputes in which Solov'ëv actively engaged. Not only are the disputes insufficiently known in the West, but their influence on Solov'ëv's thought and writings are also inadequately recognized. In short, Solov'ëv played a very active role in the intellectual and philosophical life of his time and country. To neglect these disputes, as too often happens in both Western and Russian treatments, is to underestimate the vibrant atmosphere of the Russian philosophical community, numerically small though it was, in the decades preceding the Bolshevik Revolution, a vibrancy that in the succeeding years was completely eradicated in the most brutal fashion. In doing so, I hope to retrieve something for the Western student from Russia's philosophical past, its adolescence, if you will, which like many adolescents exhibited great energy in a number of different directions, but in Russia's case, met an abrupt termination, we could even say an execution, by circumstances out of its control.

The plan of the present work is quite simple. Proceeding chronologically, we will examine each of Solov'ëv's early philosophical works, pausing when appropriate to look at an exchange of views between Solov'ëv and the disputing party or parties. Thus, we will examine sequentially Solov'ëv's first publications – and the reactions to them – most notably his *Crisis of Western Philosophy*, followed in succeeding chapters by his only comparatively recently published manuscript "Sophia," his "Principles of Integral Philosophy," the *Lectures on Divine Humanity* and lastly his major philosophical treatise the *Critique of Abstract Principles*. However, there will also be much said in terms of Solov'ëv's biography. Of few other distinguished philosophers can we more appropriately say that the events in his life shed light on his concerns and approach to them. Understandably, many may object to this claim, seeing it as purely wishful thinking and contentious. I make no claim for its falsifiability. Should anyone adamantly object out of fear of the interjection of a subjective, psychological element into the analyses to follow, maintaining that there is no place in philosophy for biography, it is my sincere belief that all of my criticisms of Solov'ëv's philosophical stances are immanently dictated in terms of the very approach he himself initiated and pursued. Yet, who would deny, for example, that knowing something about Wittgenstein's life makes the *Philosophical Investigations* that much more fascinating even though we do not take his biography into account when examining, say, the private-language argument?

Traditionally, at the end of an author's introductory comments expressions of thanks are in order to those who have assisted in one way or another in preparing the text that follows and in obtaining the research materials used. Even were this neither a tradition nor some Kantian duty to do so, I would want to express my appreciation for the invaluable resources offered foremost by the New York Public Library, the Rutgers University Library and the resources of numerous other university libraries through inter-library loans. A special word of thanks must be extended to the anonymous reviewers who patiently and carefully recognized omissions and flaws in the original manuscript. I hope I have answered many of their concerns to the best of

my ability while remaining faithful to my intentions and outlook. A word of thanks is certainly in order to all the many participants in the various on-line discussion groups that helped me at least to focus my perspective and clarify my thoughts regarding Solov'ëv and his works. I would like to thank in particular two individuals, Kristi Groberg of North Dakota State University and Evert van der Zweerde of Radboud University in Nijmegen for encouragement, comments and materials over the many years this work was coalescing. While they surely would not agree with all, perhaps even many, of the criticisms and opinions expressed in this study, I hope they are not embarrassed by this expression of thanks. I would also like to extend my deep appreciation to the staff of Springer for their generous encouragement and professionalism throughout the publication process, especially Ties Nijssen and Anita van der Linden-Rachmat. Finally but by no means least, a heartfelt thanks to my wife and children who with great forbearance allowed me to devote so much of my free time to the preparation of this work.

It should be noted that all dates are given according to the Julian calendar in effect in Russia in the nineteenth century, which lagged 12 days behind the Gregorian calendar in use in the West. The transliteration of Russian names into English always presents a quandary. The spelling of those names most familiar to readers have been retained: Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky. However, in the case of individuals less familiar to the English-speaking public but who have similar names to those great writers I have rendered their names in a manner consistent with the others, for example, S. A. Tolstaja. In those instances where I reference an English-language translation, I have given the author's name as it appears in the English. For example, Solov'ëv's nephew's name is given throughout as "Sergey Solovyov" in keeping with the spelling preferred by the translator of Solovyov's biography of his uncle. The one exception here is to the spelling of the name of the present volume's subject. For now, there is no consensus how it should be rendered: Soloviev, Solovyov, etc. For this reason and no other – other than habit – I have used Solov'ëv.

Chapter 1
A Voyage of Discovery

Unquestionably, Solov'ëv's public defense of his *magister*'s thesis in November 1874 ushered in a new era in Russian philosophy. Certainly, he himself viewed this early work in prophetic terms, i.e., as signaling the start of post-Western philosophy, which he already characterized at this time as "concrete thought." The sheer number of reviews it evoked – many of them hostile – together with the wide press coverage of the defense shows that Russian intellectual circles recognized the significance and provocative character of the thesis. In order to grasp both Solov'ëv's early work and its author's later intellectual trajectory, we need to understand the historical background of the thesis as well as the train of thought evinced therein. The first of the two parts to this chapter is largely a historical account of the intellectual path Solov'ëv took during his early years that culminated in his *magister*'s thesis, a veritable biography of *The Crisis of Western Philosophy*. The second, much lengthier part, presents a detailed analysis of Solov'ëv's treatment of the history of philosophy, culminating in a brief section dealing with his own systematic views to the degree that they can be gleaned at this time. We will see that besides a sizeable debt to his country's philosophical and religious traditions, Solov'ëv's first foray into philosophy rested heavily on his interpretation of the results of current German thought.

1.1 Genesis of *The Crisis*

In early June 1873 at the age of 20 years, Vladimir Solov'ëv completed the formal requirements for the basic undergraduate degree, the *kandidat*, from the liberal arts faculty of the University of Moscow. Despite his exceptional performance in secondary school, his years at the university were marked with indecision, a good measure of insouciance, and a decided lack of scholarly diligence. Having initially enrolled in 1869 in the liberal arts faculty, he switched while still in his first year of

T. Nemeth, *The Early Solov'ëv and His Quest for Metaphysics*, International Archives of the History of Ideas/Archives internationales d'histoire des idées 212,
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-01348-0_1,

study to the science faculty.[1] Regrettably, Solov'ëv never commented on the reason for this change, and consequently there is much room for speculation. Whatever the case, his devotion to his new scientific studies, on the whole, was less than exemplary, and his results were considerably lower than what we would expect, given his earlier academic record in secondary school. Of course, the possibility exists that his youthful enthusiasm for the sciences waned with the passage of time or that his increasing religious fervor may have averted him from the path towards a career in science, presumably biology, which in his day and place meant a naturalistic explanation of the world. Both possibilities, however, must surely sound quite disingenuous. Nevertheless, Solov'ëv did persevere – at least for a time. Although a great deal of uncertainty remains even today as to the specific grades he received during these years, there is no doubt that as the academic year 1872–1873 progressed, Solov'ëv, after "repeated failures with microscopes, plates and test tubes," became more and more discouraged, if he had not already given up all hope of succeeding.[2]

On 18 April 1873, Solov'ëv addressed to the rector of Moscow University a request to sit for final examinations not in the sciences, but in the liberal arts faculty. His academic hopes rested on taking advantage of a university statute that with authorization allowed the waiving of course requirements for a degree upon satisfactory performance on the respective final exams alone. Exactly when the idea of switching back to the liberal arts came to Solov'ëv is unclear. In any case, his request was granted, and during the course of the next month he took a total of 17 examinations, obtaining the highest grade possible in all but ancient history and Greek.

The final degree requirement, which Solov'ëv could not have circumvented, was the submission of a *kandidat*'s dissertation, comparable to what we would call today a senior thesis. Unfortunately, a copy of what he wrote has not survived nor even has definitive information as to the topic. Solov'ëv himself never mentioned what he offered to fulfill this requirement, and the official records reveal nothing other than the formal notation that the work was received and accepted! Had we a copy of the dissertation, even information as to its content or topic, we might have a clearer idea of Solov'ëv's plans for the immediate future as he conceived them at the time. In an early comment, Solov'ëv's nephew, Sergey, concluded that, based, as he later confessed, on what his father, Vladimir's younger brother, had told him, Vladimir's first published article, which appeared in November 1873, was originally submitted as the dissertation.[3] On the other hand, a long-time friend of Vladimir's, Leo Lopatin, who later taught philosophy at Moscow University, wrote: "If my memory is not mistaken, Solov'ëv expounded in a fairly detailed manner the metaphysical principles

[1] In his biography of his uncle, Sergey Solovyov wrote that already Vladimir's "main interest was, of course, philosophy." This seems highly unlikely, particularly in light of the swift change in his field of study. Solovyov 2000: 55.

[2] *Pis'ma*, vol. 3: 67. Already in a letter of 12 October 1871 to his cousin E. V. Romanova, and thus while in his *second* year of studies, Solov'ëv admonished her not to study the natural sciences. Certainly such a deprecation of one's chosen field of study would hardly be conducive to academic excellence. On the other hand, we cannot simply dismiss the possibility that the attitude may have been the *result*, rather than the cause, of his poor results.

[3] Solovyov 2000: 89.

of the later Schelling in his *kandidat*'s dissertation (for which he submitted a preliminary outline of *The Crisis*)."[4] Of course, it is possible that Solov'ëv did submit some sort of draft outline of *The Crisis* that has since been lost. It is also possible that he wrote an exposition of Schelling's later views. If, however, Lopatin is implying that such an exposition was subsequently incorporated in some manner into *The Crisis*, this is simply incorrect. As we shall see shortly, Solov'ëv accords Schelling scant attention in his finished book.

Whatever Solov'ëv's plans were in April–May 1873, there is no basis for doubting that at approximately this time he harbored hopes of pursuing a *magister*'s degree in philosophy. For shortly later in a letter dated 2 June 1873 to his friend Nikolai I. Kareev, he wrote of a surprising change in plans:

> I want to substitute a *magister*'s degree in theology for one in philosophy. To do this I will take the *kandidat*'s exam at the theological academy, which is equal to our *magister*'s. Then I will have to defend a thesis. All of this will take two years.[5]

Of course, in this letter Solov'ëv did not say when he had this change of heart to pursue theology. We can, however, with measured confidence conclude that at the end of his formal undergraduate career Solov'ëv intended to continue studies in philosophy. Thus, whatever his *kandidat*'s dissertation might have been it was philosophical rather than theological in character for the following reasons:

1. Based on Lopatin's testimony, Solov'ëv had begun an intense reading of the chief figures in modern philosophy when he was already 16 years of age. This reading most likely continued until at least the early months of 1873. Since he had to submit a sustained piece of writing in short order, a philosophical treatise would have come more readily and, therefore, more swiftly than one in theology.
2. Although his interest in religion and religious matters was rising dramatically at this time, his concerns in April–May, based admittedly on correspondence from several months earlier, were more of a philosophical than a theological nature.
3. During this period, Solov'ëv developed a particularly close relationship with Pamfil Jurkevich, who held the chair in philosophy at Moscow University. Surely the latter would have tried to influence, if not encourage, him in some manner to submit a paper dealing with the history of philosophy.[6]

---

[4] Lopatin 1913: 409f.

[5] *Pis'ma*, vol. 4: 147.

[6] The record is unclear as to what extent Solov'ëv attended Jurkevich's lectures. True, soon after his mentor's death in October 1874, Solov'ëv published a panegyric essay that *mentioned* Jurkevich's classroom presence, but this could have been surmised easily enough from the accounts of others or after attending a few classes at most. Solov'ëv's essay, confining itself to the ideas in Jurkevich's publications, makes no reference to philosophical digressions, departures or amplifications made in class. The few asides Solov'ëv gives in his article were drawn explicitly from personal conversations with his former teacher. I take these as considerations why we must be cautious in accepting Radlov's claim that Solov'ëv heard Jurkevich's lectures, if by that Radlov meant Solov'ëv regularly attended his philosophy classes. All accounts of Solov'ëv's undergraduate years corroborate a lack of enthusiasm for his studies. Moreover, since Radlov makes other factual errors concerning Solov'ëv's biography, there is no reason for us to think that he had any privileged information in this matter. For Solov'ëv's essay on Jurkevich, see PSS, vol. 1: 156–175. For Radlov's statement, see Radlov 1913: X.

On the basis of surviving letters to his cousin, E. V. Romanova, we can confidently conclude that during the subsequent summer months of 1873, Solov'ëv spent many of his days studying works from the history of philosophy. He made no secret of his new intentions, however, which made little sense to his privately religious though thoroughly secular father, a distinguished professor of history at the University. At a time when theological studies were almost exclusively for the sons of priests intent themselves on entering the priesthood, Vladimir's choice could seriously jeopardize any chance for a successful academic career. Even friends from his adolescent years found his decision most bizarre. Well aware of his views from a few years earlier, a period during which he espoused materialism and a religious skepticism, they must have regarded his new plan as a complete flip-flop, bordering on madness. Solov'ëv was aware of his friends' impressions. He wrote to his cousin in August: "I already arouse misunderstanding. Some consider me a nihilist, others a religious fanatic, and a third group simply a lunatic."[7] Nevertheless and most importantly, Solov'ëv now saw for himself a new, virtually messianic, role that would underlie and be embodied in his *magister*'s thesis:

> …the existing order of things (above all, the social and civil order, interpersonal relations, which determine all of human life), that this existing order is not as it *should* be, that it is based, not on reason and justice, but, rather, for the most part, on meaningless fortuity, blind force, egoism and forced submission.[8]

Since the existing order "is not as it *should* be," it can and must be changed. To effect this, Solov'ëv believed we must start by convincing people of the veracity of Christianity and not by a political revolution. Although it is far from clear exactly what Solov'ëv expected the world to be like when the masses accepted his vision of Christianity, it is clear that the present popular version is merely a pseudo-Christianity, a "simple semi-conscious faith" wrapped in an "irrational form" and "encumbered by all sorts of meaningless trash." What needs to be done is usher in the absolutely rational form of Christianity that is appropriate to its "eternal content." To achieve this goal, the new Christian philosopher must master both the sciences and philosophy as a whole. The apparent opposition of science and modern philosophy to religion has actually yielded the possibility of an Hegelian *Aufhebung*, in which the conflict between reason and religious belief will disappear and along with it what served as the obstacle preventing the universal acceptance of Christianity.

Presumably in connection with his goal to pursue theological studies, Solov'ëv, in late July or at the beginning of August, also conceived the idea of writing an article on the history of religion.[9] He believed he already had the assurance of the editor of the theological journal *Pravoslavnoe obozrenie* (*Orthodox Review*) for its publication therein. In a letter to his friend N. I. Kareev dated 6 August, Solov'ëv wrote that he could not turn his attention to an undisclosed review because "all my

[7] *Pis'ma*, vol. 3: 91.

[8] *Pis'ma*, vol. 3: 87.

[9] In his editorial note to the publication of "Mifologicheskij process…" in PSS, B. V. Mezhuev writes, "Solov'ëv definitely began work on the text at the end of July or first days of August." PSS, vol. 1: 255.