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The Neo-Idealist Reception of Kant in the Moscow Psychological Society

Randall A. Poole

The Moscow Psychological Society, founded in 1885 at Moscow University, was the philosophical center of the revolt against positivism in the Russian Silver Age. By the end of its activity in 1922 it had played the major role in the growth of professional philosophy in Russia.¹ The Society owes its name to its founder, M. M. Troitsky (1835-99), an empiricist psychologist. Although it sponsored significant psychological research, its greater importance in the history of Russian philosophy began to emerge already in 1888, when Nikolai Ia. Grot (1852-99) took over as director. Grot's principal colleagues in the affairs of the Society included the major Russian idealist philosophers Vladimir S. Solov'ev (1853-1900), Sergei N. Trubetskoi (1862-1905), and Lev M. Lopatin (1855-1920). In 1889 the Psychological Society began publication of Russia's first regular, specialized journal in philosophy, *Questions of Philosophy and Psychology* (*Voprosy Filosofii i Psikhologii*). Grot characterized the journal's prevailing direction as idealist or, "in respect to method, metaphysical."²

While the cultural revival of the Silver Age mounted a broad-based revolt against positivism, neo-idealist philosophy in the Psychological Society was distinctive in the theoretical depth of its critique. Positivism was remarkably perva-

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¹ On the Moscow Psychological Society see Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak, *Sergei N. Trubetskoi: An Intellectual Among the Intelligentsia in Prerevolutionary Russia* (Belmont, Mass., 1976), 63-80; Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal and Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak (eds.), *A Revolution of the Spirit: Crisis of Value in Russia, 1890-1924*, tr. Marian Schwartz (New York, 1990), 16-22; and Randall A. Poole, *The Moscow Psychological Society and the Neo-Idealist Development of Russian Liberalism, 1885-1922* (Ph.D. dissertation, U. of Notre Dame, 1996).

² N. Ia. Grot, "Eshche o zadachakh zhurnala," *Voprosy Filosofii i Psikhologii* 2: 2, kn. 6 (1891), i. (Hereafter *VFP*.)

sive in Russia from the middle of the nineteenth century. The main characteristics of this positivist *Weltanschauung* were *reductionism*, which dismissed as a meaningless proposition (neither analytic nor empirical) the possibility of being beyond the positively-given data of sense experience, i.e., phenomena in space and time; *scientism*, the claim, consistent with the positivist reduction of being to natural phenomena, that the methodology of the natural sciences covered everything; and *utopianism*, the hope that the application of natural scientific methods to man and society would make human existence as regular and well-ordered as nature.³ The defining trait was reductionism or, in other words, naturalism or atheism: the reduction of being to nature. In ethics, epistemology, ontology, and social philosophy neo-idealism emerged as a response to these characteristics. Its development by philosophers in the Psychological Society, apart from comprising a basic chapter in the history of Russian thought, informs the European-wide revolt against positivism characteristic of *fin-de-siècle* culture.

According to scientific positivism, philosophy had no distinctive methodology and thus no legitimate right to exist as its own type of scientific (*nauchnyi* or *wissenschaftlich*) discipline. Empirical sciences were the only sciences; philosophy could at best serve as a field that systematized empirical research. Against these claims Russian neo-idealists sought to advance the autonomy of philosophy by showing that the positivist measure of reality was far from exhaustive and that what it did not exhaust comprised the domain of philosophy. This domain was human consciousness itself, to the extent it could be shown to be irreducible to empirical experience (the positivist sphere). Neo-idealism thus took shape as a type of philosophy of consciousness. In the inaugural issue of *Questions of Philosophy and Psychology* S. N. Trubetskoi published the first installment of a large essay bearing the title, "On the Nature of Human Consciousness." "The question of the nature of consciousness is the principal question of philosophy, not only of psychology," Trubetskoi wrote, "for in consciousness we know everything that we know."⁴ Trubetskoi and his colleagues in the Psychological Society were convinced that philosophy had to develop through specification of its own internal standards and through autonomization from the spurious criteria positivism applied externally to it. Their goal was to match, in theoretical rigor, the professionalism associated with the natural sciences by making philosophy "scientific," but on idealist, not empirical grounds.

³ Leszek Kolakowski, *The Alienation of Reason: A History of Positivist Thought*, tr. Norbert Guterman (New York, 1968).

⁴ S. N. Trubetskoi, "O prirode chelovecheskogo soznaniia," reprinted in *Sobranie sochinenii Kn. Sergeia Nikolaevicha Trubetskogo*, II, *Filosofskie stat'i* (Moscow, 1908), 36.

The Kantian Critique of Positivism

In their defense of the self against positivist reductionism and naturalism, neo-idealists of the Psychological Society were deeply indebted to Kant, in both epistemology and moral philosophy. This claim revises the traditional view that Russian philosophy developed without significant assistance from Kant.⁵

In two ways Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* defends the minimal idealist claim that not everything intellectual can be reduced to the natural (sensible or psychological), that consciousness cannot be wholly explained by the facts of the empirical world. First, the treatise argues that empirical experience itself would not be possible without synthetic a priori knowledge, and therefore not all knowledge can be empirical in origin.⁶ Kant answers his famous question, "How are a priori synthetic judgments possible?"⁷ by stating in effect that they must be possible since without them neither experience nor the self would be. They enable the self to be what it means to be a self, that is, to have a world, a reality different than self, an outside capable of being experienced, otherness or alterity, objects. This startling capacity Kant describes as "transcendental." This transformation in the conception of the nature of experience is Kant's transcendental idealism, his "Copernican revolution." Among its main contentions is that the self cannot be reduced to the empirical, natural world because the self is the world's very condition.

By arguing that synthetic a priori judgments confer objectivity or, what is the same thing, make empirical experience possible, Kant hopes to make their existence seem obvious. This does not, or does not necessarily, provide a mandate for rationalist metaphysics or ontology as a "proud science"; certainly it did not for Kant. Nonetheless, the irreducibility of the self to empirical determination implies a general metaphysical commitment to trans-empirical being (and so, for Kant, "noumenal" being transcendent to space and time and inaccessible to theoretical knowledge). Transcendental idealism refutes naturalism by showing that nature does not stand on its own but is transcendently conditioned. Although it cannot be proven that the *transcendental* conditions of experience

⁵ See T. G. Masaryk, *The Spirit of Russia. Studies in History, Literature, and Philosophy*, tr. Eden and Cedar Paul, II (London, 1955), 472; and V. V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, tr. George L. Kline (New York, 1953), II, 470; and cf. Thomas Nemeth, "Kant in Russia: The Initial Phase," *Studies in Soviet Thought*, 36 (1988), 79-110, the first in his series of articles on "Kant in Russia" in that journal and its successor, *Studies in East European Thought*; also *Studies in East European Thought*, 47 (1995), guest ed. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, on "Neo-Kantianism in Russian Thought"; Z. A. Kamenskii and V. A. Zhuchkov (eds.), *Kant i filosofii v Rossii* (Moscow, 1994), reviewed by me in *Slavic Review*, 55 (1996), 161-67; and A. I. Abramov, "Kantianstvo v russkoi universitetskoi filosofii," *Voprosy filosofii*, 1 (1998), 58-69.

⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. Norman Kemp Smith (New York, 1965), 41-42.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

strictly entail a *transcendent* level of being, it is difficult to think that the only alternative to naturalism is solipsism, a free-floating self anchored neither in this world nor another. In any event it was difficult for Russian neo-idealists to think so.

The second basis behind Kant's critique of positivism relies on moral experience, which according to Kant also constitutes a type of knowledge—practical knowledge—that is not empirical. Moral consciousness of what ought to be (*das Sollen*) is neither derivative from nor reducible to what is (*das Sein*). Duty, which can determine the will in opposition to empirical-natural causes, is Kant's primary testimony to the autonomy of the self relative to nature. "There is in man a power of self-determination, independently of any coercion through sensuous impulses."⁸ Kant calls this power of self-determination "practical," to describe the capacity of pure reason, rational direction alone, to initiate (or inhibit) a series of events, to put them, or prevent them from going, into practice. The categorical imperative exempts man from natural necessity: it is a miracle, a violation of the laws of nature.

The impossibility, from a naturalistic perspective, of both moral consciousness of "what ought to be" and the freedom to act on it (since nature indicates only "what is" and permits no exception to its own system of causality) is fundamental to the structure of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant's system is a tightly integrated whole: his epistemology (transcendental idealism) reconceptualizes nature in order to make possible or validate duty and free will. If natural phenomena are not phenomena but things-in-themselves, if naturalism is a true description of being, then, as Kant succinctly states, "freedom cannot be upheld. Nature will then be the complete and sufficient determining cause of every event,"⁹ and conscience and freedom will be reduced to psychological illusions. But if nature is seen from the transcendental perspective of the capacity for differentiation of self and other, for objectivity or empirical experience, then moral experience can be affirmed as authentic, with all the implications this holds for metaphysics. In this way the thrust of both Kantian epistemology and moral philosophy is to reject naturalism and uphold idealism, to "postulate" (as Kant would have it) the possibility of the metaphysical reality of the self.

This tight set of ideas formed the point of departure in the neo-idealist revolt against positivism in the Psychological Society. The Kantian irreducibility of consciousness to empirical determination was not only the basis for the autonomy of philosophy. It also had direct implications for the value and dignity of human personhood and thus for the defense of liberalism. Pavel I. Novgorodtsev (1866-1924), the Society's leading social philosopher, pointed to this connection at the jubilee meeting commemorating Kant (December 1904): "The enormous significance of Kant consists precisely in the fact that he again directed thought to the

⁸ *Ibid.*, 465.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 466.

depths of self-consciousness, to the ... internal sources of the spirit in which man knows his infinite vocation and absolute worth.”¹⁰ The Society’s philosophers drew out the metaphysical or ontological conclusions of the Kantian autonomy of the self to show that neo-idealism, by grounding the value of the human person in transcendent being (personalism), could serve as a powerful theory of liberalism.¹¹ For them, Kantian transcendental idealism entailed a transcendent ontological reality. As Novgorodtsev wrote, “affirmation of the relative nature of empirical knowledge means for me also the admission of free, creative, uncaused being.”¹² In this, Russian neo-idealism can also be seen as a type of modernized, theoretically explicit theism, in which it is the “image and likeness” of God in man that constitutes personhood.

Russian neo-idealism was distinctive in its return to the ontological reality of Kant’s concept of the noumenal. By contrast the post-Kantian development of German thought, from absolute idealism through neo-Kantianism, tended to be anti-ontological in its phenomenalist reduction of being to the immanent data of consciousness. The philosophers of the Society advanced their own “concrete,” ontological conceptions of idealism in direct opposition to abstract, rationalistic German forms, neo-Kantianism first of all. “We find in [Hermann] Cohen the most resolute assertion of the *identity of thought and being*,” Evgenii N. Trubetskoi (1863-1920) wrote characteristically.¹³ One important implication of this identity was, as Evgenii’s brother Sergei expressed it, the destruction of the person as a concrete, ontologically real entity. “From abstract concepts it is possible to neither draw out nor understand anything concrete—it is impossible to understand the *person*, as a real factor of the historical process.”¹⁴ More generally, the Society’s philosophers concluded that idealist constructions that collapse the distinction between consciousness and being already contain the germs of a positivism that reverts from a pure ontologically-groundless phenomenism to crude forms of ontology such as materialism. Russian neo-idealism, in its critical ontological direction, was thus a more consistent and thoroughgoing critique of positivism than contemporary German neo-Kantianism.

¹⁰ P. I. Novgorodtsev, “Kant, kak moralist,” VFP 16: 1, kn. 76 (1905), 28.

¹¹ Three of the six philosophers Andrzej Walicki treats in *Legal Philosophies of Russian Liberalism* (Oxford, 1987) were among the most influential members of the Psychological Society: Boris Chicherin, Vladimir Solov’ev, and Pavel Novgorodtsev.

¹² P. I. Novgorodtsev, “K voprosu o sovremennykh filosofskikh iskaniakh. (Otvét L. I. Petrazhitskomu),” VFP 14: 1, kn. 66 (1903), 138.

¹³ E. N. Trubetskoi, “Panmetodizm v etike. (K kharakteristike ucheniia Kogena),” VFP 20: 2, kn. 97 (1909), 126.

¹⁴ S. N. Trubetskoi, “Osnovaniia idealizma,” *Sobranie sochinenii Kn. Sergeia Nikolaevicha Trubetskogo*, II, *Filosofskie stat’i*, 190.

Transcendental Idealism: S. N. Trubetskoi

Prince Sergei N. Trubetskoi became a member of the Psychological Society in 1887, and in the years that followed he served it as deputy chair and co-editor of *Questions of Philosophy and Psychology*. His assimilation and interpretation of transcendental idealism, which he calls Kant's "critique of experience,"¹⁵ was the most influential reading of Kant in the Society. More generally, Trubetskoi's importance in the growth of Russian idealism from the last decade of the nineteenth century was second only to that of Solov'ev.

Trubetskoi's lengthy essays, "On the Nature of Human Consciousness" (1889-91) and "The Foundations of Idealism" (1896), were central events in the Russian reception of Kant. We have seen that Trubetskoi defines philosophy in terms of philosophy of consciousness. In "The Foundations of Idealism" he adds that the focus on consciousness must not be isolated from the other main concern of theoretical philosophy, ontology.¹⁶ The history of modern philosophy has privileged consciousness as an abstract principle, to the neglect of its necessary ontological ground. Subjective or abstract idealism tends to hypostatize consciousness and abandon all being apart from the self. Such skepticism is difficult to sustain for long, and the result, Trubetskoi observes, is a return to naturalism. "The innate realism of human consciousness cruelly takes its revenge and replaces the refined, smart criticism of the sceptics with crude anti-philosophic materialism," a development no less true of German idealism than of British empiricism.¹⁷ Trubetskoi thus formulates one of the major insights of neo-idealism in the Moscow Psychological Society: a thorough-going idealist critique of positivism must be self-consciously or critically ontological. The extent to which Kant's transcendental idealism contributed to the reduction of being to consciousness and thence to the materialist reaction, and how on the other hand its principles are resistant to such reductionism, were difficult problems that much pre-occupied Russian neo-idealists.

In "On the Nature of Human Consciousness," Trubetskoi (following Solov'ev) sets the basic attitude of Russian neo-idealists toward Kant, embracing his conception of experience while censuring him for a radical subjectivism that leaves human consciousness on its own, without a higher ground. Transcendental idealism was "Kant's immortal discovery," despite his failure to realize that the transcendental functions of consciousness cannot be wholly subjective or merely human.¹⁸ In "The Foundations of Idealism" Trubetskoi maintains that Kant might deny the existence of being apart from the phenomena of consciousness, "but hardly in all philosophy," Trubetskoi nonetheless affirms, "is there a position more solid than the foundations of idealism which emerge from his

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 267.

¹⁷ S. N. Trubetskoi, "O prirode chelovecheskogo soznaniia," 7-9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.

theory.”¹⁹ Regardless of whether Kant thinks there is any thing-in-itself, Trubetskoi celebrates him for showing that natural objects are not things-in-themselves but phenomena. This approach “absolutely destroys the materialistic theory with its naive, uncritical realism,” while substantiating healthy, critical empiricism.²⁰

Trubetskoi’s two articles are a response to, and an attempt to come to terms with, Kant’s concept of the thing-in-itself. Trubetskoi uses the concept in two distinct senses. One assimilates Kant’s critique of empirical experience that objects in space and time are not things-in-themselves but phenomena that necessarily exist in relation to consciousness. The other stands for being in itself, independent of human consciousness. Both are Kantian, although Trubetskoi takes the first further than Kant intended while charging him with abandoning the thing-in-itself in the second sense (the gist of his criticism of “subjective idealism”).

The thing-in-itself as transcendent being is the center of the problem in distinguishing Kant from his successors. At times Trubetskoi states that the thing-in-itself is for Kant only a hypothetical possibility that cannot be categorically excluded, a limiting concept in epistemology without ontological significance.²¹ For example, Trubetskoi ascribes to Kant the view that, “outside of consciousness there is nothing. Things outside consciousness, things-in-themselves, are only concepts of reason.”²² Such statements identify Kant with the reduction of being to consciousness characteristic of the phenomenalist currents in post-Kantian German thought. Trubetskoi is not, however, very consistent on this score, and he levels the charge of reductionism far more against Kant’s successors than Kant himself. Thus, he writes that while Kant proscribed the transcendent application of the categories to anything outside the possibility of empirical experience, only Kant’s followers proceeded from this to abstract idealism, to the claim that “there are no things-in-themselves, no things outside reason, no being preceding thought.” And in writing about “the basic contradiction of Kant, the contradiction between thought and being, between the ‘thing-in-itself’ and consciousness, which he himself recognized as radical and elevated to a principle,”²³ Trubetskoi comes still closer to granting Kant the ontological reality of the noumenal.

Transcendental idealism corroborates one of Trubetskoi’s central ideas, that being in itself must be taken on faith since it cannot be theoretically proved. The a-priority of space and time makes possible such faith, something which Kant

¹⁹ S. N. Trubetskoi, “Osnovaniia idealizma,” 173.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 180.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 166.

²² S. N. Trubetskoi, “O prirode chelovecheskogo soznaniia,” 51; see also 54: “the *Ideas* [of the distinct faculty of reason] have no reality.... Therefore, if that which we call God, the soul, and the universe amount only to our ideas, then in themselves they are nothing or the equivalent of nothing.”

²³ *Ibid.*, 52.

himself maintained and which presents too striking a parallel with Trubetskoi to be coincidental, especially in view of his knowledge of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trubetskoi integrates faith as a distinct factor into his epistemology because being that transcends consciousness cannot be established through sense-perception or thought alone. "Reality is not explicable without reality: it is *given* to us, it is apprehended or supposed by us, as *an object of faith*."²⁴ Like sense-perception, "my thought, taken abstractly, pure concept, does not contain adequate basis for transition to real being by way of some 'ontological deduction [umozakliuchenie].'"²⁵ Therefore, for the man who would permit himself to doubt the reality of the world external to him, there apparently can exist no rational proofs to the contrary."²⁵ In Trubetskoi's language, "concrete" being transcendent to consciousness must be taken on faith because it cannot be proved through "abstract" concepts of consciousness. Kant shared this same concern, one that goes to the heart of transcendental idealism.

According to Kant, "that which is in time and space is an appearance; it is not anything in itself but consists merely of representations."²⁶ As a result, it is imperative that space and time be (merely) a-priori forms of sensibility, not transcendently real conditions of the existence of things-in-themselves. For then, writes Kant in the Transcendental Dialectic, "it is, in fact, this transcendental realist who ... finds that ... all our sensuous representations are inadequate to establish their reality."²⁷ Kant makes the same point about space and time in the Transcendental Aesthetic:

it is only if we ascribe *objective reality* to these forms of representation, that it becomes impossible for us to prevent everything being thereby transformed into mere *illusion*. For if we regard space and time as properties which, if they are to be possible at all, must be found in things in themselves, and if we reflect on the absurdities in which we are then involved ... we cannot blame the good Berkeley for degrading bodies to mere illusion.²⁸

Surely it is no coincidence that Trubetskoi cannot refute "the man who would permit himself to doubt the reality of the world external to him" and that Kant cannot blame the good Berkeley for doing so. Transcendental idealism, by contrast, permits faith in being. "I have therefore found it necessary to deny *knowledge*, in order to make room for *faith*," Kant himself wrote in perhaps his best known lines.²⁹ His concern is that since the forms of space and time (on which

²⁴ S. N. Trubetskoi, "Osnovaniia idealizma," 195.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 218-19.

²⁶ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 441.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 346.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

theoretical knowledge depends) naturalize or phenomenalyze whatever they encompass, their “objective reality” would deny the possibility of a supernatural or transcendent ground of being. This is why Kant claims that even the assumption of God, freedom, and immortality is incompatible (“not permissible”) with the claim to theoretical knowledge of them. Underlying what is perhaps most often seen as a “merely practical” interest in upholding morality is Kant’s ontological contention that transcendental idealism makes possible transcendent being, providing a philosophic basis for faith. In other words, if space and time are real, Heaven is not.

Kant also believes that under transcendental realism, “even our own existence ... would necessarily be changed ... into sheer illusion—an absurdity of which no one has yet been guilty.”³⁰ But Kant is quite sure that he exists, affirming, “I am conscious of myself, not as I appear to myself, nor as I am in myself, but only that I am.”³¹ Transcendental idealism permits this conviction in one’s own being, that is, in the transcendental self; otherwise, with transcendental realism, we would be sure only of the empirical or psychological self experienced (i.e., as an object) in introspection—but precisely this self we cannot be sure of, since like all objects it is not directly intuited but is merely empirical. Kant makes this distinction in arguing that the subject of experience is a focus radically set apart from literally everything, for everything (even an object of thought) is an object for “it.” This capacity for objectivity is so central to experience, including thought (inner experience), that “it” cannot be done away with. The scare quotes around “it” are necessary because even in thinking about this capacity for objectification, for experience, we must objectify the self which has or is this capacity. Kant thus deduces a transcendental or pure self (the transcendental unity of pure apperception), or simply the *I think*, which can never be an object for “itself” because “it” is the very capacity for experience, including thought and introspection.³²

Trubetskoi also follows Kant in this, the Transcendental Deduction. The similarity is striking:

The object of our self-consciousness appears as the “self” in the totality of our internal experience; but, becoming an object, the “self” is thus distinguished from the subject. This is not simple play of words.... An object presupposes a subject, and the object is distinguished from the subject even in our self-consciousness.³³

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 89.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 168.

³² *Ibid.*, 152-55.

³³ S. N. Trubetskoi, “Osnovaniia idealizma,” 225, referring only to “critical philosophy,” not Kant himself (226).

As a result of such objectification, Trubetskoi writes that the subject (the Kantian transcendental self) must be taken on faith.³⁴ Fortunately, transcendental idealism permits such faith.

For Trubetskoi being itself is somehow like the self that transcendental idealism permits us to think is real. All being is mind-like in one way or another. This is the basis for his personalist, spiritualist ontology. Trubetskoi now concludes that nothing is a thing-in-itself. Selves are indeed ends-in-themselves, but they are minds, not “things.” And natural things or objects are phenomena, i.e., they do not exist outside a relation to a subject. Nothing that is not a subject or somehow mind-like exists on its own. Everything is either phenomenal or itself a subject (human, cosmic, or absolute).³⁵ All being must be ideal at one level or another. Something radically non-ideal—a “thing-in-itself” as Trubetskoi now uses the term—would not appear, be accessible, or exist in relation to any consciousness but would be utterly closed off in itself. Like countless philosophers before and after him, Trubetskoi wonders how it is that the mind assimilates something apparently alien to it, and concludes from this, the very possibility of consciousness, that being itself must be mind-like and not a “thing-in-itself.”

Clearly Trubetskoi has permitted himself a sleight of hand. He rejects the possibility of a thing-in-itself, defined as something non-ideal and radically closed-off in itself. Trubetskoi would have us believe that since for Kant phenomena are not things-in-themselves but are ideal (they exist in relation to consciousness), whatever for Kant is a thing-in-itself must be non-ideal—the conception Trubetskoi rejects as inconceivable. However, all that logically follows from Kant’s actual use of the concept is that the thing-in-itself is not ideal in the same way phenomena are; the thing-in-itself cannot be *transcendentally* ideal since that is the definition of phenomena, but it may be ideal in some other way. Nonetheless, in “On the Nature of Human Consciousness” Trubetskoi declares that Plato’s objective idealism, recognizing the ideal nature of true being, must seem naive to Kant. Trubetskoi permits Kant to suppose the possibility of an unknown “something” outside consciousness. “But,” according to this allegedly Kantian point of view, “we have no right whatsoever to assert that this *something* is ... ideal. For in that case, we would have to admit consciousness outside consciousness, that is, a special *transcendent* consciousness together with the subjective consciousness of man.” We would have to admit this, but Kant cannot, Trubetskoi insists.³⁶

Contrasting his view to what he takes (erroneously) as Kant’s, Trubetskoi writes, “if the absolute is ideal, it possesses consciousness, and to that extent is universal consciousness. But then the subjective consciousness of man ceases to be something autonomous and self-sufficient: for absolute consciousness is evi-

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 223-24.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 234-35.

³⁶ S. N. Trubetskoi, “O prirode chelovecheskogo soznaniia,” 54-55.

dently that which grounds, organizes, and serves as the norm for any conditional, limited consciousness.”³⁷ Ironically, in firmly grasping Kant’s demonstration that natural objects are not things-in-themselves, Trubetskoi has badly distorted the other side of Kant’s thought. For Kant had well-defined ideas about the nature of transcendent, absolute consciousness, and moreover he clearly believed that the very possibility of such consciousness (an *intuitus originarius* or *intellectus archetypus*) rested on transcendental idealism (see below).³⁸ Trubetskoi, despite his reservations, reaffirms that it was the “positive, immortal discovery of Kant” to have shown that the natural world is not a thing-in-itself but is made possible by the transcendental, a priori forms and categories of consciousness. Trubetskoi accordingly points “to the necessity of a higher form of idealist theory, reconciling the objective idealism of ancient with the subjective idealism of modern philosophy.”³⁹

Trubetskoi’s own curious efforts in this direction further reveal his intellectual obligation to Kant. Trubetskoi revises Kant’s theory of sensibility in order to overcome what he sees as its mere subjectivity. Regretting that Kant gives no metaphysical ideas about the nature of sensibility,⁴⁰ Trubetskoi transforms the transcendental conception into a Sophiological one. Space and time become forms of the universal—now in the sense of cosmic—sensibility of a world-soul (*Sophia*). For this he draws not only on Vladimir Solov’ev but also Plato, who, “together with the world of ideas, recognized a special principle, the ‘world-soul,’ as the basis of sensible nature and finite consciousness.”⁴¹ Trubetskoi posits this cosmic subject as a more secure ground than human consciousness alone for everything phenomenal. For when we conceive the whole boundless world of phenomena in all its reality and intricacy, “we at once necessarily suppose a *subject* of this world object, as its ‘transcendental,’ metaphysical condition.”⁴²

The “Russianness” of Trubetskoi’s notion of universal sensibility should not dim awareness of its indebtedness to transcendental idealism, to the idea that objects of experience are possible only in relation to a subject. The very possibility of relation between self and other, of the assimilation in consciousness of external reality as “mine,” Trubetskoi elevates into a general principle, “the law of universal correlation.” “Without it the recognition of any reality external to us, or of any subject distinct from us, would be inconceivable,” Trubetskoi writes. “Without it even actual self-consciousness would be impossible.”⁴³ The possibility of correlation between self and not-self is a problem of both philosophy of

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

³⁸ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 89-90.

³⁹ S. N. Trubetskoi, “O prirode chelovecheskogo soznaniia,” 56-57.

⁴⁰ S. N. Trubetskoi, “Osnovaniia idealizma,” 169-70.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 179.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 266.

consciousness and ontology. Neither consciousness nor being is closed off in itself. "To be" means to relate. "All that exists in some relation.... Relation is the basic category of our consciousness and the basic category of being."⁴⁴ We have seen that Trubetskoi rejects the concept of the thing-in-itself as something completely closed off in itself, incapable of relation. Although Kant does not use the concept this way, the necessary relation between subject and object is a deeply Kantian insight to which the Russian philosopher was very much indebted.

Trubetskoi may be right in arguing that Kant's abstract, apparently closed-off, emphasis on consciousness at the phenomenal level facilitated the reductionist, immanentist tendencies in later German idealism. He stresses that his own conception of philosophic idealism gives equal rights to the relative and absolute spheres of being and preserves their necessary distinction (if not utter separation). The relativity of the natural and historical world in space and time is not a mandate to reject it. For only concrete knowledge of relative reality enables us to recognize the absolute and distinguish it from the relative. "Therefore every infringement of the rights of autonomous, empirical study of nature or history leads to the conflation of the absolute with the relative, or else is the result of such conflation." By the same token, empiricism must critically define its own borders, recognize the relativity of experience, not confuse the relative forms of being with their absolute and supra-empirical foundations, and indeed not exclude the possibility of a supra-experiential, rational knowledge of being. Most of all empiricism must guard against becoming a false metaphysics, "rejecting being outside phenomena (absolute phenomenalism), abstractly opposing being as an imaginary 'thing-in-itself' to appearance, or, finally, falsely ascribing to matter, as the basis of appearing reality, absolute substantial being."⁴⁵ Trubetskoi's emphasis on the necessary autonomy and equal rights of the relative and absolute spheres is a distinctly Kantian insight which deeply informed not only theoretical but also social philosophy among neo-idealists in the Moscow Psychological Society. It would in particular be developed by Sergei's brother Evgenii and by Pavel Novgorodtsev into a penetrating critique of utopianism.

Sergei Trubetskoi devoted his last major philosophical essay to one of the implications of concrete, ontological idealism, "Belief in Immortality." In this affirmation that personalism was the main thrust of his whole philosophy, Trubetskoi returned to his considerations of the transcendental self, seeking to reconcile Descartes and Kant. According to Trubetskoi, Descartes was right to have expressed in his famous *cogito ergo sum* the "basic *ontological* supposition of thought," the necessary transition from thought to being, but wrong to have not subjected it to criticism.⁴⁶ For "we cannot know directly the mode of

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 264.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 281-82.

⁴⁶ S. N. Trubetskoi, "Vera v bessmertie," *Sobranie sochinenii Kn. Sergeia Nikolaevicha Trubetskogo*, II, *Filosofskie stat'i*, 410.

the real existence of the self, because the very existence of the self is something preceding our experience and our rational reflection: it is the *subject* and not the *object* of sense and thought.”⁴⁷ Therefore, Trubetskoi repeats on the basis of his earlier formulations, the real existence of the soul cannot be known directly but must be taken on faith. Representations and concepts of the soul are inevitably inadequate images or symbols, which only objectify transcendent reality.

The internal, ontological relation of our soul to the fullness of being is transcendent and pre-conscious in so far as it cannot in itself be for us an object of objective knowledge.... The ontological relation of our cognizing self, our soul, connecting us with the “essence of things” is as concealed from us as this essence itself. It is the root of our being: we do not see this root, we do not know how deep it goes or how it is united in the depths of being with the roots of other beings.⁴⁸

Certainly this recalls Kant’s own speculation about the two stems of human knowledge, sensibility and understanding, “which perhaps spring from a common, but to us unknown, root.”⁴⁹ Even more does it anticipate Karl Jaspers’s interpretation of Kant: “being is invoked as the one root.”⁵⁰

Transcendental Idealism: L. M. Lopatin

Lev M. Lopatin was the senior philosophy professor in the Moscow Psychological Society. He succeeded Grot as chair in 1900, and he was also editor of *Questions of Philosophy and Psychology*. He valued Kant most of all as a *historical* response to naturalism and mechanistic rationalism, the dominant philosophical framework since Descartes.⁵¹ Were the climate of philosophic opinion different, as Lopatin would prefer, Kant would lose much of his relevance. Within Lopatin’s own philosophy of free, creative spiritualism there is not much place for Kant’s theory of knowledge. But the fact that Lopatin felt it necessary to devote as much space as he did to a philosopher whose views as a whole he did not share, and the skill with which he explicates them, speak to Kant’s role in the neo-idealist revolt against naturalism and reductive positivism.

Despite his overall evaluation that Kant’s importance is primarily historical, Lopatin does appreciate that transcendental idealism has a positive significance, as he makes clear in his paper, “Kant’s Theory of Knowledge,” delivered in December 1904 at the Psychological Society’s special Kant meeting.⁵² Lopatin

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 411.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 413.

⁴⁹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 61.

⁵⁰ Karl Jaspers, *Kant* (San Diego, 1962), 28.

⁵¹ L. M. Lopatin, *Kant i ego blizhaishie posledovateli* (Berlin, 1923), 13-14.

⁵² L. M. Lopatin, “Uchenie Kanta o poznanii,” VFP 16: 1, kn. 76 (1905); repr. L. M. Lopatin, *Filosofskie kharakteristiki i rechi* (Moscow, 1911).

singles out two main Kantian theoretical contributions that “comprise a permanent and ineradicable element of the philosophical understanding of the world.”⁵³ First is the a-priority of space and time, Kant’s “immortal service” which, Lopatin emphasizes, makes materialism impossible. Second is the “radical significance of the unity of consciousness for the very possibility of experience.”⁵⁴ More generally Lopatin saw that the noumenal world had great importance for Kant, that it became (“imperceptibly”) an all-encompassing spiritual kingdom for him. Kant’s critique of rationalist metaphysics denies only the possibility of scientific knowledge of metaphysical being, not its very reality. On the contrary Kant tirelessly strived to advance the enormous positive significance behind the Ideas of reason about the soul, God, and freedom.⁵⁵

Although “Kant’s Theory of Knowledge” is a sophisticated and generally sympathetic account, elsewhere in *Kant and His Immediate Followers* (a collection of essays devoted almost entirely to Kant himself) we find another side of Lopatin’s attitude to the German philosopher. We have seen that Lopatin celebrates Kant’s theory of space and time, but in “The Weak Sides of the Transcendental Aesthetic and Analytic” he emphasizes that the phenomenality of space and time was not Kant’s discovery. Idealist and spiritualist philosophers have always recognized that space and time are not absolute forms or properties of all being. Aristotle, for example, “recognized the eternal, self-identical being of God as pure thought in itself, in which there obviously is no place for spatial and temporal relations.”⁵⁶ The impossibility in space and time of divine self-intuition is an important point for Kant as well (see below); it is significant that Lopatin would single out this problem.

The importance Lopatin and the other Psychological Society neo-idealists attached to personalism, when combined with their general acceptance of Kant’s theory of the a-priority of space and time,⁵⁷ meant they had to take account of Kant’s conclusion (specified in most detail in “The Paralogisms of Pure Reason”) that the self cannot be known in its essential nature because it cannot directly intuit itself but is, like all objects of experience (in this case, inner experience), empirical. The self is accessible only as an “object of thought” and not in its pre-objectified state. We have seen the remarkable extent to which Sergei

⁵³ L. M. Lopatin, *Filosofskie kharakteristiki i rechi*, 57.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 61, 64-65.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁷ S. A. Chernov, “Krititsizm i mistitsizm (Obzor kantianstva v zhurnale ‘Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii’),” *Kant i filosofii v Rossii*, ed. Z. A. Kamenskii and V. A. Zhuchkov (Moscow, 1994), 129-34, concentrates on certain aspects of the reception of Kant’s theory of space and time on the pages of *Voprosy filosofii*. Chernov indicates that Solov’ev, Grot, Lopatin, Sergei Trubetskoi, and B. N. Chicherin, among the major Psychological Society philosophers, accepted Kant’s theory, at least in its broad outlines. This can also be said of Novgorodtsev, Evgenii Trubetskoi, and A. A. Kozlov.

Trubetskoi assimilates the Kantian view. N. Ia. Grot and Lopatin rejected it. Grot disputed Kant's claim that time is a necessary form of inner experience that, if so, would prevent immediate knowledge of the soul.⁵⁸ Russian idealists like Grot often pointed to the very awareness of the flow of time, which seems to require a supratemporal perspective, as evidence of the substantiality of the soul.

The basic premise of Lopatin's "system of concrete spiritualism" was that personal substantiality could be taken on the evidence of inner experience.⁵⁹ This did not prevent him from seeing certain merits in Kant's "Paralogisms." In "The Theoretical Foundations of Conscious Moral Life" Lopatin explains why Kant, "one of the greatest dialecticians in all human history,"⁶⁰ both postulated immortality and yet rejected the possibility of theoretical knowledge of the soul's substantiality. Kant's critique of rational psychology, the claim to theoretical knowledge of the real nature of soul, is an inevitable consequence of transcendental idealism, according to which all objects of science are phenomenal. Science cannot make any ontological statements about its objects. "This conclusion is, of course, more dangerous for realism than for any other philosophical theory."⁶¹ Kant's contention that science operates only at the level of phenomena, that nature describes only an empirical reality, permits belief in the substantiality of the soul. Or as Karl Ameriks puts it, "this means not that simple beings are to be dismissed ontologically but rather that they are to be saved—even if their individual determination is ruled out for us."⁶²

Ethics: The Autonomy of the Good and Its Ontological Implications

Russian philosophy has often been seen as having a strong interest in ethics. N. Ia. Grot, in introducing *Questions of Philosophy and Psychology* to the Russian reading public, reviewed the distinctive contributions various national cultures have made to philosophy. "Russians ... are evidently inclined to give preponderance in their *Weltanschauung* to the religious-ethical element," Grot wrote. "But this does not prevent us from hoping to achieve a certain general synthesis among all aspirations of the human spirit under this new point of view."⁶³ If it is true, as Pavel Novgorodtsev wrote later, that "Kant's philosophy is moral phi-

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 130-31. Chernov analyzes here Grot's essay, "O vremeni" VFP 5: 3-5, kn. 23-25 (1894).

⁵⁹ See "The Concept of the Soul on the Evidence of Inner Experience." L. M. Lopatin, "Poniatie o dushe po dannym vnutrennego opyta," VFP 7: 2, (kn. 32) (1896), 264-98.

⁶⁰ L. M. Lopatin, "Teoreticheskie osnovy soznatel'noi нравstvennoi zhizni," VFP 2: 1, kn. 5 (1890), 71.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁶² Karl Ameriks, "The Critique of Metaphysics: Kant and Traditional Ontology," *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge, 1992), 261.

⁶³ N. Ia. Grot, "O zadachakh zhurnala," VFP 1, kn. 1 (1889), xviii.

losophy most of all,”⁶⁴ then we might expect that ethics would be an important part of the neo-idealist reception of Kant in the Moscow Psychological Society.

The autonomy of the good, or genuine ethics, is the center of Kant’s philosophic architectonics. No sense of moral obligation or duty should arise on consistent naturalistic premises, since empirical experience gives no indication of “what ought to be.” Moral consciousness thus contradicts the naturalistic premise that being and nature are co-extensive. From this contradiction Kant postulates God, freedom, and immortality. As Nicholas Lobkowitz writes, “Kant’s whole practical philosophy is nothing but an ontology of supersensible reality—an ontology which is ‘practical’ only because and to the extent that its subject matter cannot be met anywhere in actual experience and therefore takes on the character of an *ideal*, of something which ought to be, although it is not.”⁶⁵ Transcendental idealism, by reconceptualizing space and time as a priori forms of sensibility, demonstrates how the ontological implications of the autonomy of the good are possible. So conceived, space and time define the limits of empirical experience, nature, and theoretical knowledge, leaving room for supra-sensible being beyond those limits. Although transcendental idealism thus rules out dogmatic metaphysics or ontology, which claim theoretical or scientific knowledge of their subject matter, it also provides the very possibility of transcendent or metaphysical being. By contrast, the extension of space and time “everywhere,” as in the Newtonian conception, phenomenalizes or naturalizes being as such.

In the Preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant writes that it may seem that the results of the critical philosophy are merely negative, preventing the extension of theoretical knowledge beyond the limits of experience. This is true.

But such teaching at once acquires a positive value when we recognise that the principles with which speculative reason ventures out beyond its proper limits do not in effect extend the employment of reason, but, as we find on closer scrutiny, inevitably narrow it. These principles properly belong [not to reason but] to sensibility, and when thus employed they threaten to make the bounds of sensibility [space and time] *coextensive with the real*, and so to supplant reason in its pure (practical) employment.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ P. I. Novgorodtsev, *Kant i Gegel' v ikh ucheniakh o prave i gosudarstve. Dva tipicheskikh postroeniia v oblasti filosofii prava* (Moscow, 1901), 89.

⁶⁵ Nicholas Lobkowitz, *Theory and Practice: History of a Concept from Aristotle to Marx* (Notre Dame, 1967), 130.

⁶⁶ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 26 (italics mine).

The critique of theoretical reason is thus propaedeutic to Kant's practical philosophy. Ethics and its ontological implications fall outside the sphere of theoretical knowledge because, according to Kant, such knowledge relies on the forms of space and time, which "in fact, extend only to objects of possible experience and which, *if also applied to what cannot be an object of experience, always really change this into an appearance*, thus rendering all *practical extension* of pure reason impossible."⁶⁷ The claim to theoretical knowledge of metaphysical realities undoes Kant's work, re-naturalizing everything. Thus the importance of the autonomy of the good from theoretical philosophy.

The distinctively Kantian autonomy of ethics provides a measure for differentiation among the Psychological Society philosophers. Vladimir Solov'ev, in his *Justification of the Good* (1897), the most important Russian contribution to moral philosophy, accepts the Kantian conception.⁶⁸ Sergei Trubetskoi similarly embraces the Kantian position. In "Psychological Determinism and Moral Freedom," his approach to and resolution of the problem is almost purely Kantian.⁶⁹ His "Ethics and Dogmatics" is a valiant effort by this man of deep Orthodox faith to interpret Christian morality as meeting the criterion of autonomy.⁷⁰ Lopatin rejected the autonomy of ethics from theoretical philosophy, but otherwise generally admired Kant's moral philosophy.⁷¹

The problem of the autonomy of practical from theoretical reason, and of how it relates to the metaphysical implications to which this very autonomy gives rise, was the subject of a polemic on the pages of *Questions of Philosophy and Psychology* between Pavel Novgorodtsev and Evgenii Trubetskoi, occasioned by Novgorodtsev's book, *Kant and Hegel in Their Theories of State and Law* (1901). Novgorodtsev's normative approach to jurisprudence links the field through natural law to broader issues of the autonomy of moral philosophy, all in an effort to counter positivist and historicist reductionism. In one chapter, published in the journal under the title "The Moral Problem in Kant's Philosophy," Novgorodtsev emphasizes that while theoretical and practical reason circumscribe autonomous spheres, transcendental idealism in fact makes possible genuine ethics: "these are two inseparable parts of an integrated whole."⁷² His

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 29. Italics mine.

⁶⁸ V. S. Solov'ev, *Opravdanie dobra, Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, I (Moscow, 1990), 100. See also Sergius Hessen, "Bor'ba utopii i avtonomii dobra v mirovozzrenii F. Dostoevskogo i Vl. Solov'eva," *Sovremennye zapiski* (Paris) nos. 45-46 (1931); Andrzej Walicki, *Legal Philosophies of Russian Liberalism*, 192-93; and V. V. Lazarev, "Kategoricheskii imperativ I. Kanta i etika V. Solov'eva," *Kant i filosofiia v Rossii*, 42-80.

⁶⁹ S. N. Trubetskoi, "Psikhologicheskii determinizm i npravstvennaia svoboda," *Sobranie sochinenii Kn. Sergeia Nikolaevicha Trubetskogo*, II, *Filosofskie stat'i*, esp. 131-32.

⁷⁰ S. N. Trubetskoi, "Etika i dogmatika," *Sobranie sochinenii Kn. Sergeia Nikolaevicha Trubetskogo*, II, especially 147-49.

⁷¹ See L. M. Lopatin, "Npravstvennoe uchenie Kanta," VFP 1, kn. 4 (1890).

⁷² P. I. Novgorodtsev, *Kant i Gegel' v ikh ucheniakh o prave i gosudarstve*, 77. Also see "Npravstvennaia problema v filosofii Kanta," VFP 12: 2, kn. 57 (1901).

formulation of the autonomy of ethics proceeds by way of Kant's revision of the correspondence theory of truth; with Kant truth consists in the correspondence of reason with itself, not with things outside it.⁷³ The criteria of ethics were also thought to derive from knowledge of the external world, but once the measure of truth is internal to reason then "it becomes perfectly understandable that moral consciousness can find its own truth inside itself, rather than seeking it in the external world."⁷⁴ The autonomy of moral consciousness rests on the a priori idea of "what ought to be" (*dolzhnoe*, *dolzhenstvovanie*, *das Sollen*). At times Novgorodtsev tries too hard to make his point, as in writing, "it would be incorrect to think that in moral conclusions Kant saw a certain *knowledge*.... Of knowledge here there can be no talk."⁷⁵ Such categorical statements, imprecise with regard to Kant, no doubt sharpened Trubetskoi's response.

Trubetskoi's review is a significant essay that sheds considerable light on his general relation to Kant. Trubetskoi himself was a leading advocate of the contemporary Russian revival of natural law and welcomed Novgorodtsev's contribution. He agrees that natural law entails a commitment to an autonomous principle in ethics, and that in this Kant's moral philosophy is indispensable.⁷⁶ According to Trubetskoi, "if under the autonomy of the ethical principle is meant the *a-priority* of the idea of 'what ought to be' [*dolzhnoe*], the irreducibility of this idea to any data of internal or external experience, then, of course, with this it is impossible not to agree."⁷⁷

Trubetskoi calls the autonomy of moral will Kant's great discovery, but he hastens to add that here his agreement with Kant and Novgorodtsev ends, first of all because they draw too sharply the dualism of theoretical and practical reason. True, scientific explanation of phenomena and moral evaluation must be precisely distinguished, but from this it in no way follows that ethics falls outside the sphere of scientific knowledge in general. The opposition is not between ethics and science, only between ethics and the positive sciences of natural phenomena. Theoretical knowledge yielding precise conclusions about not only ethics but also metaphysics is possible. Trubetskoi objects, therefore, when "Mr. Novgorodtsev denies the possibility of any methodical activity of reason and, consequently, the possibility of scientific knowledge beyond the limits of experience; the boundaries of science for him coincide with the sphere of phenomena," precisely as they do for Kant. From this point of view it is necessary, Trubetskoi writes, "to reject all attempts at theoretical analysis and theoretical substantiation [*obosnovanie*] of morality."⁷⁸ We shall see that Novgorodtsev, in respond-

⁷³ Novgorodtsev, *Kant i Gegel*, 78.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁷⁶ E. N. Trubetskoi, "Novoe issledovanie o filosofii prava Kanta i Gegelia," VFP 13: 1, kn. 61 (1902), 585.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 589.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 590-91.

ing to Trubetskoi, more carefully distinguishes between theoretical *analysis* and *substantiation* of ethics.

Trubetskoi claims that Kant himself was the first to violate the limits he placed on theoretical knowledge. Although Kant rejected the possibility of metaphysics, the *Critique of Pure Reason* is replete with metaphysical elements. Specifically, “he asserted the unknowability of the thing-in-itself; but this assertion itself already makes a cognitive judgment about it: were the thing-in-itself *only* a concept of our understanding, it would be fully knowable; it is possible to speak of the unknowability of the thing-in-itself only on the presupposition of its existence independent of us.” This significant comment indicates that Trubetskoi appreciated that for Kant the thing-in-itself is unknowable because of its very nature as a transcendent ontological reality. Moreover, Trubetskoi continues, Kant’s claim that the sphere of moral obligation (*dolzhenstvovanie*) is inaccessible to theoretical substantiation did not hinder him from writing his “work of genius,” *The Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*. In general Kant’s moral *theory* is a blatant violation of his own limits to theoretical investigation. In another significant passage, Trubetskoi notes that Kant himself affirmed that pure practical reason (specifically) cannot be an object of a critique of practical reason (generally) or of any critique, because the very task of critical analysis is to *prove the existence* of pure practical reason.⁷⁹ In this Trubetskoi suggests he recognizes that Kant’s largely analytic method aimed at explicating what pure practical reason (metaphysical in its violation of the laws of nature) entails or what, in other words, needs to obtain for it to be possible.

Trubetskoi’s criteria for theoretical knowledge are rather loose; certainly they are not confined to the limits of space and time. “If we can state precisely-based cognitive judgments about the idea of ‘what ought to be,’ if we can precisely know, for example, that this idea is trans-empirical, then how,” Trubetskoi asks, “can we assert after this that it ‘leaves the sphere of scientific knowledge?’”⁸⁰ And the metaphysical postulates Kant drew from moral experience are, for Trubetskoi, even more plainly theoretical statements about being. Trubetskoi raises important terminological and substantive issues. His term, “theoretical knowledge,” extends to what Kant maintains we are entitled to think or rationally believe but not to know theoretically. For Kant space and time define the limits of theoretical knowledge. As we have seen, one of his reasons—the main reason, it would seem—behind this delimitation is that space and time naturalize or “always really change into an appearance” whatever they encompass. As a result space and time must not threaten to be “coextensive with the real.” Therefore it might be said that, in denying the possibility of metaphysics as a science, Kant was trying to save metaphysics (as transcendent being) from itself (as science).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 591-92.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 593.

Since Trubetskoi explicitly accepts Kant's theory of the a-priority of space and time, at issue is whether he appreciates what is at stake in talking about theoretical knowledge of transcendent being without at the same time specifying whether he has in mind some type of more general theoretical knowledge that does not fall under the forms of space and time. If he does mean that—as his references to “cognitive judgments” might imply—then the difference between him and Kant is more semantic than substantial, in which case Trubetskoi uses the term “theoretical” but intends something closer to Kant's non-theoretical “thinking that.” However, Trubetskoi's terminological imprecision here suggests he does not fully appreciate the ontological significance of transcendental idealism. For he writes that Kant's philosophy is caught in a vicious circle. To the question “how is ethics possible?” the *Critique of Practical Reason* answers, “by free will, immortality and the existence of God.” But according to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, “these presuppositions in themselves possess no certainty [*dostovernost*]; they take their certainty from the very same moral consciousness for which they serve as a support.”⁸¹ It is true that Kant postulates free will, immortality and God from moral consciousness; but it is also true that transcendental idealism, by reconceptualizing nature, explicates how the ontological implications of ethics are possible. Novgorodtsev appreciates this intricate connection; Trubetskoi does not (as it seems here).

In his response to Trubetskoi, “Ethics and Knowledge,” Novgorodtsev himself contends that the basic difference between him and his critic “lies in a certain terminological misunderstanding.”⁸² For Novgorodtsev the crux of the problem consists in Trubetskoi's failure to distinguish theoretical analysis of ethics, which is not a threat to autonomy, from theoretical substantiation, which is. Analysis of moral consciousness violates the autonomy of the primary experience no more than analysis of religious feeling. “Philosophy of religion and moral philosophy do not themselves occasion the concrete and living content of religious and moral feeling, but on the contrary presuppose this content and only seek to clarify its elements.”⁸³ Immediate moral and religious consciousness is primary; theory is not adequate to this testimony and cannot prove or refute the reality to which it speaks.⁸⁴ Theoretical analysis can, however, explicate what it means (or takes) for this reality to be possible. For Kant it meant (or took) transcendental idealism.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 594-95.

⁸² P. I. Novgorodtsev, “Moral' i poznanie,” VFP 13: 4, kn. 64 (1902), 826.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 828.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 829.

Kant and the Ontological Direction in Russian Philosophy

The ontological direction in Russian philosophy has long been recognized as one of its most distinctive features. According to A. F. Losev, the major historian of philosophy during the Soviet period, "Russian philosophy is, first of all, sharply and unconditionally *ontological*."⁸⁵ Losev was no Kantian, and in fact characterizations of Russian philosophy as ontological have most often been made in opposition to Kantian influences. Thus, V. V. Zenkovsky, introducing his monumental history of Russian philosophy, writes, "With the exception of a small group of orthodox Kantians, Russian philosophers have tended in the solution of epistemological problems to *ontologism*."⁸⁶ N. A. Berdiaev drew a similar opposition in his 1904 essay, "On the New Russian Idealism," which differentiates between two idealist directions in Russia: "one is decisively metaphysical, with attraction to a religion of the transcendent, the other is ethical-epistemological, drifting in the channel of Kantian transcendental idealism."⁸⁷ Berdiaev celebrates the first direction as a distinctively Russian ontological idealism. At times the juxtaposition of the Russian ontological orientation and Kantianism has been rather shrill, as in Vladimir Ern's "From Kant to Krupp" (1914)⁸⁸ and E. N. Trubetskoi's memoirs, in which Trubetskoi compares neo-Kantianism, the official German academic establishment, to the tasteless modern skyscrapers then being built by the Bolsheviks, all in contrast to the bygone world of Lopatin's cozy villa.⁸⁹

The widespread tendency among Russian philosophers to read Kant through the phenomenalist currents dominant in post-Kantian German thought is a convincing historical explanation for the opposition they commonly drew between Kant himself and their own "concrete" ontological conviction in the irreducibility of being to abstract rationalism and in its accessibility to a more integral concept of experience. At the same time, they generally recognized that the problem of being was central in determining Kant's relation to his German successors. E. N. Trubetskoi, for example, although he often confused Kant, absolute idealism, and neo-Kantianism, could also maintain that the disappearance of transcendent being began in fact with Fichte, not Kant.

⁸⁵ A. F. Losev, "Osnovnye osobennosti russkoi filosofii," *Filosofia. Mifologiya. Kultura* (Moscow, 1991), 509.

⁸⁶ V. V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, I, 5 (also see vol. II, 470).

⁸⁷ N. A. Berdiaev, "O novom russkom idealizme," VFP 15: 5, kn. 75 (1904), 684.

⁸⁸ V. F. Ern, *Sochineniia* (Moscow, 1991, *Voprosy filosofii* supplement series), 308-18. On Ern's lecture, see Jutta Scherrer, *Die Petersburger religiös-philosophischen Vereinigungen. Die Entwicklung des religiösen Selbstverständnisses ihrer Intelligencija-Mitglieder (1901-1917)* (Berlin, 1973), 338-40.

⁸⁹ E. N. Trubetskoi, *Vospominaniia* (Sofia, 1921; repr. Newtonville, Mass., 1976), 184. Michael A. Meerson, "Put' against Logos: The Critique of Kant and Neo-Kantianism by Russian Religious Philosophers in the Beginning of the Twentieth Century," *Studies in East European Thought*, 47 (1995), 225-43.

Having rejected the concept of the thing-in-itself, *as being independent of consciousness*, he [Fichte] tries to understand the universe as the manifestation of a single principle, the result of the self-affirmation of the absolute self.... In Fichte's hands the critique of pure reason is transformed into a system of idealist monism.⁹⁰

Even so trenchant a critic of Kant as S. A. Askol'dov makes clear that the first thesis of German neo-Kantianism,

which can be called the "*position of immanence*," consists in the assertion that ... generally there is nothing in the sphere of being beyond the limits of consciousness and thought, that is, nothing transcendent to them. This thesis is the newest in relation to Kant, who affirmed only the unknowability of the transcendent, but did not clearly or categorically reject its existence.⁹¹

Berdiaev, too, tried to recognize the difference: "For certain factions of neo-Kantianism being is a ... fiction; for others it is unknowable; a third, like Kant himself, postulates a spiritualistic concept of being, not having any basis for this in their theory of knowledge."⁹² These statements all speak to the uncertainty among Russian idealists about Kant's relation to their own ontological direction.

If Russian "ontologism" is taken to mean, as Berdiaev puts it, "a return to realism and ontological objectivism,"⁹³ and includes a place for Lenin, as Zenkovsky admits,⁹⁴ then it is plainly incompatible with Kant's philosophy and tends to exclude serious attention to epistemology. A broadly-conceived ontological idealism is not, however, inconsistent with Kant. Sergius Hessen, a prominent Russian neo-Kantian (specifically of the Baden school) who helped establish and edit the Russian section of the international journal *Logos*,⁹⁵ distin-

⁹⁰ E. N. Trubetskoi, "Novoe issledovanie o filosofii prava Kanta i Gegelia," 597 (italics mine).

⁹¹ S. A. Askol'dov, "Vnutrennii krizis transtsendental'nogo idealizma," VFP 25: 5, kn. 125 (1914), 787.

⁹² N. A. Berdiaev, "O novom russkom idealizme," 704.

⁹³ N. A. Berdiaev, *Filosofia svobody* (Moscow, 1989, *Voprosy filosofii* supplement series), 35.

⁹⁴ Zenkovsky, II, 470.

⁹⁵ A. I. Abramov, "O russkom kantianstve i neokantianstve v zhurnale 'Logos,'" *Kant i filosofia v Rossii*, 227-47, provides a good overview. The *Logos* group defined its program in epistemological and methodological terms, in opposition to the neo-Slavophile religious-ontological focus of the Moscow publishing house *Put'* (established like *Logos* in 1910). *Logos* proved unable, however, to preserve the purity of its neo-Kantian direction, softening its earlier sharp criticism of *Put'* and seeking common points of view. This change in editorial policy is compelling testimony to the strength of the ontological direction in Russian philosophy.

guished between ontological and transcendental idealist directions in Russian philosophy but added that they were not irreconcilable. Writing in 1923, he observes that, “already by the time of the world war it was possible to note an interesting phenomenon—the drawing together and emerging mutual interpenetration of the two basic directions.”⁹⁶ In fact an analogous “interesting phenomenon” had by then long been underway among neo-idealists in the Moscow Psychological Society—a development no doubt facilitated by another circumstance Hessen notes, that *Questions of Philosophy and Psychology* was a neutral meeting ground for representatives of the two different directions. Hessen singles out Pavel Novgorodtsev as one of the journal’s outstanding contributors. His thought, Hessen writes, carries every quality of a new religious-ontological direction that a representative of transcendental idealism might make.

One of these qualities is a distinctive conviction in the transcendence of the fullness or plenitude of being. This criterion helps distinguish what might be called “unreformed ontologism” (Ern and Berdiaev) from its Kantian revision among leading neo-idealists in the Moscow Psychological Society. We have seen that Russian philosophers were highly critical of the phenomenalist reduction of being to consciousness in absolute idealism and neo-Kantianism. This basic ontological approach does not necessarily imply intersection with Kant (it could and did take the form of realism), but it can also combine with transcendental idealism to yield a firm conviction in the transcendence of being. It is easy to see how: according to the Kantian critique, space and time are forms of consciousness while, according to the Russian ontological critique, being is not reducible to consciousness. Russian philosophers who combined both insights were thus reinforced in their belief in transcendent being beyond space and time.

This combination was common among neo-idealists in the Moscow Psychological Society. For all the polemics he directed against Kantianism, E. N. Trubetskoi claimed that the “permanent truth” of Kant’s Copernican discovery was that the a priori forms and concepts of consciousness enable experience in the first place.⁹⁷ At the same time the idea of transcendence was for Trubetskoi a basic principle of both theory of knowledge and ontology. He took empiriocriticism as an example of how the abandonment of transcendence in phenomenism (or immanentism) inevitably leads to false absolutes and bad metaphysics: “In the end sensations are here turned into *being itself*: thereby the immanentism of the empiriocritics crosses into its opposite—ontology, and, moreover, an extraordinarily coarse and dogmatic ontology.”⁹⁸

⁹⁶ S. I. Hessen, “Nejnovejsi ruská filosofie,” *Ruch filosoficky*, no. 1 (1923), 14–19. Russian typescript original passed on to me courtesy of Professor Andrzej Walicki.

⁹⁷ E. N. Trubetskoi, *Metafizicheskie predpolozheniia poznaniia. Opyt preodoleniia Kanta i kantianstva* (Moscow, 1917), 13.

⁹⁸ E. N. Trubetskoi, *Mirosozertsanie Vl.S. Solov’eva*, I (Moscow, 1913), 233.

Kant himself, as I have argued at several points in this essay, clearly appreciated the ontological significance of transcendental idealism in that it provided the very possibility of transcendent being and thus justified the metaphysical postulates of moral experience. Transcendental idealism also met Kant's distinct but closely-related concern that since space and time mediate or phenomenalize whatever they encompass, their "objective reality" (transcendental realism) would exclude the possibility of an unmediated, certain ground of being.⁹⁹ If space and time are more than a priori forms of sensibility, being is everywhere removed from itself and "abstract"; nowhere can it be immediately in touch with itself and directly, concretely accessed (self-accessed). To be sure of itself, being must be its own self-certainty, which is impossible in space and time. Kant links this ontological contention to an important second edition addendum to the *Transcendental Aesthetic*: "In natural theology, in thinking an object [God], who not only can never be an object of intuition to us but cannot be an object of sensible intuition even to himself, we are careful to remove the conditions of time and space from his intuition—for all his knowledge must be intuition, and not *thought*, which always involves limitations."¹⁰⁰ Space and time, in preventing God's self-intuition, would violate his very nature as unmediated, self-identical being, being that directly intuit itself as being and is its own ontological self-certainty. In other words, God must be noumenal, not phenomenal.

This idea of an *intuitus originarius* or *intellectus archetypus* lies at the basis of E. N. Trubetskoi's study, *The Metaphysical Premises of Knowledge: An Attempt at Transcending Kant and Kantianism* (1917). Trubetskoi observes that the nature of human consciousness is abstraction or objectivity, a capacity that the forms of space and time themselves provide (or necessitate). Our "abstract," mediated intuition thus presupposes an absolute consciousness, transcendent to space and time, that would be "concrete," that is, self-identical or directly intuitive.¹⁰¹ It is transcendental idealism that permits such a metaphysical premise in the first place by limiting space and time to a priori forms of human consciousness. For this reason Trubetskoi writes of his own study that "it not only does not repudiate the 'transcendental method' but recognizes its necessity and takes it for the first time to its logical end."¹⁰² He does not, however, acknowledge that Kant already arrived at this logical end in contrasting our mediated, spatiotemporal intuition (perception) to divine self-intuition.

The ontological direction in Russian philosophy was linked, in some of its main representatives, to the strong apophatic tradition in Orthodox thought. Apophatic (or negative) theology emphasizes the unknowability of God, the in-

⁹⁹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 29, 88-91, 345-52, 439-43 (for example).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

¹⁰¹ E. N. Trubetskoi, *Metafizicheskie predpolozheniia poznaniia*, 23-26, 325-31.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 308.

adequacy of human conceptual categories to the divine. This may be compared to Kant's concept of the noumenal as that which transcends space and time and therefore the necessary forms of theoretical knowledge.¹⁰³ We have seen that Kant insists God is not an object of such knowledge—for if that were possible he would not be. That the apophatic and noumenal delimitations share an ontological *raison d'être* was suggested in 1915 by the major Russian religious philosopher Sergei N. Bulgakov. He included a section on Kant in his essay, "Negative Theology." "Translated into religious language, that is, into the language of negative theology," Bulgakov wrote, "the Kantian doctrine of the thing-in-itself, establishing the rights of faith ('practical reason') and opening the door to mysticism, receives very special significance." This significance, Bulgakov continues, consists in restoring what Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and the neo-Kantians, each in their own way, tried to eradicate: the transcendence of the divine and its mystery.¹⁰⁴

Kant exerted powerful influence on the development of neo-idealism in the Moscow Psychological Society. At the same time his reception there brings out certain insights of his philosophy which are lost in post-Kantian German thought. This demonstrates the merits of an explicitly cultural-historical approach to the history of philosophy, an approach that seeks to understand how the relative peculiarities of a national philosophic culture affect the reception and development of ideas.¹⁰⁵ In the case of Kant in Russia, these peculiarities include the strong ethical, ontological, and apophatic currents in Russian philosophy and theology. They reveal Kant in fresh perspective, through which it becomes clearer that the noumenal is a limiting concept epistemologically because it is, first of all, an enabling concept ontologically.

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¹⁰³ See Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense* (New Haven, 1983), 242, and Don Cupitt, "Kant and the Negative Theology," *The Philosophical Frontiers of Christian Theology*, ed. Brian Hebblethwaite and Stewart Sutherland (Cambridge, 1982), 55-67. Two Russian scholars have recently compared Kant to the ontological and apophatic currents in Russian philosophy and theology: T. B. Dlugach, "Problema vremeni v filosofii I. Kanta i P. Florenskogo," *Kant i filosofii v Rossii*, 186-211; and A. V. Akhutin, "Sofia i chert (Kant pered litsom russkoi religioznoi metafiziki)," *Voprosy filosofii*, no. 1 (1990), repr. in *Rossia i Germaniia. Opyt filosofskogo dialoga*, ed. V. A. Lektorskii (Moscow, 1993), 207-47. Akhutin's essay has been translated: "Sophia and the Devil: Kant in the Face of Russian Religious Metaphysics," *Soviet Studies in Philosophy*, 29 (1991), 59-89.

¹⁰⁴ S. N. Bulgakov, "'Otritsatel'noe bogoslovie,'" VFP 26: 1, kn. 126 (1915), 5, 83-84.

¹⁰⁵ See John Passmore, "The Idea of a History of Philosophy," *History and Theory*. Beiheft 5: *The Historiography of the History of Philosophy* (1965).