

Peter Chaadaev

*Between the Love of Fatherland
and the Love of Truth*

EDITED BY

Artur Mrówczyński-Van Allen,
Teresa Obolevitch,
and Paweł Rojek

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PETER CHAADAEV
Between the Love of Fatherland and the Love of Truth

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Contents

Contributors | vii

Introduction: The Critique of Adamic Reason: Peter Chaadaev and the Beginning of the Russian Religious Philosophy—Artur Mrówczyński-Van Allen, Teresa Obolevitch, Paweł Rojek | ix

Part I: Ideas

- 1 *Peter Chaadaev: Prolegomena to the Philosophy of Russia as a Peripheral Empire*—Andrzej Walicki | 3
- 2 *The Lessons of History in Chaadaev's Reflections*—Boris Tarasov | 16
- 3 *From Chaadaev to Patriarch Kirill: The Russian Orthodox Counterdiscourse*—Artur Mrówczyński-Van Allen | 40
- 4 *"The Madman" Appeals to Faith and Reason: On the Relationship between Fides and Ratio in the Oeuvres of Peter Chaadaev*—Teresa Obolevitch | 55
- 5 *Peter Chaadaev's Ideas on the Unity of Nations and the Crisis of Post-National Europe*—Olga Tabatadze | 73

- 6 *Individual and "Supra-Individual" in Chaadaev's Philosophical Letters*—Daniela Steila | 83

Part II: Contexts

- 7 *Some Reflections upon Russian Literary Prose and the Chaadaev/Pushkin/Custine/Mickiewicz Node*—Bernard Marchadier | 101
- 8 *Peter Chaadaev and St. Innocent of Kherson: The New Contours of Tradition*—Fr. Pavel Khondzinskiy | 116
- 9 *Chaadaev and Tyutchev: History, System, and Chaos*—Atsushi Sakaniwa | 127
- 10 *On Some Features of Dissident Movement in Russia: The Sample of Peter Chaadaev*—Andrew Schumann | 137

Part III: Influences

- 11 *Peter Chaadaev: The Founding Myth of Russian Philosophy*—Janusz Dobieszewski | 151
- 12 *Peter Chaadaev on the Religious Basis of the Russian History Vector*—Yuriy Ivonin, Olga Ivonina | 166
- 13 *The Problem of Personality in the Philosophy of Peter Chaadaev and Russian Theological Personalism*—Konstantin Antonov | 180
- 14 *Peter Chaadaev as the Founder of the Geographic Deterministic School of Russian Historiosophy*—Grigory Olekh | 191

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INTRODUCTION

The Critique of Adamic Reason

*Peter Chaadaev and the Beginning of the
Russian Religious Philosophy*¹

ARTUR MRÓWCZYŃSKI-VAN ALLEN

TERESA OBOLEVITCH

PAWEŁ ROJEK

Peter Chaadaev (1794–1856) is rightfully considered one of the forerunners of modern Russian philosophy. In order to approach this impressive figure and contextualize him in reference to the subsequent tradition of Russian religious philosophy which he played such a crucial role in generating, it is well to approach him from a concrete scene in his life. Chaadaev spent three years in Western Europe visiting a few countries and meeting various people. In 1825 he became personally acquainted with Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, with whom he continued to correspond. When he returned to Russia in 1826, he continued with his studies. Chaadaev was one of the first in Russia to read Hegel. At that time, he also carefully studied Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and it is significant that, upon finishing it, Chaadaev crossed out the title on the cover and wrote beneath it: *Apologete adamitischer Vernunft—An Apology for Adamic Reason*.²

1. This publication was generously supported by a grant from the National Science Center, Poland, No. 2014/15/B/HS1/01620.

2. Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, 49. For Chaadaev's complicated relationships with Kant, see Zeldin, "Chaadaev's Quarrel with Kant" and "Influence of Kant on Chaadaev."

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Individual and "Supra-Individual" in Chaadaev's *Philosophical Letters*¹

DANIELA STEILA

The polarity between the universal and the particular, between the individual and the supra-individual, between the singular and the collective, has been widely considered as a peculiar character of Russian philosophical thought. For example, if we look in the history of Russian thought, the classical scheme elaborated by the Slavophiles appears particularly compelling. According to it, the opposition between Western and Russian cultures consisted exactly in a different attitude toward separation and integrity, individual and community. As Ivan Kireyevsky famously wrote:

In the West we find a dichotomy of the spirit, a dichotomy of thought, a dichotomy of learning, a dichotomy of the state, a dichotomy of estates, a dichotomy of society, a dichotomy of familial rights and duties, a dichotomy of morals and emotions, a dichotomy of the sum total and of all separate aspects of human being, both social and individual. We find in Russia, in contrast, a predominant striving for wholeness of being, both external and inner, social and individual, intellectual and workaday, artificial and moral.²

On the opposite side, Westernizers generally maintained the rights of individual reason and a person's ethical autonomy. Belinsky, for instance, was

1. This essay is a part of a wider research project on individual subjectivity and the collective in Russian thought in nineteenth and twentieth century, carried on during a visiting fellowship at the Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki, September 2015.

2. Kireyevsky, "On the Nature of European Culture," 229.

ready to give up the chance to be "on top of the stairs of development," if he could not receive a full account of "all the victims of the circumstances of life and history, all the victims of casualties, superstition, Inquisition, Philipp II etc. etc."³ Although it would be a simplification to interpret the opposition between the Slavophiles and Westernizers in terms of super-individual versus individual perspectives, the theme as such has had a major role within their discussions. Chaadaev, who is usually found in the general surveys of the history of Russian thought in the chapter before the outburst of the contrast between Slavophiles and Westernizers, and who has somehow anticipated characters from both these currents of thought, had some very original views on the relationship between individual and super-individual.

In contrast to the philosophers of the Enlightenment, Chaadaev criticizes the idea of the human being as a free and autonomous individual. According to him, the human being is actually inclined to subordinate himself, both in nature and society, to the physical order and to the moral one. As Andrzej Walicki summarized:

His true inclination is to subordinate himself, being is hierarchical in structure and the natural order is based on *dependence*. Human actions are directed from outside by a force transcending the individual, and the power of man's reason is in direct proportion to his obedience, submissiveness, and docility. The individual is nothing without society; his consciousness and knowledge flow from a social, supra-individual source. The mind of the individual is anchored in the universal mind and draws its nourishment from it.⁴

The Role of the Individual in the Structure of Being

First of all, let us briefly discuss Chaadaev's views on the individual and his role within the structure of being. In his *Philosophical Letters*, Chaadaev traced a general hierarchy of being, at the basis of which is nature. Chaadaev considers the world as consisting of two realms: the physical realm of nature and the mental realm of morality and intellect. Both are created by God and guided by Providence. In the physical realm, Providence appears as the law of gravitation, which acts in terms of centripetal and centrifugal forces, following an initial divine impulse. In the moral realm, mental events also

3. Belinsky to Vasilii Botkin, 30 December 1840 (22 January 1841), Belinskiy, "Pis'ma 1841," 171.

4. Walicki, *Flow of Ideas*, 148.

descend from the initial impulse of ideas that were impressed by God on the mind of the first man, and were therefore transmitted from generation to generation through traditions and social intercourse. In the moral realm, the two forces that are simultaneously combined in the action are "the one force which we are aware of, our *free choice*, our will, the other, which dominates us without our knowing it, the action of an *exterior force* upon our being."⁵ In both realms the aim of the development is a wider unification. In the "Fifth Letter," Chaadaev explains:

Just as bodily collision in nature serves to continue this first thrust, imparted to matter, intellectual collision likewise continues spiritual motion; just as in nature everything is linked with all that goes before it and follows it, so each individual human and each human thought are linked with all human beings and with all human thoughts, those which precede and those which follow; and, since nature is one, so, according to the picturesque expression of Pascal, also the whole *succession of men is one man, who always exists*, and each one of us participates directly in the intellectual work which is being completed throughout the centuries. Finally, just as a certain plastic and perpetual work of the material elements or atoms, the generation of physical beings, constitutes material nature, so also then a similar work of intellectual elements or ideas, the generation of spirits, constitutes spiritual nature; and just as I conceive of all tangible matter as one whole, then I must also conceive of the succession of intelligences as a single and sole intelligence.⁶

From such a perspective, individual consciousness has to acknowledge its submission to the external action of tradition and history, inasmuch as the body is submitted to the laws of the natural world. "If we were deprived of contact with other intelligent beings, we would eat grass instead of speculating on our nature,"⁷ Chaadaev writes. As a consequence, the thoughts of a single human being must be identified with the thought of the whole human species: "As in the rest of the created world, so in the intellectual world nothing can be understood as perfectly isolated, as if it were self-sufficient."⁸ Any idea, any thought is meant to be communicated to other people, to combine with other thoughts, to become a "common good" of humankind. Chaadaev explains:

5. Chaadaev, "Philosophical Letters," 53.

6. *Ibid.*, 60-61.

7. *Ibid.*, 64.

8. *Ibid.*

A thousand of invisible ties unite the thoughts of one reasonable being with those of another; our most intimate thoughts discover every means possible for reproducing themselves outside; when they are disseminated, when they cross on another, they fuse together, they unite, they pass from one spirit to another, they sow, they fertilize, they engender universal reason.⁹

Chaadaev asks himself: "Is there anything more absurd than the supposition that each human individual begins his species anew, like the beast?"¹⁰ These views have important consequences on the philosophy of history, as we will see in the following pages. As for the hierarchical structure of being, it can be said that, in Chaadaev's view, the moral world of individual consciousness is placed above nature, and it only exists as such thanks to a common space that depends on God, which is the supreme principle of the oneness of the universe.¹¹ God's speech creates human reason, and his words keep working within history through human thoughts and traditions:

On the day when man was created God spoke with him, and man heard and understood him: this is the true genesis of human reason; psychology will never find a more profound explanation. Later, he partially lost the ability to hear the voice of God; this was a natural consequence of the gift of unlimited liberty which he had obtained. But he did not lose his recollections of God's first words which resounded in his ear. Then this same word from God, addressed to the first man and transmitted from generation to generation, strikes the child in the crib and introduces him into the intellectual world and really makes him into a thinking being. The same method which God used in order to create man from nothing, He utilizes today in order to create every new thinking being. It is always God who speaks to man through the intermediary of his fellow men.¹²

This view of the individual as a specific part of the hierarchical structure of being has many important implications within epistemology, ethics and philosophy of history.

9. *Ibid.*, 61.

10. *Ibid.*, 63.

11. Cf. Walicki, *Flow of Ideas*, 149.

12. Chaadaev, "Philosophical Letters," 63.

Epistemology

According to Chaadaev, our thinking and our knowledge depend on God. But, after Adam's transgression, human reason has been damaged. Chaadaev therefore distinguishes two kinds of reason. First comes the primordial reason that was given to Adam by God; it is objective and possesses a true knowledge of reality, since it derives directly from God and comprises his original words to his creatures. This "truly pure" reason was weakened by the human Fall, and thus reason became individual, i.e., limited by time and place, by one's own experience and character, different in everyone, and divisive among human beings.¹³ Without primordial reason, humans could not achieve a common world, neither physical, nor moral. Knowledge can be achieved only through tradition, revelation, social intercourse, and the ideas of certain enlightened persons or nations. Human, "artificial" reason can be successful if it is obedient, passive to the superindividual contents and inspirations, whereas it falls into either intellectual or moral error every time it acts independently, according to its own free will. In Chaadaev's words: "the real principle of our intellectual power is in reality nothing more than a kind of *logical abnegation*, identical with moral abnegation and originating from the very same law."¹⁴ According to Chaadaev, human being can be rescued from the Fall not through individualistic self-perfection and asceticism, but only through the sphere of super-individual consciousness. In the "Seventh Letter," it can be read that "man's whole aim on earth consists in annihilating his personal existence and substituting a completely social or impersonal one for it."¹⁵ Walicki observes that "Chaadaev's emphasis on sociality did not preclude a defense of social hierarchy or an espousal of a typically aristocratic, elitist theory of knowledge."¹⁶ It is the church that mediates the human relationship with God, and Chaadaev's criticism of the Reformation is founded mainly on the latter's individualistic egalitarianism.

The Fall itself and the consequent corruption of human reason are explained by Chaadaev as the separation of the egoistic *ego* from the divine order of the world, from the "great All."¹⁷ The goal of the historical development of human thought is therefore to go back to divine reason, which is embedded in tradition and social intercourse. In the "Fifth Letter," Chaadaev explains his views as follows:

13. Cf. Zeldin, "Chaadaev's Quarrel with Kant," 279.

14. Chaadaev, "Philosophical Letters," 45.

15. *Ibid.*, 86.

16. Walicki, *Flow of Ideas*, 150.

17. Cf. Smirnova, "Problem of Reason," 11.

All that exists in the world of ideas comes from a certain number of notions which have been transmitted traditionally, and which do not belong to any intellectual individual any more than the forces of nature belong to any physical individual. *Archetypes* of Plato, *innate ideas* of Descartes, *a priori* of Kant, all these diverse elements of thought, which were necessarily recognized by all profound thinkers as in advance of any kind of operation by the soul, as preceding all experimental knowledge and all the appropriate activity of the mind, all these pre-existing seeds of reason without which man would simply be a two-legged and two-armed mammal—no more, no less . . . Once this is established, the study that we still have to do is simple: we only have to investigate the movement of these traditions throughout the history of humanity, in order to see how and where the idea, originally put into the heart of man, was preserved in its wholeness and purity.¹⁸

Ethics

In Chaadaev's views, the realization of the unity on earth depends on the moral progress of humankind, and requires not only the divine primitive impulse, but also human free will. "The proper activities of man" should be considered "as an *accessory* principle (*principe occasionel*): as a force which works only insofar as it is united with another superior force, just as the force of gravity works only along with the force of initial thrust."¹⁹ The discussion about the theme of freedom and responsibility obviously includes the tension between individual and super-individual principles, since Chaadaev has to consider the ethical consequences of the relationship between single free will and the submission of the single subject to the providential designs of the order of the world. The solution expressed in the "Fourth Letter" is based on the circumstance that the external force that moves every human being moves him or her in terms of knowledge: "The great problem of free will, no matter how abstruse it may be, would certainly not offer any difficulties, if only men understood how to become permeated with the idea that the nature of intelligent being consists only in awareness and that, insofar as intelligent being is aware, it loses nothing of its own nature, no matter how awareness comes to it."²⁰ Chaadaev explains:

18. Chaadaev, "Philosophical Letters," 66.

19. *Ibid.*, 54.

20. *Ibid.*, 55. Cf. Zeldin, "Influence of Kant," 114.

Man is constantly stimulated by a force, which he does not sense at all, it is true, but this exterior action has an influence upon him by means of his awareness; consequently, no matter how the idea which I find in my head reaches me, I find it there only because I am aware of the idea which I find there. But to become aware is to act. Therefore, I really and unceasingly act at the same time that I am dominated by something more powerful than myself. *I am aware* of it. One factor does not destroy the other, they occur without negating each other, and one is just as demonstrable as the other.²¹

If my freedom consists in the fact that I determine my will according to my principles, the fact that the ultimate source of these principles is external does not imply any loss of freedom. On the contrary, I am really free only by submitting myself to the external power, since freedom consists in acting on God-given ideas. In Zeldin's words: "How I receive ideas is irrelevant: they are, when I have them, *mine*; since I always act in terms of ideas and since my self consists of what I know, it is *I*, wholly *I* and not something external to me, that acts; hence I am free."²² If, on the contrary, I refuse to submit myself to a divine power and decide to follow my individual inclinations instead, I cease thereby to self-determine myself, and so I lose my freedom. As a result, if the human being acts according to his own individual and arbitrary will, he will not actually be free, since he would therefore give up his own nature as an intelligent being, and would end up in isolation and divisiveness:

A man's proper activity is genuinely so only when it corresponds to the law. Every time that we act contrary to the law it is no longer we ourselves who determine ourselves, but it is our environment which determines us. When we abandon ourselves to these outside influences, when we go beyond the law, we annihilate ourselves.²³

As we have seen, reason can achieve knowledge only by submission to divinely given ideas. Similarly, morality consists of submission to an external law, which is also given, and is the source of all our moral ideas (the ideas of good, duty, virtue, etc.).²⁴ The human mind longs to obey and, as a result, to join the divine mind; our true freedom consists in the fact that

21. Chaadaev, "Philosophical Letters," 55.

22. Zeldin, "Chaadaev's Quarrel with Kant," 283. Cf. also her "Influence of Kant," 114.

23. Chaadaev, "Philosophical Letters," 56.

24. Cf. Zeldin, "Chaadaev's Quarrel with Kant," 282.

we don't feel our dependence. No wonder Chaadaev prefaced his "Fourth Letter" with a quotation from Spinoza. According to him as well as Spinoza, the maximum of freedom requires giving up one's personal liberty. But this does not entail passive subordination to the cosmic order, as it happens with the physical atom, but instead the acknowledgment and the choice of such an order. In his "Third Letter" Chaadaev asks:

Now let us see what would happen if man could push his own submission to the point of complete forfeiture of his own freedom . . . it is clear that this would be the highest level of human perfection . . . Instead of this individual, isolated idea, which permeates him at this moment, instead of this personality which isolates him from all around him and clouds up everything before his eyes and which is not at all the necessary condition of his particular nature, but solely the consequence of his violent alienation from universal nature, in surrendering the fatal present *ego*, would he not recover the idea and also the comprehensive personality, as well as the whole power of pure intelligence in its original link with the rest of things?²⁵

Without such a basic harmony in the world, any arbitrary action might lead to destruction. On the premise of the parallelism between moral and natural world, Chaadaev observes: "Assume that one single molecule of matter would make an arbitrary movement once, for example, instead of tending towards the center of its system, it would deviate a little from the radius in which it is located. What would happen? Would not the whole order of the world be disturbed at once?"²⁶

God decided to take the risk of our freedom, when he created humans in his image and likeness, but "how is it possible to doubt that, since He decided to give us this surprising power which seems to clash with the whole order of the universe, He did not also decide to give it rules and to let us know how we should use it?"²⁷

At the beginning Adam understood God's original word, then God illuminated some chosen men, and finally he sent the God-man to reveal "to us all that we can know about the divine mystery."²⁸ Christianity represents, according to Chaadaev, a decisive passage in the process that would lead to the defeat of individuality.²⁹ In the "First Letter," it can be read that:

25. Chaadaev, "Philosophical Letters," 46.

26. *Ibid.*, 56.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*

29. Cf. Gurvich-Lishchiner, "Chaadaev—Herzen—Dostoevsky," 15.

Wherever Christ's name is pronounced, this mention alone sweeps men along, no matter what they may do. Nothing demonstrates the divine origin of this religion better than this character of absolute universality, which allows it to infuse itself into men's souls by every possible means and makes it seize men's minds without their knowing it; even when they seem to resist it most it dominates and subjugates them by introducing into the intellect some truths which were not there before, by causing the heart to experience emotions it had never felt, by inspiring us with sentiments which place us, without our knowing it, in the general world-order. So the function of each individual is determined by Christianity which makes everyone strive towards a single goal.³⁰

Philosophy of History

However, divine action wants to respect human freedom. Therefore, it has appeared during the course of history in different ways and different grades. Chaadaev writes: "It is evident that individuality and freedom exist only insofar as there is diversity of intelligence, moral powers, and knowledge."³¹ The universal intelligence, which enables both knowledge and morality, develops over time, within history. Individuals and nations, endowed with what Chaadaev called supra-individual "moral personalities," are the instruments of history, in its path toward universality.³² No single individual belongs directly to humankind, he actually belongs to a nation: "One must work within the domestic circle in which one is placed and have an effect upon one's natural, social family, in order to have an effect upon men; one must address oneself to one's nation, in order to speak distinctly to mankind; otherwise one will not be heard, and nothing will be accomplished."³³ Nations, as "moral personalities," are free in the same sense in which single individuals are free: they can choose to conform themselves to the objectivity of the universal law and become truly free, or they can choose to accept the false freedom of the arbitrary free will, which condemns nations to division and isolation. Chaadaev's social utopia has been defined "collectivist

30. Chaadaev, "Philosophical Letters," 29-30.

31. *Ibid.*, 68.

32. Cf. Walicki, *Flow of Ideas*, 150-51; Dobieszewski, "Chaadaev and the Rise of Modern Russian Philosophy," 29-30.

33. Chaadaev, "Philosophical Letters," 89.

and internationalist,"³⁴ since every nation as well as every single individual develops its own consciousness within history and becomes part of the general movement of humankind toward an ideal unity. "Peoples are moral beings just as individuals are. It takes centuries to educate them, just as it takes years to educate a person."³⁵

The unfortunate example of Russia itself clearly shows that without history no collective consciousness can develop. From such a point of view, the most famous statement in the "First Letter" concerning Russia means much more than a mere condemnation of Russian backwardness:

Isolated by a strange destiny from the universal development of humanity, we have absorbed nothing, not even traditional ideas of mankind. It is upon these ideas, however, that the life of people is based; it is from these ideas that the future of people unfolds and from them comes their moral development. If we wish to take up a position similar to that of other civilized people, we must, in a certain sense, repeat the whole education of mankind.³⁶

In the "Sixth Letter," Chaadaev explicitly discusses the plurality of peoples within history: "in our hopes for future happiness and definite perfection we could not initially isolate the great individual nationalities any more than their less important composite parts. We must accept them as principles and means for reaching a perfect state. Thus, the cosmopolitan future of philosophy is only an idle dream."³⁷ Exactly in the same way it is with individuals, who should not isolate themselves in order to affirm their true nature, but who should on the contrary overcome their singularity by obeying the universal design, so different peoples deteriorate if they separate themselves from the human family and become closed in themselves. Chaadaev asks in his "Seventh Letter":

Could man ever allow the extremely personal, individual consciousness now found within himself to be supplanted by this general consciousness which would make him constantly feel himself to be part of the great moral totality? Yes, without doubt. Men must realize that besides the feeling of our personal individuality we also cherish a feeling of our relationship to the fatherland, the family, and the community of opinion to which we belong. This latter feeling is often even stronger than the former.

34. Kamenskiy, "Paradoksy Chaadayeva," 41.

35. Chaadaev, "Philosophical Letters," 22.

36. *Ibid.*, 21-22.

37. *Ibid.*, 72-73.

Men must also notice that the germ of a superior consciousness resides within us in a very genuine way and forms the essence of our nature, and that the present *ego* is not imposed upon us by an inevitable law but has been created by ourselves. Then men will see that man's whole aim on earth consists in annihilating his personal existence and substituting a completely social or impersonal one for it.³⁸

The final goal of history, according to Chaadaev is the realm of God on earth, that is to say "*the accomplished moral law*. All the work of the ages in man's intellectual life is meant to produce this definite result which is the end and goal of all things, the last phase of human nature, the dénouement of the universal drama, the great apocalyptic synthesis."³⁹

Chaadaev and Kant

It seems clear that the relationship between individual and super-individual plays a major role in different aspects of Chaadaev's thought. Chaadaev's attitude toward Kant might shade some light on such a tension between individual and super-individual, as it appears in Chaadaev's work. On this topic, there is a specific, though not very wide, literature. As Teresa Obolevitch reminds us in her own contribution to the present volume,⁴⁰ Mary-Barbara Zeldin, at the end of the seventies wrote that "the major Western influence on his [Chaadaev's] views is not Schelling and certainly not, as some maintain, Hegel, but Immanuel Kant."⁴¹ A little less forcefully, Petr Toropygin in 1994 deemed that Kant had a decisive influence on Chaadaev's philosophy of history.⁴² Without entering here this specific discussion, we will just take into consideration the undoubted fact that Kant has been a very important discussant for Chaadaev when he was developing his reflections on the theme of individual and super-individual.

Chaadaev directly knew some of the major works of Kant. While he was still serving in the army, he famously complains in a letter to a friend that he could not obtain a copy of Kant's first *Critique* in Saint Petersburg.⁴³ For sure, the first and second *Critiques*, in German, both heavily underscored and annotated, appear in the catalogue of Chaadaev's second library,

38. Chaadaev, "Philosophical Letters," 86.

39. *Ibid.*, 101.

40. Obolevitch, "'The Madman' Appeals to Faith and Reason," 57.

41. Zeldin, "Influence of Kant," 111.

42. Toropygin, "Chaadayev i Kant."

43. Chaadaev to Dmitriy Obleukhov, 1812, 7.

which he built after his coming back from Europe (he had sold his first to a cousin-in-law in 1821).⁴⁴

Chaadaev's high opinion of Kant is declared in the well-known passage of the "Fifth Letter" where the author acknowledges that "assuredly the most profound and most productive of all the known systems is the one which strives to construct conscientiously an absolutely abstract intelligence, an exclusively intelligent nature, in order to take the intellectual phenomenon into account without going back to the very source of the spiritual principle."⁴⁵ Chaadaev immediately emphasizes a limit in Kant's thought: "But, since it is always man in his present state who furnishes the materials from which this system constructs its model, it happens that this system shows us artificial reason again, but not original reason."⁴⁶ And as a matter of fact, on the title page of his copy of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Chaadaev crossed out the title and wrote over these words: *Apologete adamitischer Vernunft*.⁴⁷

According to Chaadaev, Kant's basic misunderstanding of the real nature of human reason prevented him to raise to the only point of view, from which one can properly understand both the human being and the world: "the profound thinker, the author of this philosophy, did not see that there was no point in representing an intelligence which would only will to seek out and evoke supreme intelligence; an intelligence with a mode of perfectly legitimate activity, as everything which exists, and intelligence whose power would consist only in an infinite tendency to fuse with this other intelligence."⁴⁸ Such a deep standpoint would have saved Kant from what Chaadaev considered his worst mistake: to confuse the human reason after the Fall with the "truly pure" reason and to reach, in consequence, "the false teaching about the *autonomy* of human reason" and "another, even more arrogant philosophy, the philosophy of the omnipotence of the human ego."⁴⁹

In spite of these "mistakes," Chaadaev acknowledges that Kant deserves his respect:

We owe all the healthy ideas in the world today to the movement which he gave to philosophical knowledge; and we ourselves are nothing but a logical consequence of his idea. He traced the limits of human reason with steadfast hand; he made it clear that

44. McNally, "Books in Chaadayev's Libraries," 498.

45. Chaadaev, "Philosophical Letters," 65.

46. *Ibid.*

47. Chaadayev, "Kommentariy," 768.

48. Chaadaev, "Philosophical Letters," 65.

49. *Ibid.*

reason had to accept its two most profound convictions without being able to prove them, namely: the existence of God and the unlimited continuity of its own being; he taught us that a supreme logic exists, which cannot be fitted under our measurements and which is imposed upon us despite ourselves, and that there is a world which is contemporary and different from the one on which we move and that our reason must recognize this world, because of the opposite danger of falling into nothingness, and that from this we should draw all our knowledge, in order then to adapt our knowledge to the real world.⁵⁰

Kant represented for Chaadaev a sort of John the Baptist, as he announced a new philosophical Messiah. On his copy of the *Critique of Practical Reason* he actually wrote down in German: "*Er war nicht das Licht, sondern das erzeugte von dem Licht*."⁵¹ Chaadaev acquired Kant's two *Critiques* in 1826 in Dresden, where he probably found some new thoughts he had been waiting for, presumably the same he wrote about in his letter to Pushkin in 1831: "Man will come bearing the secret of time . . . the movement that will conclude the destinies of mankind will begin."⁵²

According to Zeldin, "the real disagreement between Chaadaev and Kant is not a matter of autonomy as such; it lies in their concern for the other two objects 'to which all the speculation of reason . . . is directed; the existence of God and the immortality of the soul.'"⁵³ Their difference being that Chaadaev accepts revelation, while Kant does not, at least as far as epistemology is concerned. But another clear element of disagreement consists once again in the nature of reason and its use as the instrument for obtaining knowledge. In the "Fifth Letter," Chaadaev wrote:

Note how the most certain, the most positive, the most strict philosophy of our time proceeds. It begins with the establishment of the fact that, since our reason is the given instrument of knowledge, it is necessary first of all to study how to know our reason. Without that, the philosophy says, there is no way of making suitable usage of reason. After that, this philosophy attempts to dissect and to analyze this reason as best it can. But how does this philosophy perform this preliminary work, this indispensable work, this anatomy of intelligence? Is it not by means of this reason itself? Thus, since in this, its most primary and most important operation, this philosophy is forced to

50. *Ibid.*, 65-66.

51. John 1:8; Chaadayev, "Zametki na knihakh," 612; "Kommentariy," 706.

52. Chaadaev, "Fragments," 151.

53. Zeldin, "Chaadaev's Quarrel with Kant," 285.

utilize an instrument which by its own admission it still does not know how to use, how can it come to the knowledge which it seeks? This is impossible to understand.⁵⁴

Kant wanted to employ an artificial or abstract reason, without considering its origins and its history. But, according to Chaadaev, both in the sphere of knowledge and in the moral world, Kantian reason proves to be limited and powerless, since without God human beings are disabled both in theory and in practice. Without God, they cannot obtain any knowledge, and without his support they cannot behave according to morality.

Although she admits this basic disagreement, Mary-Barbara Zeldin tried to single out some important analogies between Kant and Chaadaev, in order to make her thesis about Kant's influence on Chaadaev more consistent. The comparison sometimes seems to be a little arbitrary, for instance when Zeldin emphasizes that, for both thinkers, moral law is "a law which man must recognize before he can attain true personality,"⁵⁵ while in point of fact the recognition happens in opposite ethic frames: the dignity of the autonomy of reason in Kant, and the passivity of obedience to the divine order in Chaadaev. But, from our point of view, it is very interesting that Zeldin emphasizes a possible relationship between the two philosophers exactly as regards the idea of "unity" as the furthest horizon of morality and, at least for Kant, on the transcendental level, of human knowledge as well: for both, according to Zeldin, "there is, and for both, there ought to be, an ultimate union of the natural and moral realms into a kingdom of God on earth."⁵⁶

Second, concerning the destiny of humankind, Zeldin observes that "for Chaadaev the moral progress involved in achieving the kingdom of God is inherited by succeeding generations and individuals; for Kant the progress exists only for mankind as a whole, not for the individual person, that is, it exists only in the sense in which, for Chaadaev, all men form but one single man."⁵⁷

Finally, in regard to the relationship between the individual and the whole, Zeldin recalls that "generalized, for both Kant and Chaadaev, determination according to moral law will result in the achievement of a moral world, the kingdom of God or the kingdom of ends, a world in which each person has absolute value in a systematically organized whole."⁵⁸

54. Chaadaev, "Philosophical Letters," 59.

55. Zeldin, "Influence of Kant," 117.

56. *Ibid.*, 116.

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Ibid.*

One might argue that such positions do not correspond exactly to what Kant might have thought. But what is interesting to us here is that Chaadaev might have read Kant in such a perspective. As Toropygin suggests at one point, a sort of "Kantian" element in Chaadaev's views on individual and the whole can shade some light on the differences between Chaadaev's "collectivism" and the Slavophiles' perspective.⁵⁹ For the Slavophiles, considered roughly as a whole in spite of all their differences, the proper relationship between individual and totality was realized first of all in a historical community, in this case in the Russian past. Chaadaev wanted to sketch a complete picture of the world and its history, where the relationship between individual and totality defines itself within history, but according to an *a priori* design, which represents the meaning of both history itself and the world.

Translated by Lucia Pasini

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59. Toropygin, "Chaadayev i Kant," 36-37.

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 PART II

Contexts