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The Lack of Moral Autonomy in the Russian Concept of Personality: A Case of Continuity across the Pre-Revolutionary, Soviet and Post-Soviet Periods?¹

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The Soviet Union experienced its revival of the notion of personality (lichnost') in Soviet academic discourse in the 1960s. Due to the fact that all these changes were embedded within the Soviet discourse of the scientific-technological revolution, this article takes a closer look at the specific twist the context might have given to the idea of the 'all-round developed personality.' The Soviet concept of the person is torn between an ardent faith in the creative individuality of the 'new man' and a deep mistrust of man's ability to rise up to this expectation, let alone by autonomous initiative. Therefore Zwahlen argues that the Soviet concept of personality lacked neither concepts of individuality nor creativity, but rather a concept of 'moral autonomy' of the type associated with Kantian philosophy. Moreover, the lack of a concept of moral au-

1. An earlier version of this paper was given at the 45th Annual Convention of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies, Boston, November 21–24, 2013, as part of the panel “The Scientific-Technological Revolution: More than Technology? Social and Moral Thought in the Late Soviet Union.” A version of the paper was also presented in absentia at the international conference “The Varieties of Russian Modernity II: Religion, State, and Approaches to Pluralism in Russian Contexts” held at the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration in Moscow on May 14–16, 2014. I thank Elena Aronova, Stefan Guth, Christopher Stroop, and the two anonymous reviewers for *State, Religion and Church* for helpful comments that contributed to improving this article.

tonomy can be observed not only in the Soviet, but also in the Russian notion of personality in general. The article concludes with brief reflection on some consequences of this diagnosis for Russian contexts today.

Keywords: personality, *lichnost'*, Russian philosophy, Soviet academic discourse, scientific-technological revolution, moral autonomy, Nikolai Berdyaev, Karl Marx, Immanuel Kant, enlightenment.

THE title of this paper recalls the Western stereotype that the prominent Russian philosopher Nikolai Aleksandrovich Berdyaev often complained about: “There are tropes that are constantly repeated and seem to be convincing. Such a trope exists for Western people about Russia as a country in which there is no personality or only a weakly developed one. Russia appears to be the faceless East” (Berdiaev 1996: 235). This article is not meant to be another argument in this vein. Most contemporary scholars in Russian philosophy subscribe to the view that “philosophical reflection concerning the person has been at the heart of the history of ideas in Russia” (Plotnikov 2012: 270).² Even the Soviet Union experienced its revival of the notion of personality (*lichnost'*) in academic discourse in the 1960s. This phenomenon has been commented upon by several scholars. Some of them tend to see this and even Gorbachev’s later revival of the “human factor” as merely formal changes in ideology: “Doubts whether Gorbachev’s ‘changes’ are genuinely revolutionary, i.e., are changing something essential in the system, derive from the fact that appeals similar to Gorbachev’s and actions, projects, and promises of a similar nature have been repeated before so many times” (Heller 1988: xvii). But more recent studies speak of a “creative development” of Soviet Marxism-Leninism that derived mainly from the attempt to integrate a new concept of person into the social concept of socialism, that is, to develop a “personalized sociocentrism” that would become a “sociocentric personalism” later (Świdorski 2011: 153–54, 163; see also Buchholz 1961; Larson 1981; Bikbov 2014; Gerovitch 2007). In his latest book, Alexander Bikbov develops a historical sociology of notions

2. See also the following assertion by the editors of the recent volume *A History of Russian Philosophy, 1830–1930: Faith, Reason, and the Defense of Human Dignity*: “We would claim that Russian philosophy as a whole constitutes an extended dialogue on human dignity, with many philosophers defending it against those political institutions and ideas that were not adverse to reducing human beings to mere instruments, that is, to means for achieving large political or social objectives” (Hamburg and Poole 2010: 4).

“that change our reality.” He dedicates a whole chapter to the development of the notion of personality and how it changed Soviet social reality, especially in the late 1970s: “The growing value of the ‘person’ within the conceptual grid of the late Soviet period provides evidence that such changes were a far cry from a mere rhetorical veneer over a hard orthodox core. [...] The political history and the critical sociology of the notion of the ‘person’ again testifies that the Soviet regime was not a monolith, but a complex of alternatives and competing projects” (Bikbov 2014: 395, 404).

Due to the fact that all these changes were embedded within the Soviet discourse of the scientific-technological revolution, I would like to take a closer look at the specific twist this context might have given to the idea of the “all-round developed personality” put forth in the Third Party Program of the Twenty-Second Party Congress in 1961. At this time, the German scholar Arnold Buchholz assumed that the more Marxist ideology — ethics, sociology, psychology, and so on — focused on the “all-round developed person,” the more complex anthropological questions would emerge and the more paradoxes within communist ideology would come to light (Buchholz 1961: 32, 191). I would agree that indeed, the concept pushed communist ideology to its limits, “because a more substantial concept of the person cannot comply with a one-sided ‘collectivist’ concept of social reality” (Świdorski 2011: 158).

According to the common stereotype, the reason for this lay in the fact that the Soviet notion of personality lacked concepts of *individuality*, *creativity* and *ethics*: “In Marxism the priority of labor conditions a *collectivist* disposition. On the contrary, the predominant priority of man in non-Marxist thought has as a consequence an *individualistic* tendency. From these essentially different prior commitments, opposing consequences follow: whereas non-Marxist thought proceeds from an originary *autonomy* of the person, in Marxism it is a derivative of *communality* — more exactly of society which lacking an ethic is not necessarily a community” (Dahm 1982: 45, my italics). However, by juxtaposing individualism and collectivism, Dahm implies that the notions of individualism and autonomy are mostly synonymous, which limits the vision for the central problem concerning the differences between “Western” and “Russian” concepts of personality. In my view, the Soviet concept of personality lacked neither concepts of individuality nor creativity.³ What it did lack though, first and

3. Nor did it lack “subjectivity” — see the debate among historians about Jochen Hellbeck and Igal Halfin’s concept of “Soviet subjectivity” in the Stalin era: Nathans 2013: 177;

foremost, was the concept of “moral autonomy” associated with Kantian philosophy: “Not the single individual as such is at stake but the individual as capable of realizing universal practical norms (according to Kant, ‘humanity proper to your person as well as of each and every other person’). The personality of the person is thus the capacity of the human individual to act as a ‘rational being’” (Plotnikov 2012: 274).

The Soviet concept of the person is torn between an ardent faith in the creative individuality (*tvorcheskaia lichnost'*) of the “new man” and a deep mistrust with regard to man’s ability to rise up to this expectation, let alone by autonomous initiative. As Slava Gerovitch has argued, Soviet ideological discourse after Stalinism preserved its fundamental ambivalence with regard to man by promoting a kind of “disciplined initiative”: “The new man had to be both an active agent of change and a disciplined member of the collective” (Gerovitch 2007: 138, 155). Erich Solov'ev speaks of a “personalism cum grano salis” among the Soviet philosophers during the Thaw: “a personalism within the limits of the Marxian claim about the human being as an ‘ensemble of social relations’” (Świdorski 2011: 152–53).

Hence, despite some “creative development” of Soviet thought, there is a certain continuity with regard to an ambivalent concept of personality within earlier and later Soviet ideological discourse. While this assumption may seem obvious, I would like to go even further and argue, first, that the lack of a concept of moral autonomy can be observed not only in the Soviet, but also in the Russian notion of personality in general. Second, I will argue that the lack of such a concept of moral autonomy becomes apparent in the late Soviet concept of the “all-round developed personality” because of the special emphasis that was laid on human creativity enhanced by the scientific-technological revolution. Third, I will reflect on some consequences of this diagnosis for Russian contexts today: if pluralism is a condition fundamental to modernity, then the moral concept of autonomy is a condition fundamental to pluralism.

One may question what is to be gained by dwelling on the lack of a concept of moral autonomy in late Soviet official discourse, where such a lack may seem obvious. In my opinion, this is nevertheless intriguing, because one can trace the roots of this discourse back to pre-revolutionary Russian thought and at the same time expose Russian thought’s confrontation with the conditions of modernity, includ-

Ab Imperio 3 (2002): 213–408; Naiman 2001; Etkind 2005. About Soviet individuality, see Kharkhordin 1999.

ing autonomy as one of modernity's central features. Distrust of the concept of autonomy is more intuitively associated with anti-modern stances focusing on "traditional values" than with the "pro-modern" stance taken by the Soviet Union through its urgent striving to play a vanguard role within modernity (by "catching up and overtaking the West") and by promoting the scientific-technological revolution for the sake of human progress.⁴ Last but not least, late Soviet discourse is the direct ancestor of today's Russian discourse, which is marked by the defense of "traditional values."

Moral Autonomy as a Key Concept of Modernity

My somewhat provocative argument is based on one of the conclusions of a recent German-Russian research project on the conceptual history of the Russian concept of personality: it concludes that this notion lacks one of the typical aspects of the semantics of "personhood" as conceptualized in the West, namely "autonomy" as a "general property of man (that is, every rational being) to be the subject of his/her actions" (Plotnikov 2012: 274). Considering the importance of this concept in Western discourse — and the fact of its being not without controversy in the West only underlines its importance — I suggest that the notion of autonomy and its interpretations represents a fruitful starting point for a discussion of the conditions of pluralism in Russian contexts. Without a concept of "moral autonomy" and respect for the humanity and sovereignty of each person, pluralism is not possible. In other words, if the diagnosis of a lack of a concept of autonomy in Russian culture is true, this would be a rather serious issue to be addressed, not only with regard to Russian but to Western discourse as well, because the "emergence of Russian philosophical terminology in the 1830s–1840s was influenced by the reception of German Idealism as well as the Romantic movement" (Plotnikov 2012: 277). Idealism and Romanticism remain strong pillars of West European concepts of the person and as such still influence a wide variety of interpretations of the concept of human dignity in Western discourse as well (Bielefeldt 2011: 75–76). According to Kant, "the capacity to give moral principles through one's will is the basis of human dignity" (Reath 1998: 2). But if dignity is linked to some traditional hierarchy or to a certain personal performance needed in order to *gain* dignity

4. See Stefan Guth (2015) on the gulf between aspiration and reality with regard to the social consequences of the scientific-technological revolution.

(for which Friedrich Schiller’s “On Grace and Dignity” is an example [see Bielefeldt 2011: 74]), then we are not speaking about human dignity as a universal attribute or a capacity inherent to every person. As already mentioned, I suggest that many misunderstandings with regard to the notion of human dignity are due to a lack of differentiation between the notions of autonomy and individuality. According to Tzvetan Todorov, *individualism* is about asserting “the rights of the personal will without worrying about the inherently social life of men.” It is a striving for independence, while (*moral*) *autonomy* in the Kantian sense recognizes society, because it recognizes the moral autonomy of other persons: “Autonomy is a liberty contained by fraternity and equality” (Todorov 2002: 228–29, 232).

I will not provide evidence for the main assertion that “autonomy” “occurs in Russian conceptual history only as subordinate moment” (Plotnikov 2012: 275).⁵ I will concentrate on the concept of personal-ity in the official academic discourse of the late Soviet period, in which a certain diversification of society took place (Bikbov 2014: 404; Guth 2015), and, concomitantly, the need for a concept of autonomy became urgent, because in modern Soviet society it was becoming more and more difficult to emphasize concepts of individuality and creativity without an assumption of moral autonomy.

But first, I will have to clarify the notion of “moral autonomy” itself. I will treat the concept fairly broadly, assuming that *moral* autonomy as a “capacity for self-governance or self-determination” may be viewed as the basis of most other descriptive notions of *personal* autonomy, such as the “actual condition of self-governance” and the notions of “personal ideal,” “right,” and “social value” (Reath 1998: 3). If social institutions do not respect each person’s *capacity to act on basic desires and values that they have critically assessed and endorsed*, that is, on moral autonomy, then personal autonomy, as the *right* to act on one’s own judgment without interference by others, will not be granted at all. It seems to me that Kant’s famous answer to the question “What is Enlightenment?” includes both moral and personal autonomy:

Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-imposed nonage. Nonage is the inability to use one’s own understanding without another’s guidance. This nonage is self-imposed if its cause lies not in lack of un-

5. Berdiaev would likely have agreed: “What Fichte and men like him did for the Germans has yet to be accomplished for the Russians: effective ideas of responsibility, self-discipline, and spiritual autonomy have still to be given to them” (Berdyayev 1936: 222).

derstanding but in indecision and lack of courage to use one's own mind without another's guidance. Dare to know! (*Sapere aude.*) 'Have the courage to use your own understanding,' is therefore the motto of the enlightenment." (Kant 1784)⁶

In the following, I draw on Andrew Reath's assessment of the concept of autonomy, that the opportunity to guide one's actions by exercise of one's capacity for critical reflection is considerably more complex than simply acting on one's own desires. Hence "any values are consistent with autonomy, as long as one accepts them on one's own. [...] The capacity for autonomy is so central to agency that respect for persons is plausibly construed as respect for the exercise of this capacity" (Reath 1998: 1–4). This concept of autonomy neither means that the value of autonomy is inconsistent with other values or commitments, nor that it necessarily leads to an overestimation of one's abilities — on the contrary, Kant himself pointed out that autonomy was a "disagreeable business," because men were too lazy and too cowardly to think for themselves (Kant 1784). What is meant by moral autonomy is the capacity for critical reflection on natural, social and other factors that influence one's agency. Awareness of one's own and others' moral autonomy may actually lead to a more modest attitude with regard to our own judgment (Bielefeldt 2011: 91), and it does not preclude "agents from [...] concluding that certain commitments and ties are inescapable because constitutive of who they are" (Reath 1998: 4).

Hence, in the wake of the Enlightenment, modern thought put "moral weight on an individual's ability to govern herself, independent of her place in a metaphysical order or her role in social structures and political institutions" (Christman 2011: 1). But while Soviet scholars claimed that the Soviet ideal of the "all-round developed personality" had emerged out of the Enlightenment and would experience a rebirth on a new socio-economic, socialist basis (Buslov 1978: 268), the Soviet concept lacked this one main feature of the Enlightenment, that is, autonomy, even if it was mentioned in Soviet treatises. Such is the conclusion of Jon Erik Larson's work about the Soviet

6. Formosa rejects the claim that personal autonomy has no legitimate role in Kant's ethical framework, which is usually associated only with moral autonomy (Formosa 2013: 209): "Kant's conception of autonomy amounts to a *unified* theory of moral and personal autonomy, since you exercise your autonomy both when you do your moral duty on condition that respecting the dignity of others is your primary motive — call this *moral* autonomy — and when you adopt merely permissible ends in accordance with your own personal conception of happiness on the limiting condition that your will has normative authority for all rational agents — call this *personal* autonomy."

concept of the person: “The Soviets never say what autonomy is. Kon suggests that each of a person’s actions is determined but autonomous in the sense that it does not depend causally on any single factor. Rezvitskii and Sabirov suggest that the actions of an autonomous person are not determined. They do not suggest, however, how the actions of an autonomous person occur. They need such a theory” (Larson 1981: 218). As a matter of fact, the lack of autonomy within the Soviet concept of the person becomes particularly obvious when it is associated with the tradition of the Enlightenment, modernity and the building of a new society. According to Shmuel Eisenstadt, the emphasis on the autonomy of man is central to the cultural program of modernity: “In the continuous expansion of the realm of personal and institutional freedom and activity, such autonomy implied, first, *reflexivity and exploration*; second, *active construction and mastery of nature*, including human nature. This project of modernity entailed a very strong emphasis on the *autonomous participation* of members of society in the constitution of the social and political order” (Eisenstadt 2002: 4–5, my italics). However, since we assume a multiplicity of modernities, the notion of “autonomy” is not central to the cultural program of *every* modernity, and especially not to the Soviet project, even if most elements from the above definition — exploration, construction, mastery of nature, and especially the participation of members in the constitution of the social and political order — are key elements of the Soviet project. Soviet state power *did* create new forms of self-identification and historical agency, but, as David L. Hoffmann argues, “it is not the agency of free-thinking, self-made individuals” (Hoffmann 2002: 273–74). The project of Soviet modernity entailed a very strong emphasis not on the autonomous participation, but on the *disciplined* participation of members of society in building communism.⁷ I share Hoffman’s view that even non-democratic “modern systems were based on the ideal of popular sovereignty, in which all citizens were to play an active part in politics. [...] The Soviet system shared an emphasis on its citizens’ sense of self with other modern political systems, but at the same time distinguished itself by the type of self it sought to cultivate” (Hoffmann 2002: 275). But while Hoffmann argues that the Soviet type of self (in the Stalin period) was not to be individualistic like the “liberal self” in Western societies, I again

7. Jochen Hellbeck has argued that “rather than seeking to repress or obliterate people’s sense of self, Soviet institutions and propaganda were intended to foster conscious citizens, who would voluntarily participate in the building of socialism and derive their sense of self from doing so” (Hoffmann 2002: 274).

argue that the sole focus on individuality is missing the point. Individuality is about a special set of *unique* traits, distinguishing an individual from other persons in a given social context. Autonomy is about a moral capacity of *every* person. What is at stake with regard to building a social structure is not only the possibility of individual distinction from other persons, but, above all, the *form* and the *ethics* of individual interaction and participation in the constitution of a political order. In modern Western societies (after World War II and the Declaration of Human Rights), the ideal form of social participation is based on the presupposition of the subject's moral autonomy (even if reality did and does not always correspond to the ideal).

By promoting the "all-round developed personality," the Soviet Party Program of 1961 introduced something of a Trojan horse into Soviet ideology: the more personal traits are developed, the more the individual will ask for the possibility to govern herself and, in following the call to participate in the social order, to claim interests in social life; she will develop her own perspective and question the prescribed top-down political approach.⁸ Hence, as the Soviet project of the scientific-technological revolution was supposed to unleash an explosion of human creativity, because machines, automation and computers would take over all the boring work and provide more time to think ("sapere aude!"), the lack of a concept of moral autonomy caused some serious problems within the Soviet discourse of personality.

The Russian and Soviet Concept of Personality as "Creative Individuality"

Let us move forward with some reflections about the Russian concept of personality in general. As already mentioned, I share the conclusions of a recent German-Russian research project on the conceptual history of the Russian notion of personality that, in comparison to Western concepts, "took on a distinctive, different form" (Plotnikov 2012: 270). I would underline that this otherness of the Russian discourse of personality "does not depend on some essentialist or ideologically conceived Russian 'otherness,' but on the genealogy of the concept in the history of the language and ideas" (Plotnikov 2012: 270). Recently,

8. See Stefan Guth (2015) on elements of "reflexive modernity" that entered the mindset of the Soviet technical intelligentsia from the late 1960s onwards. Even scientists "now started to admit that science could not substitute for value-based decisions and moral discussions. In the absence of a democratic sphere, they largely relegated these functions to literature."

Mark Lipovetsky added another puzzle piece to the argument, claiming that even contemporary Russian “liberal discourse” is based on a “concept of freedom and personality [that], having originated in [...] Soviet ideological constructs, had little in common with what was known as liberalism outside the USSR” (Lipovetsky 2013: 113).

According to the research project’s conclusions, in the Russian concept of the person, two fundamental constitutive factors of Western concepts, that is, Roman law and Christian theology, were absent. The typical aspects of the semantics of personhood in the Western concept are *autonomy* as a general property of man (Kant), *identity* as continuity in time (Locke), and *individuality* as uniqueness of the individual (Leibniz), the latter being largely influenced by the German Romantic tradition. It has been found that in Russia the concept of the person is tied almost exclusively to the aspect of *individuality*. That “brings to light a paradox that was characteristic of the semantics of romantic individuality: *the creative personality turns out not to be autonomous*. In her existence, this personality is dependent on her opposite, the anonymous social milieu, in which she seeks recognition of her irreducible uniqueness” (Plotnikov 2012: 274–76, my italics). Within the history of ideas in Russia, the person’s “capacity for free self-forming is always connected to *something inaccessible* (be it divine transcendence, social relations or a dialogical relationship), which as such enters into the determination of her individual existence. This connection between free self-determination and irreducible outer determination constitutes what is personal about the person in her own individuality, which is not the product of her rational will but the very mode of man’s existence” (Plotnikov 2012: 294, my italics).

Alongside the aspect of individuality, I would like to add another important notion, namely *creativity*. Nikolai Berdiaev — who, by the way, is referred to quite often in Soviet literature about the scientific-technological revolution as a negative example of bourgeois Russian philosophy — discussed creativity as follows: “The basic theme of Russian thought [is] the theme of the divine in man, of the creative vocation of man and the meaning of culture” (Berdyaev 1948: 245; Zwahlen 2010: 24f). Although in pre-revolutionary Russia, ideas of personal rights and autonomy were developed, at the same time they were supplanted by Nietzsche’s idea of a “creative individuality” (Plotnikov 2012: 283).⁹ In short, the notion of creativity was not linked to the

9. Nikolai Berdiaev’s thinking is an example of this supplanting of the notion of “autonomy” with “creativity” (Zwahlen 2010: 259; see also Zwahlen 2012: 198).

moral concept of autonomy but to individuality, which is not a moral concept as such and is unthinkable without a counterpart in community or society. One of the main features of the very stable Russian discourse of personhood as “creative individuality” is the status of the concept of the person as a “project”:

Neither a factual given, nor a normative requirement, the person is rather a “task”: one becomes a person. As of 1900 and thereafter throughout the entire Soviet period this discourse of the person gave rise to countless imperatives requiring personality to “develop,” to “educate” herself, to “struggle,” to “find” herself. [...] This is the reason why there is so much emphasis in this discourse on pedagogy, educational psychology, and in particular aesthetic education for the sake of the “integral,” “harmonious,” and, once again, “creative personality” (Plotnikov 2012: 283–84).¹⁰

When the operative concept of personality is dependent on “something inaccessible,” there are always intermediaries somehow closer to the “inaccessible,” ready to guide and teach people how to live.

The Soviet discourse on personality is no exception to the Russian concept of “creative individuality,” because the “all-round developed personality,” one of the prominent new notions of the Third Party Program of the Twenty-Second Party Congress of 1961 (Dahm 1982: 38), was not supposed to act autonomously and contemplate its continuous identity in time but was urged to change and invest all its power in the building of the future society, of communism. Individual personality was not supposed to be an autonomous creation “from within” the person (Świdorski 1993: 215), but a useful part of a whole.

According to Marx the single individual is “in its reality [...] the ensemble of the social relations” and it is wrong “to abstract from the historical process [...] and to presuppose an abstract — isolated — human individual” (Marx 1969: vi). Hence, the development of a personality was to be fully determined “from without” and dependent on social reality. One of the best-known Soviet materialist philosophers of the time, Evald Ilyenkov, made this quite clear: “In this sense, the origination process of personality is a process of transformation of biologi-

10. See Vladimir Putin’s presidential address to the Federal Assembly on December 4th, 2014: “Every child and teenager in our country should be able to find something to do outside the classroom. Any curtailment of extracurricular, supplemental education is unacceptable. Art, technology and music centres help create *well-rounded people* [eto ogromnyi resurs garmonichnogo razvitiia lichnosti]” (Putin 2014).

cally given matter by the power of social reality, that exists before, outside and completely independently from this matter” (Il’nikov 2012: 304). Ilyenkov underlines that “not a single human action emerges ‘from within,’” and “that a personality or individuality only emerges as soon as an individual is no longer a mere object, but begins to interact with social reality” (Il’nikov 2012: 305). In this concept, autonomy is a capacity created by interaction with social reality and not a universal moral category in the Kantian sense. In Soviet theory, autonomy did not have to be provided or protected, but it had to be created. In other words, autonomy was a project that had to be brought forth by building the right social relations in order to generate the new man. That corresponds to the “quasi-teleological, ‘constructivist’ vision of Soviet theory, that deprived people of qualities which they would possibly get only tomorrow” (Świdorski 2011: 157).

The problem is that in the Soviet Union the autonomous, creative personality never seemed to emerge at all, not even under “actually existing socialism.” This was mentioned by Alexander Zipko, Gorbachev’s main philosopher of perestroika, in 1989:

Total state control of production drastically constrains the possibilities of unfolding creativity, of democratic commitment and intellectual development of the personality. Meanwhile it has become perfectly clear that the main social goal of socialism — *paving the way to creative work and self-realization* — cannot be achieved by a state-driven command system. The total control of the producer excludes the development of an all-round and harmonic personality” (Zipko 1989: 208, my italics).

At the root of a system of state control of production one finds a concept of personality that lacked a universal notion of moral autonomy, even if it intended to develop such a notion.¹¹ But a universal moral concept cannot be postponed, and I argue that especially the Russian and Soviet emphasis on creativity (*tvorchestvo*) caused several Soviet thinkers to trip over the lack of autonomy in their concepts of personality. In the following I will discuss some characteristics of the discourse on the scientific-technological revolution, which might have shaped, if not subverted, the late Soviet notion of personality.

11. As an aside, Sergei Bulgakov’s *Philosophy of Economy* is a critique of all modern economic systems that are based on materialism and the lack of a notion of a creative, autonomous man. That is why, in his opinion, “in practice, all economists are Marxists, even if they hate Marxism” (Bulgakov 2000: 41).

The Problem of Personality within the Scientific-Technological Revolution

Many Soviet scholars emphasized “man as the key problem of today.” Indeed, as the editor of the 1986 volume *The Scientific-Technological Revolution and the Spiritual Development of the Person* put it, “the question of man would become the most important criterion to evaluate the course and results of the competition of two systems, which under the conditions of the Scientific-Technological Revolution will show the superiority of real socialism in comparison with declining capitalism” (Kas’ian 1986: 40). Rosalind Marsh observed that “by the 1970s, probably as a result of the growing awareness of popular indifference or skepticism towards science, it had become official policy to emphasize that science and technology must be used for the benefit of man” (Marsh 1986: 167). In contrast to the enduring capitalist exploitation of human labor, the scientific-technological revolution was supposed to foster a “fundamental change of the human personality,” as Genrich Volkov put it:

The revolution in science and technology, which is moving in parallel with social changes, will also result in *fundamental change of the human personality*. The ideal man of communist society is a *harmoniously developed personality*, a *creator* for whom labour is the very first vital requirement and the greatest pleasure, a man whose *free development serves as a condition for the development of society as whole*, and society in its turn makes *‘an aim in itself of this integral development*, i.e., development of all human powers as such without relating them to any preset scale” (Volkov 1975: 95, my italics; Marx quoted in Volkov).

In the following analysis I will focus on the concepts laid out by Volkov as well as on the new quality of the Soviet personality as a consumer, which added a new dimension to the Soviet concept of personality.

1. The Problem of the Fundamental Change of the Human Personality

By the end of the 1960s, one debate in the early Soviet philosophy of the person was already more or less decided: after 1966, most Soviet thinkers rejected the so-called “empty concept theories” (*tabula rasa*) that were in general directed against Western philosophers with their assertion of the abstract, eternal, ahistorical nature of the person. Jon

Erik Larson has shown that after 1968 the existence of a general concept of the person with universal content was accepted without question (Larson 1981: 45, 48). For example, the Soviet scholar Alexander Drozdov argued that universal traits are necessary for the purposes of comparison and in order to be able to make judgments about the progress of the person (Larson 1981: 34, 36). According to Drozdov, “among the universal traits of a person are the capacity to be a subject, the bearer of social relations, reason, the presence of ideals and the capacity for their purposeful implementation, etc.” (quoted in Larson 1981: 31). One could say that the capacity to be a subject accompanied by ‘reason’ comes close to what we mean by the notion of “autonomy.” This is worth noting because the problem of Soviet philosophy with “universal traits” was that they cannot be changed — not even by or within the “new man.” The more “universal traits” are seen as a general human condition, the less a “fundamental change of the human personality” seems to be possible, and moreover such characteristics as immorality or religiosity could also be regarded as universal traits (Buchholz 1961: 20). This perspective was underlined by the serious problem that “by the 1970s it had become clear in the Soviet Union that *crime* [conceived as a transient phenomenon under capitalism] was not on its way to extinction” (Graham 1993: 248). With regard to *religion*, the survival of religiosity was explained by the fact that the information flow of the scientific-technological revolution threatened the authenticity of human contacts, which caused a deficit of emotional communication — a need that small informal, often religious groups could fill easily, if a person’s atheistic *Weltanschauung* was not yet fully developed (Bukin 1982: 17–18).¹²

From a different perspective, the so called nature-nurture debate was based on growing doubts about the actual influence of social reality on human behavior; the “naturalists” were looking for other causes of human behavior, including hereditary factors (Graham 1993: 226–27). But the attempt to explain human behavior in terms of innate characteristics or genetics was still considered illegitimate, as a bourgeois (and fascist) approach to medical problems that perpetuated class inequality by insisting on the “unchangeable nature” and the “inertia” of man (Graham 1993: 221). Hence, hereditary factors, innate characteristics, physical preconditions and universal traits, like, for example, moral autonomy, had to be seen as threats to the possi-

12. See Victoria Smolkin-Rothrock (2014) on the spiritual crisis of late Soviet atheism.

bility of social “human engineering” and the Marxian concept of man as an ‘ensemble of social relations.’

2. The Moral Superiority of the Soviet Consumer

According to Alexander Bikbov, one of the most important symbolic revolutions of the 1960s was the semantic link of the “personality of workers” with the notion of prosperity (*blagosostoianie*) — personality had quietly become synonymous with the consumer (Bikbov 2014: 196, 210; Kapranov and Fomina 1982: 69). According to Volkov and others, “the conversion of labor into the highest human pleasure is only possible when the rapid growth of the people’s prosperity is guaranteed” (Volkov 1975, 98). Obviously, people’s prosperity could not yet be guaranteed in the Soviet Union, and the acknowledged “greater capability and economic strength of capitalism” had to be explained. Volkov did it in the following way: “[the economic strength of capitalism] can be achieved only at the expense of the greatest harm to the development of every individual” (Dahm 1982: 41–42). Boris Parygin put it plainly: “Under the conditions of today’s capitalist society, the Scientific-Technological Revolution exhibits a depersonifying, deforming influence on man. Under the conditions of socialism the opposite tendency is taking place — the personification of the person” (Parygin 1978: 101). Hence, in the name of the development of every individual, socialist prosperity would grow more *slowly* (Dahm 1982: 42).¹³ The difference between the capitalist and the Soviet consumer consisted in the fact that the first will always remain an object within a world of things, while the latter will, sooner or later, become a subject and creator of the world of things (cf. Rikhta 1970: 66) as a result of his moral superiority and his ability to distinguish needs from wants (Rogov 1978: 116).¹⁴

13. For example, simply for humane reasons, conveyer belts would run more slowly: “Socialism brings principal changes to the interaction of man and technology: technology appears not to be an enemy, but an assistant, a support for the development of the person. [...] A normal, science-based level of work intensity will be guaranteed. That, in particular, will be achieved by a low speed of the conveyer belt’s movement (at the automobile factory at Volzhsk for example, the speed of the conveyer belt’s movement is one and a half times slower than at the factories of the same type of the Italian company “Fiat”), by the introduction of periodic interruptions for passive rest, as well as for active rest with physical exercises” (Buslov 1978: 57).
14. For example: “Whereas the desire to have your own swimming pool in your home can be seen as a caprice, there is nothing unreasonable in the need for regularly using a public swimming pool, which, obviously, should be provided in each neighborhood for anyone who wishes to use it” (Rogov 1978: 101–2).

Was it moral autonomy they were talking about? No, because in order to be able to properly enjoy the new material and spiritual goods created by the scientific-technological revolution, the country needed a goal-oriented “education of needs,” to be achieved by appropriate tactics and propaganda (Rogov 1978: 105, 111, 114). Thus, each person had to be treated as an object of education in order to “form in the soul the free decision in favor of its own development” (Rikhta 1970: 65). Obviously, a need for “free decisions” had been stated, but a Soviet consumer and person did not need to choose or act autonomously by virtue of her capacity to act on critically assessed basic desires and values, but by virtue of the values and needs taught by Soviet ideology.

3. The Harmoniously Developed Person as an “End-in-Itself”

The Soviet notion of the “all-round developed person” is based on Marx’s concept of the “absolute working-out of [man’s] creative potentialities, with no presupposition other than the previous historic development, which makes this totality of development, i.e., the development of all human powers as such the end in itself, not as measured on a *predetermined yardstick*” (Marx 1973: 488). As already mentioned above, Soviet “society in its turn makes ‘an aim in itself of this integral development [of man], i.e., development of all human powers as such without relating them to any preset scale’” (Volkov 1975: 95; Marx quoted in Volkov). But obviously, “presuppositions” and “predetermined yardsticks” were inherent to Soviet ideology, and Marx’s reference to Kant’s definition of the person as an “end-in-itself” seems to have been a special problem for some Soviet thinkers. Instead of dwelling on its meaning, they were more keen to discuss the question of what the “working-out of man’s creative potentialities” really meant. According to I. M. Rogov, well-roundedness was not to be understood literally, in the sense that every person would become a universal genius (Richta 1969: 127; Buslov 1978: 140), but, according to the conclusions of a Soviet academic conference from 1975, “development presupposes a *choice between possibilities* given by culture, that is, the building of individuality” (Rogov 1978, 138). Hence, the person would choose between possibilities – but this choice was pre-conditioned by the desire for some form of “harmony” that had to be achieved. Rogov created a model (fig. 1) defining this ideal of the ‘all-round developed personality’:



Figure 1

According to Rogov's model, the main elements of a person's life are work, community, social commitment and knowledge. Pursuing these goals will engender spiritual wealth, physical perfection, moral purity and civic spirit; and the pursuit of these goals will be enhanced by occupational, ideological-political and moral education. Nevertheless, the concept of *choice* and arrangement of different possibilities called for some kind of agent in the middle, for "a robust notion of the human subject uniting 'from within' the characteristics that Soviet philosophy usually ascribed to individuals ['from without']" (Świdorski 1993: 215). In other words: it called for a concept of moral autonomy, for a rational subject as an "end-in-itself" capable of critical reflection.

4. Man as a Creator

In fostering the scientific-technological revolution, "for the first time in history, socialism created the real possibility for an exceeding development of the creative principle in man" (Rogov 1978: 81). According to the definition of many Soviet authors, creativity is the capacity to generate something *new* (Rogov 1978: 80; Buslov 1978: 75). Great expectations were fueled by the scientific-technological revolution because it would call forth a "radical change in [...] the cardinal productive force — the human being, the creator of all material and spiritual wealth" (Buslov 1978: 76). The greatest hopes were pinned on automation, because it "will transform the labor of ordinary citizens into a source of delight, inspiration and creativity [...] it favors the all-round development of the personality" (Volkov 1975: 43–44). "In the future automation and new, more effective technology will eliminate monotonous physical labour" and make

“interesting work the property of each member of society” (Volkov 1975: 51, 98). Furthermore, computers would enable man to concentrate on creative thought and help him to develop his spiritual potential (Rogov 1978: 154). Finally, every person would establish her own goals, and each individual would *conceive of these goals as her own* (Rogov 1978: 81). The need for autonomous choice of action was thus stated as a fact, but it was still projected into the future. Using the example of the ambiguous role of the cosmonaut between “active agency” and being a part of a “technological” system, Gerovitch put it simply: “[T]he main problem was not that the human was not capable; the main problem was that the human was not fully predictable” (Gerovitch 2007: 60, 138).

What about Today? (Further Questions)

I would like to conclude with some observations on the contemporary situation in Russia. What has happened to the Russian concept of personality, now that Soviet ideology has been abandoned? Anna Krylova has criticized the tendency of American, and probably most Western schools of Soviet studies to present the history of the Soviet personality in terms of the “death of the liberal subject, its partial rebirth as a corrupt self-centered egoist [a consumer], and its triumph as a resisting liberal spirit” (Krylova 2000: 120, 145). As the above-mentioned research project on the Russian notion of personality and I here would argue, such a “liberal subject,” always ready to resist totalitarian invasion of its self, never existed in the mainstream of Russian concepts of personality. Of course it could also be contested that such a fully autonomous subject exists at all — but there are crucial differences between a society in which moral (and personal) autonomy is held as an important universal value and one in which such an ideal has long been lacking. Russia is a striking case, considering the overwhelming amount of thought that has been devoted to problems of personality, individuality and creativity in Russian and even late Soviet philosophical literature, even prior to perestroika. Even today the “moral discourse and ethical practice of work on the self [is] perhaps the most powerful moral concept in contemporary Russia” (Zigon 2011: 5).¹⁵

15. For example, Oleg Kharkhordin (1999) demonstrates that Party rituals — which forced each Communist to reflect intensely and repeatedly on his or her “self,” “had their antecedents in the Orthodox Christian practices of doing penance in the public gaze. Individualization in Soviet Russia occurred through the intensification of these public penitential practices rather than the private confessional practices that are characteristic of Western Christianity.”

One conclusion to be drawn from my argument seems to be quite obvious. A concept of personal autonomy will not simply emerge in Russian thought, neither of itself nor from the ashes — it has to be developed. Some other conclusions lead to further research questions deserving closer attention. First, the lack of a concept of moral autonomy in Russian thought seems to account for the fact that there is not a vast dichotomy between “traditional Orthodox” and “modern Soviet” worldviews. Hence, focusing on the lack of autonomy in the dominant Russian concept of personality might help to explain the “surprising continuity between Soviet and present-day religious moralities” (Agadjanian 2011: 19), for example, why the list of “traditional Russian values” promoted by some representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church in 2011 can easily be compared with the “Moral Code of the Builder of Communism” from 1961 (Gumanova 2011; De George 1969), or why the general secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Leonid Brezhnev, as well as Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and all Rus, have both emphasized the importance of Article 29 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights about “duties to the community” (Kirill 2009: 133; Brezhnev 1977: 21), while both condemned “rotten liberalism” (*gniloi liberalizm*).

Second, the question of whether a concept of “moral autonomy” can be found in recent Russian thought should be posed. According to Mark Lipovetsky, even contemporary Russian “liberal discourse” reflects a paradoxical coexistence of liberalism and anti-democratic, hence not pluralistic, attitudes toward the concept of moral autonomy (Lipovetsky 2013b: 110). Lipovetsky argues that the “liberal” concept of freedom and personality in today’s Russia is inherited from the discourse of the Soviet technical intelligentsia of the 1960s and is based on “the old positions of knowledge power and the ensuing superiority complex toward the ‘subalterns,’ who again will have to be enlightened at any cost” (Lipovetsky 2013a: 218). Hence, the Russian intelligentsia would still follow an essentialist program of modernity without instruments to handle conflicting views. Lipovetsky’s “restrained optimism with regard to the transformability of the Russian cultural discourse” stems from a recent change in the dominant intelligentsia’s discourse, which Maxim Waldstein has noted since 2012: “It became harder to speak about ‘traditional values’ and their ‘eternity’ in a matter-of-fact way, without thinking about the meaning of these words. One felt the need to explicate his or her statements, even if the form of these explications was dogmatic and xenophobic” (quoted in Lipovetsky 2013a, 217–18; Val’dshstein 2013: 154–55). Could this “need to explicate his statements,” the need to con-

vince others by argument, be seen as evidence of a growing notion of and respect for the moral autonomy of others?

Third, it would be interesting to examine today's Russian Orthodox thinking with regard to the concept of moral autonomy. The Russian Orthodox Church's "Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights" (2008) can be taken as an example of the continuity of the Russian emphasis on the notions of *individuality* in terms of agency (e.g., as "work on the self" or "theosis") and *responsibility*, while common Western concepts of personality (supported by Western Christianity, at least in the aftermath of World War II) are linked to individual *autonomy*, *self-determination* and *rights*. The difference between these concepts is not to be found in their "individualistic" or "collectivist" outlooks, but in their attitude to autonomy, which is negative and positive, respectively. Without a concept of moral autonomy, the Russian "Romantic" concept of "creative individuality" does not allow that individuals can create "from within," and it is not strong enough to resist control and governance "from without." Furthermore, a concept of individual responsibility is not conceivable without a notion of moral autonomy. For example, in order to reconcile juridical and religious notions of human dignity, Heiner Bielefeldt, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, created the notion of a "responsible subject endowed with reason" (*vernunftbegabtes Verantwortungssubjekt*) that underlies the arguments of both those who claim rights and those who appeal to duty to the community (Bielefeldt 2011: 28–30, 157).¹⁶

But if the increasing focus on personality was something of a Trojan horse in Soviet ideology, Orthodox Christian thought is not doomed to the same paradoxes, but is perfectly able to develop a notion of moral autonomy, because "nothing in the conceptions of autonomy [...] precludes agents from deciding as a result of critical reflection to take on binding obligations or to affirm attachments to others" (Reath 1998: 4). And indeed, one can find traces of autonomy in recent documents of the Russian Orthodox Church. Quoting St. Irenaeus of Lyon, the "Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights" (2008) and the "Basic Social Concept" (2000) both speak of the need "to preserve for the individual a certain autonomous space [*nekuiu avtonomnuiu sferu*] where his conscience remains the absolute master, for it is on the free will that salvation or death, the way towards Christ or away from Christ will ultimately depend" (Russian Orthodox Church 2008:

16. See also Philip Pettit (2001: 20f) on the "advantages of conceptualizing freedom as fitness to be held responsible.

sect. 4, art. 3). The question remains whether the individual choice between salvation or death is tantamount to the notion of moral autonomy in the Kantian sense. Apparently it is not by chance that the “Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights” shows a “striking absence of juridical rights” as “the Doctrine does not mention the right to fair trial and equal access to law,” and “it largely ignores the function of human rights as protective rights” meant to defend the rights of autonomous individuals against arbitrary state interference (Stoeckl 2014: 84–86). But if today’s Russian Orthodox Church leadership seems to try to avoid confrontation with state institutions for political reasons, that does not mean at all that there is no potential to develop a concept of moral autonomy within Orthodox theology.¹⁷

However, as the diagnosis of a “lack of autonomy” obviously comes from a Western point of view, a fourth, self-reflexive question must be asked: What happened to the Western concepts of autonomy during the twentieth century, especially in relation to their employment in strong opposition to “Soviet collectivism”? In his reflections about the legacy of the Enlightenment, Tzvetan Todorov spoke of a “hypertrophy of the notion of individual autonomy” in the West that is “not content with recognizing the individual as a *necessary* entity, [but] declaring him to be a totally *self-sufficient* one” (Todorov 1989: 12), which detaches the notion of autonomy from a constructive attitude toward community. Do Western (liberal) concepts today tend to make the same mistake as the Soviet ones in the past by focusing more on individuality (and independence) than on autonomy and solidarity, and hence lose their power to build social bonds? Could this be the reason why in the West “rights talk is becoming banal,” as Andrew Clapham illustrates with reference to an essay by Milan Kundera about the fight for human rights “becoming a kind of universal stance of everyone towards everything, a kind of energy that turns all human desires into rights” (Clapham 2007: 17). It is not individualism (or liberalism) that underlies the very idea of human rights, but rather moral autonomy.

17. Sergei Bulgakov represents a rare historical example. According to Bulgakov, the idea of man as God’s image and likeness is the ontological basis for conceiving of every human being as an “end-in-itself.” In his view, moral autonomy is a God-given fact and a part of the human condition. It is not an individual attitude, but a moral faculty of each person, which enables anyone to create and to be part of interpersonal relations (Zwahlen 2012a: 198–200; Zwahlen 2012b). See also Randall A. Poole on Vladimir Solov’ev’s philosophical anthropology (Hamburg and Poole 2010: 131–49), and Aristotle Papanikolaou (2012) for a contemporary Orthodox case for the modern liberal principles of freedom of religion, the protection of human rights, and church-state separation.

In his paper “What Is Enlightenment?” Michel Foucault argues that “the deliberate attitude of modernity is tied to an indispensable asceticism. [...] The thread that may connect us with the Enlightenment is [...] the permanent reactivation of an attitude — that is, of a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era” (Foucault 1984: 7–8). If we want to critically develop concepts of autonomy within pluralistic societies, both Russian and Western concepts should be regarded in terms of the variety of modern experience. Following Todorov, their dialectic should be taken as an appeal to reconsider the modern legacy of the concept of autonomy. Kant’s concept of moral autonomy is not about ruthless individualism, but about commonly established values and “intersubjective consent” (Todorov 2006: 34–35). Sir Isaiah Berlin likewise argued that modern history “has permanently shaken the faith [...] in the possibility of a perfect and harmonious society,” that “not all ultimate human ends are necessarily compatible,” and that “active solidarity in the pursuit of common objectives, may be the best that human beings can be expected to achieve” (Berlin 1992: 235–37). When it comes to overcoming the dichotomy of individual and communal ends, more than a few Russian concepts of personality have a lot to offer (see Hamburg and Poole 2010; Stoeckl 2008; Zwahlen 2010).

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