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REMNANTS OF A “MID-LAND”

The Russian Concept of Faith and European Philosophy¹

Andrea Oppo*

Abstract. Questo articolo prende in esame il concetto di “fede” nella filosofia religiosa russa del XIX e dell’inizio del XX secolo, con una particolare attenzione al pensiero di Čaadaev, Chomjakov, Kireevskij, Dostoevskij, Solov’ev e Berdjaev, e il loro rapporto dialettico con il mondo occidentale. Il pensiero religioso russo ha considerato da sempre il concetto di fede in un modo particolare, vale dire come *fede per sé*, ossia il modo in cui uno crede piuttosto che l’oggetto del credere stesso. Perfino la annosa disputa tra occidentalisti e slavofili dimostra questo aspetto e, in qualche modo, l’esistenza di una specifica “Idea russa” che risiede, come dice Berdjaev, nella esplicitazione di una visione unitaria del mondo e di una fusione di filosofia e vita, di scienza e fede.

Abstract. This paper examines the concept of “faith” within Russian religious philosophy of the 19th and early 20th centuries, with particular reference to Chaadaev, Khomyakov, Kireevsky, Dostoevsky, Solovyov and Berdyaev, among others, and their dialectical relationship with the Western world. Russian religious thought, in fact, has always highlighted the concept of faith in a peculiar way, i.e. as a faith per se, as the way in which one believes, rather than the object of belief itself. Even the long-lasting dispute between Westernisers and Slavophiles – or the later opposition between the Russian Intelligentsia and religious philosophy – can be said to demonstrate the existence of a specific “Russian idea”, which resides in the identification of a unitary vision of the world and of a fusion of philosophy and life, of science and faith (Berdyaev).

The world has from all time been divided into two spheres, the East and the West. This is not a geographical division; it is an order of things which develops from the very nature of intelligent being. East and West are two principles which correspond to two dynamic natural forces, two ideas which encompass the whole economy of mankind. P. Y. CHAADAEV, *Apology of a Madman*

DIFFERENT POINTS of view can give a more accurate shape of an object. This is, more or less, what I intend to do in my paper, which examines European philosophical thought from the perspective of its relationship with its close “neighbour,” i.e. the Russian intellectual world, and tries to “see” Europe, as it were, through the *lenses* of Russia. This might also be

¹ Questo articolo è il frutto di una relazione tenuta al convegno internazionale, che si è svolto all’Università “La Sapienza” di Roma, Dipartimento di Filosofia, il 13 e 14 dicembre 2013, dal titolo: “The Reasons of Europe. History and Problems of a Philosophical Concept”.

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an initial answer to the implicit question on “why should we involve Russia in our discussion?” The general idea is to ultimately obtain an “enlarged picture” – a sort of a geo-philosophy on the concept of Europe.

When I was first thinking of a possible contribution to this conference, I started to consider how a Russian “point of view” might depict the philosophical concept of Europe, and what this may add to our comprehension of the “reasons of Europe” (as is, in fact, the title of this conference). This was certainly difficult, since all Russian intellectual history is overtly shaped in a constant comparison to Europe. Therefore, here it is not so much a case of finding a specific, Russian, point of view on Europe, since the whole of modern Russian thought – one might even say – is a point of view on Europe.² Moreover, historically speaking, the concept of “Europe” served Russian intellectuals much more in understanding their own identity than the opposite (which is the case we are in need of here). It is not a guess to affirm that understanding Europe, in order to understand Russia, is the central problem of the Russian philosophical tradition, as well as of Russian literature, and Russian culture.³ An analysis of this kind, therefore, would probably start from the day after Russia’s victory in the war with Napoleon, in 1814, when Russian intellectuals started to reflect on their role with regard to Europe, up to present time.⁴ This whole topic would be obviously too big to be dealt with in this context. At the same time, as previously stated, it would probably say more about Russia, and the development of a specific Russian thought, than about Europe and its identity.

For this reason, I tried to search for a single aspect from this two-century-long debate that would add something different to the discussion of our conference. For me, the easiest way to involve the Russian world within such a debate, and to draw a useful idea to our scope from it, was to start from Edmund Husserl’s idea of “crisis of Europe.” I have reason to believe that the German philosopher’s late work *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* is one of the twentieth-century European philosophical works that better corresponds to the philosophical reflection that has been carried out in Russia in the last two centuries. The ideal of

² This position is also expressed by Boris GROYS in his article “Russia and the West: The Quest for Russian National Identity,” in *Studies in Soviet Thought* 43 (1992) 3, 185-198.

³ *Ibi*, 185. Cf. also Vera Tolz’s opinion: «Since Peter the Great’s reforms “the West” (*Zapad*) had become arguably the most important ingredient of modern Russian identity», in W. LEATHERBARROW and D. OFFORD (eds), *A History of Russian Thought*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2010, 197.

⁴ See on this the classic study by A. KOYRÉ, *La philosophie et le problème national en Russie au début du XIXe siècle*, Gallimard, Paris 1976 (the text was written in 1929).

“integral knowledge” that, according to Nikolay Lossky, is one of the characteristic features of Russian philosophy,⁵ along with different forms of intuitivism in epistemology⁶ and the «search for unity and universality not at a level of thought, but of life»⁷: all this is not far from the ways of research and the general spirit that animated Husserl in his fundamental critique to a Western model of rationality.

In Husserl’s mind – as it clearly emerges already from his conference in Wien (1935), “Philosophy and the Crisis of European Humanity,” from which the *Crisis of European Sciences* arises – one thing is by now evident, i.e. the *telos* (to use Husserl’s terms) that was inborn in European humanity, namely, being “humanity” through philosophical reason, has been lost. As a result, for the German philosopher, what we have now is a big fissure between objectivism and subjectivism, which is the very failure of Western philosophy to grasp the fundament of meaning. The sciences could not achieve that, since any *experience* is always relative, and no empirical statement can immediately give an essence in itself. The essence of subjectivity is, thus, destined to remain hidden to science and psychology (at least, as long as the latter tries to “ape” positive sciences). This is, in very general terms, what Husserl implies.⁸

Within this view, and following both Husserl’s concerns and the Russian philosophical tradition,⁹ one might draw a conclusion by tracing perhaps a rather hazardous 21st century “map” of a geo-philosophy, as previously stated, which would eventually reveal how that fissure predicted by Husserl might produce a world split into at least two parts – with the West, represented by North America totally involved with the objectification of the world and the East, represented in this case by Russia, that is mostly concerned with the subject.¹⁰ In between, there is Europe as a sort of “Mid-land” that is pulled

⁵ Cf. N. O. LOSSKY, *History of Russian Philosophy*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, London 1952, 404-405.

⁶ *Ibi*, 403.

⁷ See GROYS, “Russia and the West,” cit., 186.

⁸ Cf. Edmund HUSSERL, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston (IL) 1970. The themes above stated are crucial to the entire book, but see in particular two introductory parts: 3-20 and 269-300.

⁹ Here I am thinking, in particular, of Ivan Kireevsky’s seminal essay “On the Nature of European Culture and on Its Relationship to Russian culture” (1852), which traced a path that others (e.g. Solovyov and Florensky) would follow on the distinction between Western philosophy and Russian culture.

¹⁰ This argument on the technological superiority of Western Europe, which allows its predominance over the “objective world,” as opposed to the superiority of Russian society in the spiritual domain is both present in the Westerniser and Slavophile

and tempted on both sides: by the Western border, as it were, with its claim that the dominion of space and nature is the most effective key to understanding the world; and by the Eastern border with its inner conviction – somehow derived from the Greek metaphysical tradition itself – that the supreme Being, the *real life* (again, in an Husserlian sense) can never have a *reality* of its own. Europe today seems poised between the West and East as the very “fracture” in that “dangerous dualism,” Objectivism/Subjectivism, which Husserl first depicted in his conference in Wien in 1935.

But, however inspiring this view may be, this is not exactly the way Russian thinkers thought, unless we state clearly what their, supposed, “subjectivism” is. In order to understand this point – and here I am arriving to Russia – it is a further note, almost a marginal comment, that Husserl added to his reasoning, which made me think of a peculiar difference between European and Russian thought, i.e. something that could have been studied more in depth. At the end of a passage in which Husserl is talking about contemporary skepticism about the possibility of metaphysics and the fall of the faith in “absolute reason,” through which the world finds its meaning, the German philosopher also states: «If man loses this faith, it means nothing less than the loss of faith “in himself,” in his own true being.»¹¹

This theme of “faith,” in the way Husserl seems to express it here, relates very much to the Russian intellectual history and, as I am going to illustrate in a few moments, it represents possibly one of the greatest concerns of Russian philosophical thought, i.e. the universality of the “true being” (life) as opposed to the universality of reason (logos) as proclaimed by the West. But before dealing with such an aspect, I would like to summarize very briefly the philosophical relationship between Russia and Europe as it developed in the last two centuries.

As previously mentioned, the entire intellectual history of modern Russia has always been struggling to define the specific character of its national culture. In particular, in the first half of eighteenth century this debate was heated and intense. Eventually – as is shown by Alexandre Koyré’s remarkable study on this debate – in this attempt to find its originality, Russia simply “failed.” The answer to the question on the original achievements of Russian culture was an extremely despairing “nothing.” As Koyré concluded: «[In

tradition of thought. More generally, within the reflection of Russian intellectuals from nineteenth and twentieth century, the separation of the material domain and the spiritual domain seems to be a trait of modern Russian culture. On this, see also Vera TOLZ, “The West,” and David SCHIMMELPENNINGK VAN DER OYE, “The East,” in W. LEATHERBARROW and D. OFFORD (eds.), *A History of Russian Thought*, cit., 197-240.

¹¹ E. HUSSERL, *The Crisis of European Sciences*, cit., 13.

Russia] there was something missing. Or, perhaps, there was too much of something.»¹² It turned out that Russian culture appeared to be exclusively imitative and contained no elements which could be considered as its original contribution to the universal world culture. Religion in Russia appeared to be entirely Byzantine, and its secular culture entirely West European. There cannot be a “philosophy” in Russia in the western sense of the word.¹³

The first document attesting to this “failure” is that crucial work for Russian philosophy: Peter Chaadaev’s “Philosophical Letter”, published in 1836. But while Chaadaev, on the one hand, acknowledges the fundamental unoriginality of Russian culture, on the other hand he locates its position in a precise place outside world history. At the same time, in so doing Chaadaev traces a first distinction between Russia and the rest of Western culture. While the term “West,” philosophically speaking, designates the quest for a universal, rational and compelling truth beyond all differences in actual life or cultural practices, the term “Russia” indicates the impossibility of such a truth at the level of logos, but its real existence only at the level of life. The Western world aims to achieve the universality of reason. The Russian world, for Chaadaev, searches for a Universal truth as well, but at the level of “True Being” (not of Logos), or in more Russian terms, “life.”¹⁴

In Russia – as Chaadaev puts it – there is no history, no beautiful memories, such as other nations have: it lives only in an extended present.¹⁵ What one finds, instead, is the unconscious, unrepresentable mode of being that

¹² «[...] Il y manquait quelque chose; peut-être aussi y avait-il quelque chose de trop...» (A. KOYRÉ, *La philosophie et le problème national en Russie au début du XIX siècle*, cit., 259).

¹³ *Ibi*, 225-246.

¹⁴ Cf. on this also Ivan Kireevsky: «Eastern thinkers were primarily concerned with the proper inner condition of the thinking spirit, while Western thinkers were more interested in the external coherence of concepts. Eastern thinkers, striving for the fullness of truth, sought the inner wholeness of reason [...] In contrast, Western philosophers assumed that the complete truth could be discerned by the separated faculties of the mind, acting independently in isolation.» (I. KIREEVSKY, “On the Nature of European Culture and on Its Relationship to Russian Culture” in B. JAKIM and R. BIRD (eds.), *On Spiritual Unity. A Slavophile Reader*, Lindisfarne Book, Hudson (NY) 1998, 213-214).

¹⁵ «Every nation has its period of stormy agitation, of passionate unease, of hasty activities. [...] All societies have gone through such phases. Such periods provide them with their most vivid memories, their legends, their poetry, their greatest and most productive ideas. [...] But we Russians, we are devoid of all of this. [...] There are no charming remembrances, no graceful images in the people’s memory; our national tradition is devoid of any powerful teaching. [...] We live only in the narrowest of presents, without past and without future, in the midst of a flat calm.» (P. Y. CHAADAEV, *Philosophical Letters and Apology of a Madman*, The University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville 1969, 35-36).

is alternative to any historicity. With respect to the universal world history, according to Chaadaev, this “mode of being” is unarticulated, unobjectified and unoriginal. This a-historicity of Russian identity (i.e. this extra historical and “unformalized” character of Russian culture), which is nonetheless “full of inner life”, will be the “gist” of later Slavophile reflection. Two philosophers in particular, Ivan Kireevsky and Aleksey Khomyakov, would highlight the specific character of “Russian soul” in this very mode of Being, which they named “sobornost” [conciliarity], whose reality is achievable only through “faith.”¹⁶

In this line – that starts with Chaadaev, passing through the Slavophile tradition and, again, continues through Fyodor Dostoevsky and his “mentor” Vladimir Solovyov, as well as Nikolay Berdyaev, and carries on to the present day, almost, with Mikhail Bakhtin – one can find a significant path of Russian thought as a thought on that which is “other” than thought (specifically, *life*), which works dialectically, between Wisdom (*Sofia*) and Apocalypse, toward the achievement of this Otherness beyond History. This is, also, what has been called the “Russian idea” (Solovyov, Rozanov, Berdyaev). Overall, Russian philosophical identity – in particular, the Slavophile-oriented philosophizing in Russia – can be defined as a general paradigm of the post-idealist unconscious (i.e. the unobjectifiable Other, which lies beyond reason or knowledge).¹⁷ One might even argue that Russian philosophers, or this big part of Russian philosophy that descended from the Slavophile tendency, “theologized the unconscious”: whether they called it “sobornost” (Slavophiles) or “Divine Sofia” (Solovyov). Even the experience of Soviet Marxism cannot be understood outside this general framework of Russian philosophy, in that it subordinates historical materialism to dialectical materialism in order to achieve the final unity of the world as a universal cosmic life, rather than a historical life. This line of thought can easily be extended all the way to Mikhail Bakhtin’s critique of ideology and also his attack on Freud’s “disembodied” (and thus, inauthentic) unconscious interpreted by Freud himself as an abstraction incapable of grasping the “true Other.” But also Pavel Florensky’s general idea of “discontinuity” [*preryvnost’*] (i.e. his critique on linearity in space, time, and evolution) can be set within this Russian heritage. In this same context, one could add many other authors or concepts: from Semyon Frank’s concept of “The Unfathomable” [*nepostizhinoe*] to Yuri Lotman’s seminal concept of “semi-

¹⁶ See on this, B. JAKIM and R. BIRD (eds.), *On Spiritual Unity. A Slavophile Reader*, cit.

¹⁷ Cf. B. GROYS’ article “Russia and the West: The Quest for Russian National Identity,” cit., 190-192.

osphere,” to Losev’s particular conception of “Myth” (in many ways connected to Florensky’s ideas) etc. As Nikolay Lossky argues,¹⁸ even the most important of Russian positivists, such as Lavrov and Mikhailovsky, developed their theories by combining theoretical truth with “righteousness,” and rejected the idea of existence as an evolutionary factor.

As a matter of fact, it is not that difficult to believe, as Nikolay Lossky does, that this ideal of an *integral knowledge*, which can be achieved through an *integral experience* set outside our usual concepts of time, space and history, is one of the most characteristic traits of the Russian mind. In all of this, what I find particularly interesting – as it adds something to the topic of our discussion – is the very “way” in which Russian thought, with its paradoxical form of a “thought against thought,” went in search of the *unity of life* (*Vseedinstvo*, to use Soloyov’s term). This way is, essentially, a *mode* of “faith.” Although, in Russian intellectual history, the term *faith* holds a peculiar significance that is tied to the above-mentioned Slavophile tradition, and some of its epigones (as, for example, Viktor Nesselrode), in a wider meaning it can also be applied, as Berdyaev does, to a general, anti-metaphysical attitude of Russian thought.¹⁹

One of the most famous demonstrations of the importance of such a concept for the Russian culture is those well-known verses by the greatest Russian poet Fyodor Tyutchev (1803-1873) – a sort of “introduction to Russia” – which, not by chance, Berdyaev puts at the beginning of his fundamental work *The Russian Idea*.

Умом Россию не понять,
 Аршином общим не измерить:
 У ней особенная стать —
 В Россию можно только *верить*.
 [Russia cannot be understood with the mind alone,
 No ordinary yardstick can span her greatness:
 She stands alone, unique –
 In Russia, one can only *believe*.]²⁰

¹⁸ See N. O. Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, cit., 404.

¹⁹ The influence that the Slavophile movement had on Russian culture can be hardly underestimated. As an example of this, new studies on Dostoevsky have underlined how the novelist’s legacy to the Slavophile’s thought was deep and decisive. See S. HUDSPITH, *Dostoevsky and the Idea of Russianness. A New Perspective on Unity and Brotherhood*, London: RoutledgeCurzon 2004.

²⁰ Tyutchev’s italics. These verses were written by Tyutchev on 28th November 1866.

While Tyutchev, in composing these verses, was certainly influenced by the Slavophile thought, it is also clear from the context that the above-mentioned faith is not solely, or necessarily, a religious faith. What Tyutchev, Solovyov, Berdyaev imply when they use this word is something different from a confessional, religious belief. The same Kireevsky explains this difference in his analysis of the crisis of Western thought in terms of a loss of its “living convictions.”

Having broken the wholeness of the spirit into fragments, and having left the higher consciousness of truth to detached logical thinking, in the depth of their self-consciousness, people were torn from all connections to reality, and they themselves appeared on earth as abstract beings, like spectators in a theatre, capable of sympathy, love and aspiration for all things on the sole condition that the physical personality not suffer and not be disturbed. For the only thing that their logical abstractness did not allow them to repudiate was physical being. Consequently, not only was faith lost in the West, but also poetry, which in absence of living convictions became transformed into a barren amusement; and the more exclusively poetry sought imagined pleasure alone, the more tedious it became.²¹

The loss of faith is not the loss of God, but of the human. Faith, in both Tyutchev’s and Kireevsky’s words, appears as something external to reason but that, somehow, is capable of putting reason at work. It is separated from reason and from the Divine, but nonetheless it has the possibility to transform and orient philosophy and set its focus on human self-consciousness:

[...] the character of the dominant philosophy depends on the character of the dominant faith. Philosophy may not derive directly from faith; it may even be in contradiction to faith; but it is still born of the peculiar orientation given to reason by the peculiar character of faith. The same sense that enabled humankind to understand the Divine also helps humans to understand truth in general.²²

What, then, is this “faith” – the *only way* to understand Russia? How could it possibly function differently from logos?

A little linguistic excursus on this subject could possibly help us with a couple of useful insights. The Russian word “faith,” *vera* [вера], and the correlated verb *verit'* [верит'] (to believe, to have faith in), have, in fact, a

²¹ I. KIREEVSKY, “On the Necessity and Possibility of New Principles in Philosophy” in B. JAKIM and R. BIRD (eds.), *On Spiritual Unity. A Slavophile Reader*, cit., 256.

²² *Ibi*, 257.

peculiar density of meaning in Russian language. It takes the same Indo-European root **wer* [affection, friendship] of the Latin word “*verus*” (true, truth), which suggests the idea of “trust” within a relationship but also within knowledge.²³ In this regard, the Russian language, unlike any other Indo-European language and unlike the other Slavic languages as well, has two terms to express the concept of “truth”: *pravda* and *istina*. The first (*pravda*) – as also Pavel Florensky observes in his interesting analysis on this point²⁴ – takes more the Greek meaning of *aletheia* as a reference to the correspondence of the real world in what one affirms (common facts, scientific truths, objective world, but also objectivity in morality and righteousness); the other (*istina*), in fact, refers more to the Latin meaning of *verum* as *trust*, *affection*, and ultimately “faith” in what one states (affective truth, what matters “to me,” religious and moral truth from a personal point of view).

There is a theoretical problem, regarding the classic distinction belief/faith, which to my mind has always been much clearer to theology than to philosophy of science. In all Christian theology, starting from Augustine, we have the following two-fold definition of faith: the *Fides quae*, as the object of belief itself, and the *fides qua* as the faith with/in which one believes.²⁵ Moreover, in the Latin language the verb *credere* plus accusative means the mere belief in the objectivity of one’s belief, whereas *credere* plus dative indicates an affective relationship that is established with the person or object of belief. It is called, in fact, “dative of affection”: *Crede mihi* (“Believe in me”). The importance granted to the shape of belief, or in other words “faith,” is an inner part of the process of knowledge and construction of the world for the Russian mind. It is the condition for the True Being to be grasped, or for the “Being” to be “true.” In the short space of this paper I have only the time to introduce this aspect of Russian philosophy: but what I did want to suggest here, as merely a starting point, is once again an imaginary situation in which the concept of belief/faith might also work as a *fides quae* or *fides qua* for the philosophical reasons behind national identities. Here, it is not about “real” national identities, but rather, as Chaadaev points out, about principles or ideas «which encompass the whole economy of mankind.»²⁶ “West” and “East” might well be, in a

²³ This relationship has been kept in the Latin word “*se-verus*” i.e. “without affection,” in fact, “severe” (cf. sources: J. POKORNY, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*; A. WALDE – J.B. HOFMANN, *Lateinisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*).

²⁴ See Pavel Florensky’s second letter (“The Doubt”) of his masterpiece *The Pillar and Ground of Truth* (1914).

²⁵ Cf. St. AUGUSTINE, *De Trinitate*, 13, 2-5.

²⁶ P. Y. CHAADAEV, *Philosophical Letters and Apology of a Madman*, cit., 169.

way not too distant from Chaadaev's view, the modern epitome of Augustine's concepts of *fides quae* and *fides qua*, i.e. a faith whose end is the object (where the subjectivity is shaped in order to the object of faith) and a faith directed to the subject (in which the objective reality is seen in relation to the subject). In both cases, neither the subject nor the object are missing, but the direction of the process is clear and definite. A middle point (or a Mid-land, to keep our metaphor) between those West and East occurs where there is not a clear direction, or no movement at all. In this light, a veiled critique made by Berdyaev to Martin Heidegger can be understood, when the first more or less says: «We are both named as existentialists, but a metaphysical existentialism is a contradiction in terms.»²⁷ In the same way, Lev Shestov's critique to the early Husserl of *Philosophy as a Rigorous Science* must be considered.²⁸ Berdyaev and Shestov might be perhaps regarded as two biased examples of a Russian philosophy that specifically tries to *fight* against thought, or against thought in the purest of its versions. But, as previously observed, in various ways a big part of Russian intellectual culture has resisted to Western rationality precisely in its typical modes of categorizing reality and thought itself. One of the first results of this resistance to a "thought that reflects upon thought" is the discovery of a *subject* who "believes" in that thought, and consequently, in an extended reason, the "wholeness of being," as Kireevsky puts it, opposed to the "rationalistic understanding" of a "dichotomic" mind that is proper of Western thought.²⁹ In this exact sense, as stated before, Russian philosophy has been defined by Boris Groys as a paradigm of the post-idealist unconscious. It is no surprising, then, that some categories like "will" or "faith," or "wisdom," may assume a peculiar relevance for the Russian mind with respect to the European world. One might say that while Western and European philosophy has worked on the authenticity of *Pravda*, the Russian thought has been more concerned with the authenticity of *Istina*.

²⁷ «My philosophy is decisively personalist and according to the fashionable terminology now established it might be called existential, although in quite a different sense from the philosophy of Heidegger, for example. I do not believe in the possibility of a metaphysics and theology based upon concepts and I have certainly no desire to elaborate an ontology. Being is only the objectivization of existence" (N. BERDYAEV, *The Russian Idea*, Lindisfarne Press, Hudson [NY] 1992, 257).

²⁸ See L. SHESTOV, *Pamjati velikogo filozofa (Edmund Gusserl)* [In Memory of a Great Philosopher (Edmund Husserl)], in *Russkie Zapiski* 12 (December 1938), 127-145; and 13 (January 1939), 108-116.

²⁹ See I. KIREEVSKY, "On the Nature of European Culture and on Its Relationship to Russian Culture," cit., 229.

Without going further in this analysis, a first conclusion of what has been said so far can be drawn. A Russian point of view on Europe is – as stated at the beginning of this essay – a point of view on Russia. In this regard, such a perspective would not help much our purpose of understanding the philosophical reasons of Europe. On the other hand, however, the concept of “Europe” as used by the Russian philosophical tradition (namely, as a mirror to understand Russia itself) does also reflect what Europe is actually not, i.e. it reflects its distance both from Russia and from another decisive development of Western thought – the American thought. From a Russian perspective, today Europe, as a paradigm of knowledge, might appear as a middle point between East and West: even more, however, it is a middle point when one looks at “what kind of faith” is put on that paradigm.³⁰ While the same concept of “faith” (as “belief,” or *fides quae*) is crucial to the American thought and mind, since it is steadily directed toward the “object” (and an objective world, or a world that in its objectivity finds its most authentic reason), and while for Russian thought the concept of faith is just as decisive, although clearly directed towards the subject (and a subjective world); European thought, on the contrary, seems simply “undecided” with regard to faith, like a mid-land between the two, and, as Kireevsky observed, with no movement in any direction and only capable of developing and multiplying descriptions and details of its static condition.³¹ Husserl, whom has been previously quoted, was probably right in that the fissure he predicted has produced exactly this: not so much the loss of an objective or a subjective view of the world, but rather a loss of *faith* in both. On the one hand, Europe has always been, constitutively, a Mid-land, as the multiform Ionia was – the door between East and West, the origin of difference itself. This was and has always been its strongest point, as Jacques Derrida pointed out many times: its “non-identity” as the very possibility of its identity. On the other hand, however, Europe, in our time, struggles to find a reason or a mode for its own faith, or, we might also say following Ian Patochka’s

³⁰ After all, faith is part of any process of knowledge, and even the most anti-metaphysical of philosophical traditions (e.g. empiricism), which maintain the maximum of distance between fact and value, or object and thought, must assume nonetheless a certain level of *faith* in their presuppositions, i.e. a paradigmatic view of their own theory that is called to predict the subsequent discoveries or the development of that same theory.

³¹ «Lacking the opportunity to move forward, philosophy can expand only in breadth, developing details and lending all individual disciplines a common meaning. Consequently, we see that contemporary philosophers, however they may differ among themselves almost all proceed from the same level of basic principles.» (I. KIREEVSKY, “On the Necessity and Possibility of New Principles in Philosophy,” cit., 235).

famous expression, to “care” for its own *soul*. As Kireevsky argues, «the very triumph of the European mind has revealed the narrowness of its basic aspirations» and consequently «[...] life itself has been drained of its essential meaning.»³² A Russian perspective on Europe today might highlight how the problem of Europe is not so much, or is no longer, about searching for knowledge or for truth. It is about the meaning or shape we give to that knowledge or to that truth. It is the “mode” of faith in that knowledge. That *shape*, in fact, might be uncertain or lacking clear direction.

Undoubtedly, in a time in which the quest for absolute objectivity and for a newer and more radical realism seems to epitomize the highest scope of Western thought (a scope for which American thought is actually more prepared than European thought), to maintain that the main philosophical problem of a contemporary European philosophy is to redefine its attitude and faith towards its knowledge of the world is highly problematic. Nonetheless, in European thought in general, the question on “what is a soul?,” or better again, “what is a *care* for that soul?” seems to be the less practiced, and thus it may call for special attention. If philosophy aims to be a cure for the crisis of European thought, it must probably recover its original, ancient Greek value of moral *wisdom* over the mere facts and reasoning, as Kireevsky points out³³; and it must find out a transcendental (in Husserlian terms) knowledge over the simple, objective reality. But most of all – be it said as a sort of conclusion drawn from the Russian philosophy – it has to regain its faith on the value of its own philosophy, as that faith is an integral part of it.

³² I. KIREEVSKY, “On the Nature of European Culture and on Its Relationship to Russian Culture,” cit., 191.

³³ I. KIREEVSKY, “On the Necessity and Possibility of New Principles in Philosophy,” cit., 243-249. For Kireevsky, the spirit of ethics and human moral worth started to decline in Greek philosophy with Aristotle, for whom «reality was the complete embodiment of supreme reason» (*ibi*, 248).