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Russia in Search of Modernity (Cycles of Russian Power)

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The Russians have always had a strong sense of the uniqueness of their historical destiny, social experience, and their state whose ways of governance are unlike any patterns familiar to humanity. In a certain sense, their instincts did not deceive them: the Russian state is not like any other state. Whether one should be proud of the fact or regret it is a matter for discussion, but the fact of the matter is beyond dispute, even more so, today.

It is only natural for Russian statehood, which developed in a specific cultural environment, to look somewhat peculiar: Russia does not resemble any European and, the more so, Asian models. The Russian context is undoubtedly unusual. The “alogicality of Russian power” is a consequence of the “alogicality of Russian culture” which emerged and developed under conditions containing little hope for a successful civilization to emerge. It was all the more surprising to see a huge Empire develop, which for a time kept half of the world on edge. It should not be so surprising for a culture which bore fruit on such barren soil to have unique features.

The prerequisites for the development of Russia’s statehood are therefore essentially different from anywhere else in Europe or Asia. In Europe, the state developed *in parallel with society*. In Asia, the state was *a substitute for a nonexistent society*. In Russia, it *complemented an underdeveloped society*. In Europe, the state developing alongside society has evolved from being *a class-state* via *a representative estate state* to *a bureaucracy state* in its various manifestations and eventually to *a nation-state*. In Russia, the statehood, which grew out of a semblance of society, evolved from *a patrimonial (votchina) state* (“a proto-state”) via *a zemsky state* (based on *boyars’* quasi-representative monarchy) to *a nobility state* and then to *an autocratic empire*. None of Russia’s state forms are fully analogous to Western or Oriental political practice.

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Russian Peasant Commune (*Obshchina*) As a Unique Foundation of Russian Statehood

The foundation of Russian statehood is a unique phenomenon without parallel in other cultures—the Russian peasant commune. It is unique in that it “got stuck in history.” What in other cultures was a transient thing, in Russia turned into the cornerstone of its civilization. There is a Russian saying that there is nothing more permanent than temporary solutions.

Social relations grow out of “natural” (patriarchal-tribal) relations, but to some extent, the former are the latter’s opposite and negation. The development of civilization necessarily involves displacing “the natural” with “the social.” In different cultures, this process occurs in different ways: as *displacement*, as *merger*, or as *augmentation*.

It is accepted that “natural” (patriarchal-tribal) relations were not displaced in Russia by social relations as fast and as fully as in Europe, and the former went on to influence the nature of social development for a long time (and, as it appears, to exert, to a greater or lesser degree, its influence today too). Yet, in Russia, the influence of “natural” (patriarchal-tribal) relations on the development of culture has not been as overwhelming as it has been in Asia, where social relations became imbedded in the existing patriarchal foundations rather than displacing them. Russia, therefore, never had an orderly system of social relations developed, capable of evolving entirely out of its own foundation, although the patriarchal order of Russian life was shattered over time. Freethinking in Russia has always combined paradoxically with a flagrant vestige of the patriarchal mentality.

The key social principle in Russia is not society, but *the peasant commune (obshchina)*. Many great scholars of the past noted its excessive influence on social and public life as the main peculiarity of Russia’s historical path, and they appear to be right.

This would seem to create an affinity between Russian and Oriental societies. But the peasant commune in Russia differs from the commune in the Ancient East, which provided for stability of the patriarchal way of life for thousands of years. The Russian *obshchina* is a “*neighbors’* commune,” a variant of the Slavic *zadruga* commune—an intermediate stage of social relations. Its stability varied depending upon the circumstances.

The peculiarity of the Slavic world, generally, and of Russia, specifically, does not appear to lie in the historical fact of the existence of the neighbors’ commune. All Europeans have gone through this stage in one way or another. The Slavic world is distinct in the unique longevity of this commune in that the formation of social relations “got stuck” for quite a long time at this transitional stage.

The Slavic commune is a sort of a product of the “half-decay” of natural relations. But in the same way as radioactive isotopes have a different half-life, “products of the half-decay of natural tribal relations” have different lifetimes. The Russian commune was particularly stable. It would constantly reproduce itself in its peculiar semipatriarchal, semisocial form, without shifting either way for centuries.

Russia is a country of “protracted social construction work.” The commune-based mode of life in Russia is an uncompleted system of social relations, a *sui generis* “protosociety,” where natural (traditional) forces and bonds no longer dominate overwhelmingly, whereas the social mechanisms have not yet got into full gear. “Protosociety’s” development markedly differs from society’s development. At the same time, “protosociety” is distinct from the Asian commune, where social relations gradually merge into natural relations inherited from ancestors instead of displacing the latter.

In Europe, “protosociety” turned out to be a moment in the history of development of social relations. Social relations between members of the neighbors’ commune were fairly quick in breaking up and displacing traditional, natural relations. The family, as an independent social unit, appeared quite early in the historic arena, leading to the emergence of private property and the state. However, this algorithm, as described by F. Engels, is a uniquely European way of forming a state and society. In Russia, it was quite different.

Russia is often viewed as an “Asian” society. But a closer look will reveal very significant distinctions. In Asia, the commune has always been a natural entity, part of nature. In Russia, it is a seminatural and semisocial entity. In Russia, it is a sort of “unfinished society,” a precursor of more developed social relations.

In the Russian commune, social and natural relations between its members are on a par, but competing with each other, instead of complementing each other, as one can see in the Asian commune. It is this peculiar half-and-half feature of relations within the Russian commune that is the root cause of the Russian schism. A single society could not have taken shape in the “commune-based” Russia; neither could appear the emancipated individual. Instead, one saw the emergence of innumerable little social islets, which gravitated toward cohesion, and which did not have enough time to evolve into a single organic whole.

Within the Russian commune, a member was already sufficiently “socialized,” had a partially autonomous individual will and at the same time was oppressed by tradition. “The social” and “the natural” paradoxically co-existed in the Russian soul, waging an eternal fight with each other without ever gaining a final victory.

“The Oriental” commune is immovable, resembling an inert gas. The commune in Russia is more like a radioactive isotope. Social life there would remind one of an infinite flow of alpha-decays, social “microexplosions” during which the commune would expel autonomous individuals from its nucleus along with its particles.

The stability of the peasant commune in Russia is a façade hiding an intensive process of individuation in social life, which brings it closer to the European institution of the commune. However, in Russia, unlike Europe, this process has never been consistent.

The Patrimonial (*Votchina*) State As the Initial Political Form of Life of the Russian Commune (*Obshchina*)

Having gone through its prehistory, the Russian state was born as the Muscovite Kingdom. Its first historical form was the “Patrimonial state”—a kind of

protostate which arose from *protosociety*, that is, the community of Russian communes.

The historical role of the Russian commune is well known. It is believed that, among other things, the stability of community relations and, at the same time their ambiguity and inconsistency had a decisive impact on the formation of Russian statehood. On the basis of the Russian commune there has emerged the phenomenon of the perpetually adolescent “*teenager state*,” which cannot mature even in old age.

The patrimonial state is hardly a state at all, but only its embryo; it is stuck somewhere between the epic (heroic) era and the class-state. However, each nation has an “embryonic period” when its foundations are being laid. But not every state has gone through all the subsequent evolution, remaining frozen in “an embryonic pose.”

“Immaturity” became the natural form of existence for the Russian state. In over a thousand years of its history, the Russian state has not severed the umbilical cord that connects it to archaic society. The blend, the innate lack of differentiation between society and the state in Russia, has been, to some extent, preserved to this day. The consequence of this is also a well-known quality of Russian power, that is, its inseparable bonds with property.

The patrimonial *protostate* did not possess the same independence in relation to society inherent in the European class-state. Yet there was more to it than the superficial resemblance to archaic Asian society. At the very least, Russia has always had one free man—the Czar. His personal emancipation from traditional relations became a harbinger of the future emancipation of the whole of Russia.

In Russia, the state emerges as a specific sociopublic entity. So I would define the “*protostate*” as a stabilization of an intermediate form of state formation, which already stood apart from society, but was not yet juxtaposed to it. It would be logical to assume that when the half-formed state appeared in Russia it would try as soon as possible to evolve into “the finished product.” That is, the “*protostate*” would first become a “normal” class-state (in accordance with the European standard), and would then go along the same path which Europe has already trodden.

However, in reality, this half-formed state began an independent historical evolution, paving the way to modern statehood. That way, due to a whole set of objective and subjective factors was, as we now know, much more difficult than the European way: the Russian state was literally squeezing its way up to its highest form through the “*thicket*” of historical circumstances.

This *independent, yet asynchronous and parallel to Europe*, historical development contains the secret of Russian statehood. Its evolution goes through the same stages as European countries. Even so, the way the essence of the state manifested itself at each of these stages betrayed the *immaturity* of the respective forms of Russian society.

The specific progress of Russia towards modern statehood is comparable to an initially weak child’s development, taking many years to catch up with the peers, and in adulthood, gain equivalent strengths, capabilities and opportunities

(not that this inevitably happens). At the same time, the prerequisites of development of statehood in Russia contain a key inherent contradiction which defined both the destiny of the Russian state and its face. This contradiction is between the unresolved archaic *unity* of the state and society and their ever growing *separation* from each other. The uniqueness of this situation is in that in its evolutionary process, the Russian state, like European states, is moving further and further away from society, while at the same time, remaining identical with society, like Asian states.

“Zemsky State” As a Russian Version of European Estate-Representative Monarchy

During the heyday of Muscovite Russia, the patrimonial state transformed into a *zemsky* state, where the sovereign exercises his powers with the participation of the *Zemsky Sobor* and the council of boyars. Yet the main feature distinguishing the *zemsky* form of government is a fairly developed military and civil bureaucracy (*prikazy*, *streltsy*, etc.), which, however, did not yet take the shape of a class and was controlled by patrimonial landed aristocracy. The rule of Tsar Ivan III represents the peak of this form of statehood.

The place of the “*zemsky* state” in the series of successive state forms of Russian power appears to correspond to a point between the class-state and the estate-representative monarchy in the “evolutionary chain” of the European statehood. The *zemsky* state resembles both Europe and Asia, being neither of the two.

From the outside, the Russian state, no doubt, looked like an Oriental despotic state. “Russia’s internal life,” Konstantin Kavelin wrote, “represented a rounded and complete whole. The Muscovite state was an Asian monarchy in the full sense of the word.”¹ It was a kingdom where the sovereign was the country’s *absolute master*. But closer scrutiny makes this appearance deceptive.

It would be relevant to quote Georg Hegel: “The Oriental World has as its inherent and distinctive principle the Substantial (the Prescriptive), in Morality. We have the first example of a subjugation of the mere arbitrary will, which is merged in this substantiality. Moral distinctions and requirements are expressed as Laws, but so that the subjective will is governed by these Laws as by an external force. Nothing subjective in the shape of disposition, Conscience, formal Freedom, is recognized. Justice is administered only on the basis of external morality, and Government exists only as the prerogative of compulsion... The Constitution generally is a Theocracy, and the Kingdom of God is to the same extent also a secular Kingdom as the secular Kingdom is also divine.”²

Russia is often described as a country which is European in form and Asian in essence. But it can equally be seen the other way around—Asian in form and European in essence. It depends upon the way one looks at it. Even a cursory look at the Russian history of the 15th—16th centuries from this perspective reveals a deep rift separating Russia from the Oriental world. In the former, one always discerns moral judgment, a subjective will with its inherent beliefs, con-

science and formal freedom. Russian statehood took its shape primarily within the Christian paradigm, albeit distorted by Asian prejudices.

The *zemsky* state only appears to be stable and immovable. It is a sleeping volcano of human passions. Under no circumstance could the *zemsky* state have existed for thousands of years, unchanged, like Oriental despotic governments, even without any outside interference. The flywheel of moral quest and individual assimilation of historical experience had long been set in motion. The *zemsky* state, therefore, was destined “to explode” sooner or later from internal tensions.

The internal vector of the evolution of the *zemsky* state was set by a gradual growth of individuation in Russian society, by the formation of individual self-awareness, by accumulation in all spheres of social life of autonomous elements contributing ever more subjectivity to political life. Yet, the process of individuation in Russia’s social life is far from straightforward.

- Firstly, it unfolded simultaneously on two planes. Since Russian society never evolved into a coherent system and represented a multitude of fairly isolated communes, individuation progressed both at the level of a specific commune (microenvironment) and at the level of the whole set of communes (macroenvironment).
- Secondly, individuation in Russia was *discrete* in character. This process was not even and smooth, as it was in Europe. Russia saw occasional discharges of “individual energy.” Throughout its history, there have been alternating periods of intensive and slow growth of “the subjective element.”
- Thirdly, Russian society tried to expel the individuated persons. “Independent agents” did not so much accumulate within Russian society, helping to transform it, as were squeezed outside it, forming “a parallel society” of their own. (This trait has been preserved to this day in a perverse form as emigration of the most industrious individuals settling in Europe).

Thus, whereas in Europe, individuation and personalization of social life led to a weakening of traditions, in Russia, traditional structures, by expelling “individualists,” became isolated, stale and even more aggressive.

- Fourthly, the process of individuation was one-sided. Its outcome was a semifinished product. Those Russians, who were to become building blocks for the new era, were uniquely *one-sided*. Having severed the umbilical cord linking them to archaic society, they never became complete persons. Active elements burst out of the communal way of Russian life like a shot from a gun, quickly and avidly assimilating a negative attitude toward traditional society, whose conventionalities stifled individual will, but those people failed to develop any self-regulation and self-organization skills.

When Russian society had accumulated too many “outcasts,” i.e., independently (though “one-sidedly”) thinking people, the “*zemsky* state” proved to be incapable of controlling their boundless energy. They continued to be expelled

through inertia, but they would not disappear, remaining within Russian society. This served to prepare a crisis of the “*zemsky* state.”

This is the way historian Sergey Solovyev described the situation: “Wide steppes... became a land of freedom for the Cossacks—people who were unwilling to earn their bread by the sweat of their brow—people who by their nature, by their abundance of physical energy, felt cooped up in town or village streets.”³ Were the authorities to display a hint of weakness, “free people” would shatter the state to the ground.

This rising tension was not visible for some time. More so, the government managed to use the Cossacks in its interests. Yet starting from the time of Ivan the Terrible the subjective principle in Russian history was making itself known. The revolution carried out by Ivan the Terrible is a major bifurcation point in Russian history. His tireless activity resulted in Russian power acquiring two prevailing traits surviving through the centuries. First, he laid the foundation of “*nomenklatura*,” i.e., started to turn bureaucracy into a special privileged order with rent rights. Second, he separated the power into “external” (institutional) and “internal (extrainstitutional). Both were born in the flames of *oprichnina* (a system of cruel reprisals against dissent.—*Ed.*). Ivan the Terrible thus undermined the very foundation of the “*zemsky* statehood,” although its edifice did not collapse until after his death.⁴

Artificial stability achieved by removing the “antigovernment” (too independent) elements from the center to the periphery could not last forever. Sergey Solovyev rightly notes: “An opposition was formed between the *zemsky* person who toiled and the Cossack who made merry, an opposition that, necessarily, was bound to cause a clash, a fight. This fight was at its highest in the early 17th century in the so-called Time of Troubles, when Cossacks, under impostors’ colors, came from their steppes to government-run regions and utterly devastated them: they were more ferocious to the *zemsky* folk than the Poles and Germans.”⁵

One evident outcome of the reforms of Ivan the Terrible was that nobility—Russian bureaucracy—finally established itself as another distinct land-owning class competing with patrimonial landed aristocracy (it does not matter that nobility was recruited for the most part from that same old aristocracy).

Now that the mass and strength of the Cossacks (the “independent elements” who had already left traditional society) grew to critical levels, the conflict between nobility and the old patrimonial aristocracy acted as a detonator of the Time of Troubles—one of the severest political crises in Russia’s history. Russia entered the Time of Troubles as a *zemsky* state and came out of it as a *nobility* state. The civil war did not eliminate the old aristocracy and the Cossacks, yet it undermined their strength forever. All lost in that war, yet the state lost least of all. The Russian state was becoming step-by-step a state of nobility, i.e., a state of *self-sufficient and self-contained bureaucracy* (which it sometimes appears to remain to this day).

The Nobility State As a State of Victorious Bureaucracy

The 17th century saw a rapid rise and fall of “the nobility state” in Russia. Located between the two great revolutions (of Ivan the Terrible and Peter the

Great), it became a connective tissue between the Muscovite Kingdom and the Russian Empire. The role and significance of “the nobility state” as a particular form in the evolution of Russian statehood has not yet been fully clarified.

Appearances in Russia are deceptive, as nowhere else. Russian nobility, “blue blood,” has actually little in common with European aristocracy, but it has a lot in common with European bureaucracy. Russian nobility is a bureaucracy elevated to the rank of aristocracy, a *sui generis* “secondary aristocracy” (hence, incidentally, “the secondary serfdom”). The nobility state is a kind of devolution back to “the class-state,” because in Russia, bureaucracy turned into a special privileged estate endowed with the right to own land and peasants. Yet, at the same time, it is a movement forward to a bureaucratic state in which power is exercised by a professional estate of administrators. Since nobility is an estate obliged to serve the state: he who does not serve, shall not eat.⁶

Russian nobility emerged in the bosom of the *zemsky* state, and *the nobility state* itself became a logical stage in the evolution of the forms of Russian statehood. But it did not last long, quickly giving way to the autocratic Empire. The nobility state got lost between the Kingdom and the Empire as something inessential. It was, nevertheless, a very important historical link, without which the overall logic of the development of Russian statehood cannot be understood. By the way, the same can be said about “the Soviet statehood.”⁷

The nobility state was a bureaucratic compromise between the conservative patriarchal commune and the unrestrained newly-born individuality. It emerged in response to the challenge of the new culture inconspicuously grown in the depths of the dormant kingdom. On the one hand, Russia saw the emergence of individualistic culture. True, it was one-sided and deformed. In lieu of full-fledged self-awareness, Russian people had a vague sense of the need for the latter. To cover their “naked” mind, they had “to try on” foreign self-consciousness. The source of “borrowing” both now and then was the same—Europe (searching for self-awareness in Asia is a waste of time). Europeanism was for quite a long time the historically inevitable and solely possible form of existence of the Russian individual consciousness. “Europeanism” and dependence on European culture has been, for many centuries, its “*idée fixe*.”

On the other hand, Russia saw a conspicuous decline of the peasant commune (*obshchina*), “the foundation of the Russian civilization.” It was gradually losing the role of the custodian of traditions and the bearer of the moral principles. As the most active elements were leaving the peasant commune (primarily, through “the exodus” to the Cossacks), the latter was losing vitality. But the peasant commune did not vanish in the thin air of history, as was the case in Europe, but continued its conservative existence through inertia. The peasant commune at the time was not so much a social phenomenon, but rather a social phantom, a form that lost its substance.

The subsequent centuries gave birth to a myth of resilience and beneficial power of the Russian peasant commune as a unique phenomenon in world history. Virtually the entire Russian historiography has been based on either maintaining the myth or challenging it. One has to conclude, unfortunately, not only

that there has been nothing unique in the Russian peasant commune, except that its dissolution dragged out for many centuries (almost all developed European nations “leapt through” this stage of development), but also that in Russia this “unique social unit” fairly quickly exhausted its potential.

By the time of the 16th century, Russian society faced a most complicated dilemma: the natural regulator of social life (the commune) was no longer working, and the social regulator, whose basis is the individual’s developed self-consciousness, was not working yet. This created a cultural vacuum. Traditional culture was already unable to ensure a full-fledged development of Russian society, totally devoid of its “energy source,” while the nascent individualistic culture was not yet capable of that, being one-sided and irrational.

A vacuum in such cases is to be filled by a third force. In Russia, such a “third force” was the state. Therefore, the reaction to the danger of a cultural split was *absorption by the Russian state of the peasant commune, and with the latter—of the entire society*. The state soon put the weakened commune to use: it adapted this form that had lost its substance, but which continued to exist through inertia—for the needs of the state. The *land commune* was inconspicuously degenerating into an *administrative* commune. “It is impossible for the state to deal directly with each property taxpayer separately,” Konstantin Kavelin wrote, “and it entrusted this to communes, conferring upon them the oversight of each of their members.”⁸

The commune gradually turned, from the basis of traditional society, into a primary unit of the Russian state being reconstituted, into the latter’s main “financial-administrative body.” (It is this transformation that forms the basis of the so-called secondary serfdom. This “etatization” serves to explain the subsequent unique longevity of the Russian commune). “The archaic” was thus not removed, but made the basis of the new statehood. Like in nature, the *socium*, during its evolution, adapts for its needs the material which is most easily available and is near at hand. In Russia, the evolution of Russian statehood had “at hand” the remnants of the neighbors’ commune rapidly losing its former significance. It was those debris that were used as building blocks of history.

Thus, Russia saw an inconspicuous transformation of “a social-public entity,” the former *zemsky* state, into “a public-social entity,” the eventual form acquired by “the nobility state.” The country also saw a curious change in the exterior image of the Russian state: what used to appear as Asian outside and European inside, now came to appear European outside and Asian inside.

Having absorbed the peasant commune, the state at last had at its disposal what it had lacked for development for so long—a *resource* which allowed the professional state apparatus, i.e., *the bureaucracy*, to establish itself as a separate stratum. Handing out land became an in-kind form of payment to civil and military officials in a state which had a chronic shortage of cash. As in Europe, the emergence of bureaucracy in Russia was a qualitative leap in state up building. However, Russian bureaucracy proved to be a peculiar phenomenon.

In Europe, bureaucracy emerged as a self-reliant entity, “side by side” with the class-state. European bureaucracy is just a *distinct* class in society, having

equivalent relations with all the corporations in the making of the society at large. In Russia, bureaucracy is a *distinct* class that was assigned properties of a *regular* class. Nobility aristocracy emerges in a *transformed* (*verwandelt*) form of a new landed aristocracy. In other words, being essentially a *distinct* social class having a specific status relative to all the other estates and society at large, the nobility bureaucracy, on the surface of it, appeared as a regular land owning class, part of landed aristocracy. But the aristocraticism of Russian nobility was deceptive, obscuring for some time its bureaucratic traits.⁹

Initially, the absorption by the state of the Russian peasant commune and the use of the latter as the resource base for the existence of nobility aristocracy appeared to have strengthened the state and to have allowed it, without much ado, to come out of the disastrous crisis of the Time of Troubles. The state not only did not disappear amidst the other corporations, but it very quickly turned into the only real corporation existing in Russia.

That did not last long, though. Stability turned out to be illusory, because the contradictions which hitherto had been external to the state, now became part of its internal life. The state absorbed society with all of its problems, and very soon, those problems became the state's own problems. Social conflicts now began to play out as conflicts between bureaucratic parties within government. All this led to a dramatic weakening of the state that appeared to have just overcome all the difficulties brought about by its split. Before it had time to establish itself, the nobility-state rapidly came to its end.

Autocratic Empire As a Leap into Modern Times

The bureaucracy-state in Europe was embodied in absolute monarchy. It was a strong police state having a powerful bureaucratic apparatus and claiming full control over society. In Russia, on the contrary, the bureaucracy-state in its initial form of nobility state proved to be very weak, unable to build its own "power vertical," let alone control society. The institutions of the state were rickety, the power apparatus was cumbersome and inefficient, and the overall governance system was tangled and confusing. Therefore, this period in the development of the Russian statehood was underestimated and was not often seen as a distinct stage spanning the interval between the first and second Time of Troubles.

Hardly had the nobility state become stabilized after the trials of the Time of Troubles when it became clear that it had exhausted itself. There was a rapid cultural change occurring in society, and the forms of government were behind that change. The Russians came out of the Time of Troubles as people of a different cultural formation. The newly-formed bureaucracy-state was no longer able to perform its functions in this novel cultural environment.

A similar overall picture was observed in Europe, generally, during the era of the crisis of absolutism. The new bourgeois milieu, individualistic in its nature, rejected—through revolution—the old absolutism with its self-contained bureaucracy and created in its place a new state where that same bureaucracy was

put under society's control. The old time's bureaucracy was thus replaced by the bureaucracy of the Modern Times.

Instead of individualistic bourgeois culture, in the period prior to Peter's reforms, Russia saw the emergence of a *semiindividualistic (intermediate)* culture, which was figuratively described by S. Solovyev in the following way: "Two circumstances had a harmful effect on the civil development of the old Russian person: lack of education, which let him out to get involved in social activity being a child, and a long family guardianship keeping him in the status of a minor, a guardianship, which was necessary, though, because, firstly, he was a minor, indeed, and, secondly, because society could not provide him with moral guidance. But, it is easy to understand that a long guardianship, first and foremost, made him timid in the face of power, which did not, though, exclude childish self-will and petty tyranny."¹⁰

The Russian man of the late 17th century was equally ungovernable, lacking emotional self-control but, at the same time, lacking in initiative and independence. His self-consciousness was embryonic. Having escaped from the pressure of tradition, he still needed moral guidance. But it was not to be obtained either in the family or in the commune. This "semifinished product" could hardly undertake the accomplishment of the difficult mission of organizing control over bureaucracy. He himself needed guidance, therefore, the processes in Russia went in the opposite direction to the European way.

It was the state that assumed guardianship of the "teenager society." Yet, the old nobility state was incapable of any paternalism. Nobility was not so much "a class in itself," as "a class for itself," which prevented it from becoming "a class for the others." To be able to perform a paternalistic role, the state itself needed to be transformed, which did not take long to happen.

Thus, the contradiction which revealed itself in Russian society at the turn of the 18th century differed essentially from the contradiction which manifested itself in Europe a little earlier. In Europe, the strong, ubiquitous bureaucracy-state found itself in conflict with the developed, self-guided and freedom-seeking individual. Whereas in Russia, the weak, slow-moving state entangled in prejudice proved to be unable to take on the role of a moral guardian for the "semiformed," dependent individual who needed guidance. In Europe, the crisis of the state was due to an excess strength of bureaucracy, whereas in Russia, there was its "deficit."¹¹

The ways of resolving those contradictions differed accordingly. In Europe, the bureaucratic monster collapsed under pressure from social movements. In Russia, it was the *monarch* who became the source of transformation, having the most "advanced" groups of the nobility bureaucracy to rely upon. The Russian autocrat became society's consolidated representative in the affairs of the state. He was one in two hypostases: as the sovereign, a real historic figure, on the one hand, and as the embodiment of the "idea of popular government," the bearer of people's sovereignty, on the other. This duality contains the mystery and mystique of Russian autocracy. The ruler is the incarnation of the idea of sublime power as such. Overall, Russian autocracy can be said to be "representative democracy" of sorts, in which the people have a sole representative—the Tsar.

Thus, the idea of power in Russia was severed from power itself, mystified and identified with the supreme ruler. Power in Russia was thus accorded the religious value that law acquired in Europe over time. It is thanks to this design that Russia was able to come out of the crisis, having succeeded in combining “a weakness” with “a weakness,” which produced a strength—the Empire of a new type. In Europe, the revolution from below aimed to subordinate bureaucracy to society, whereas in Russia, the revolution from above came to subordinate bureaucracy to the Tsar, who was then objectified as an independent center of power. In Russia, the Tsar was turning into a “surrogate” nation, the nation’s mediator.

As it were, Russia made a giant leap forward in the evolution of her statehood: the *autocratic Empire* created by Peter I was nothing but a modified (*verwandelt*) form of the European *bureaucracy-state* of the Modern Times.

Russian autocracy was riddled with internal contradictions. Progress and education polarized its society, once again revealing the duality of Russian culture. On one pole, there was a surplus of unrestrained individual energy, devoid of responsibility: a great many people appeared who felt constrained by the established way of life. On the other pole, there was the entrenched, albeit withering commune, which succeeded in expelling almost all of its industrious members and in making passivity and lack of initiative a dominant psychological type (which, apparently, was the only type acceptable for them). Depression was its reactive state, the effect of the trauma inflicted by the “individual’s aggression.” It was this that centuries later appeared to have prevented implementation of Pyotr Stolypin’s plans. By that time, there was nothing to extract from the commune, everything had flowed away long before.

Thus, by the end of the 17th century, Russia had a dual—*active-passive, aggressive-servile*—culture, i.e., a culture that could be described as something “between anarchic rebellion and slave habit.” On the surface, this heterogeneous culture looked like a mixture of European and traditionalist principles. In reality, it was neither truly European, nor genuinely traditionalist. Both were mimicry, two modified forms (hypostases) of a single culture.

In that cultural milieu, the state made up for the shortage of individual energy in some and restrained its surplus in others—a truly fatherly, paternalistic task. In this way, Russian autocracy managed to combine the traits of the state of Louis and the state of Napoleon, being neither in reality. The idea of autocracy is a peculiar merger of the principle of the autocrat’s absolute and unlimited prerogatives and the principle of responsibility of the rulers to the people.

The revolution in Europe destroyed the old bureaucracy in order to put new bureaucracy in its place. In the course of the “inverse revolution” in Russia, Peter I reorganized the old bureaucracy, i.e., nobility, making it perform new tasks.

The duality, characteristic of Russian nobility (as a bureaucratic class and a landowning class), was embodied in a concentrated way in the Empire created by Peter I. Autocratic Russia, which, by its nature, was a bureaucracy-state of the Modern Times, appeared in the modified form of a class-state, a state of medieval landed aristocracy. This peculiar combination of traits contributed to both the strength and the weakness of the Russian Empire.

Having quite modern bureaucracy, as a distinct privileged class, imparted a unique stability to the autocratic state, enabling it to hover above society for a long time and exercise “guardian” functions (police functions, according to Aleksandr Lappo-Danilevsky) on a scale unthinkable for the European bureaucracy-state.¹² The Russian Empire anticipated the future totalitarian regimes of the 20th century. Having seemingly incompatible principles mixed in the foundation of autocratic statehood brought about a relatively viable state organism. However, being strong like a mule, this state, like a mule, turned out to be infertile—in a historical sense.

Unlike European bureaucracy-state transformed by the bourgeois revolution, Russian autocracy *would not lend itself to rationalization*. It would only borrow some rationalist ideas which in some cases could enhance performance of its complicated functions, but overall, it continued to be an irrational phenomenon, and therefore, it was unable to move to a higher stage of development in a logical and smooth way, without revolutionary leaps, and become a nation-state.

Since bureaucracy in Russia never took the shape of a *distinct* class in its pure form, but operated in a modified form as a landowning class, the contradiction between bureaucracy and society could not become *universal* within an autocratic Empire. This contradiction between bureaucracy and society also operates in the modified form of a particular, class contradiction between nobility as a landowning class and the other social classes.

Bourgeois bureaucracy-state is rationalized and transformed into a nation-state by means of Constitutionalism. Elements of Constitutionalism (i.e., rationalization of the life of the state) will emerge over time in Russia as well. But Russian Constitutionalism was aiming not so much at mastery over the state, as at its negation. And it is quite explicable, since the state continued to be a private corporation.

However, the main thing was that one part of Russian society developed constitutional ideas, and its other part, the overwhelming majority of the population, did not support this development, and did not strive for self-restraint of individual arbitrariness on the basis of recognition of the law. The paradox was that each step forward in rationalizing Russian statehood, resulting from continuous and increasing pressure on the part of the more “advanced” active minority, led to rising entropy and greater arbitrariness on the part of the passive majority.

Soviet Power As a Form of Transition toward a State of Modernity

Autocracy, which was a guarantor of stability during two centuries, turned out to be programmed for self-destruction around the mid-19th century. Until that time, Europe and Russia had developed along parallel paths. In Europe, the class-state transformed into a representative estate monarchy, which in its turn transformed into a bureaucratic absolutism replaced through the revolution by the bureaucracy-state of the Modern Age, which over time became the nation-state. In Russia, during the same stretch of history, the princes’ *votchina* was

replaced by the *zemsky* kingdom out of which grew the nobility bureaucratic state eventually absorbed by the autocratic Empire.

However, at that time, the Euclidean political geometry ends, and Nikolay Lobachevsky's geometry begins. The parallel lines of European and Russian statehood temporarily diverge. Fyodor Tyutchev writes in a letter to Pyotr Vyazemsky in March 1848: "What makes our situation very uncomfortable is that we have to call *Europe* what should not have any other name but its own: *Civilization*. This is the source of our endless misconceptions and inevitable confusions. This is what distorts our conceptions. In fact, I am getting increasingly convinced that all that *peaceful imitation* of Europe could do and give us—all of this we have received. Yet, in fact, it is not at all much. It did not break the ice, it only covered it with a layer of moss which imitates vegetation very well."¹³

Peaceful, "natural" transformation of autocracy into a nation-state was impossible because the bureaucracy-state in its pure form never emerged in Russia. This became an insurmountable barrier in the way of further evolution of Russian statehood. An additional link was to emerge between autocracy and modern nation-state—some intermediate state entity without analogues in European experience (where it was not needed).

The historic mission of this "intermediate" statehood, a buffer between the Empire and the nation-state, was the establishment of bureaucracy as a special class having distinct relations with all the other classes in society, and not covering itself with any deceptive status. The opposition between bureaucracy and society was to become, out of a particular problem, a universal problem, thereby creating prerequisites for the rationalization (known as Constitutionalism), which turns a bureaucratic state into a nation-state.

This *distinctive form of statehood* emerged on the remains of the Russian Empire as a result of the collapse of autocracy that lost its mechanical stability due to its inherent contradictions. Despite its ideological appearance, the "*Communist (Soviet) state*" was a necessary and logically justified link in the evolution of Russian statehood.

Now that the Communist state in Russia has become history, pessimists and optimists are divided in a peculiar way. Optimists speak of the birth of a Russian state, whereas pessimists—of the death of Russian statehood. For the former, history started in August 1991. For the latter, it ended in October 1917. Between October 1917 and August 1991, there is an *entity*, i.e., that very Communist or Soviet state, equally unpleasant for both optimists and pessimists (for the former, as an eerie prologue, for the latter—as an abominable epilogue).

In reality, the Russian state did not begin in August 1991, neither did Russian statehood end in October 1917. The Russian state is the outcome of the evolution of Russian statehood. The Communist (Soviet) state is a necessary link in this process. The roots of the Russian state are hidden deep in imperial and preimperial epochs, and today's state is the tree top grown out of the Muscovite Kingdom and the Petrine Empire. The so-called totalitarian state was but a trunk connecting the roots and the tree top.

NOTES

- 1 K. Kavelin, *Our Mental System. Articles on the Philosophy of Russian History and Culture*, Moscow, 1989, p. 229 (in Russian).
- 2 G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, London—New York, 1900, pp. 111-112.
- 3 S. Solovyev, *Readings and Stories on Russia's History*, Moscow, 1989, p. 136 (in Russian).
- 4 One can see in the “experiments” of Ivan the Terrible, like in an embryo, all future traits of Russian power (the separation of power into “external” and “internal,” establishment of bureaucracy as autonomous “ruling” class, etc.). Ivan the Terrible laid “theoretical foundations” to autocracy, Peter the Great put this idea into practice.
- 5 S. Solovyev, op. cit., p. 436.
- 6 Russia once again vividly demonstrated its ability to move forward stepping backwards. In today’s terms it could be called “archaic modernization.”
- 7 The Nobility state lasted for slightly less than a hundred years (from the end of the Time of Troubles to Petrine Empire), i.e., approximately for as long as “Soviet power” three centuries later.
- 8 K. Kavelin, op. cit., p. 229.
- 9 Nobility is a forerunner of the future Soviet *nomenklatura*. With all their distinctions, they have a lot in common—both nobility and *nomenklatura* were the privileged estates.
- 10 S. Solovyev, op. cit., pp. 346-47.
- 11 Russia seemed to be doomed. Combining a weak society with a weak government cannot produce anything strong. As it turned out, it can.
- 12 A. Lappo-Danilevsky, “The idea of the state and key moments of its development in Russia from the Time of Troubles to the epoch of reforms,” *Politicheskiye issledovaniya (POLIS)*, 1994, No. 1, pp. 182-183.
- 13 F. Tyutchev, *Poems. Letters*, Moscow, 1986, p.320 (in Russian).

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