Mystical Enlightenment in Late Eighteenth-century Russia

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MYSTICAL ENLIGHTENMENT IN LATE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY RUSSIA

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THESIS ABSTRACT

This thesis will examine the thought of G.S. Skovoroda (1722-1796), M.M. Kheraskov (1733-1807) and I.V. Lopukhin (1756-1816) as constitutive of a Mystical Enlightenment in Russia. Anglophone, and to a lesser extent, Russian literature has often conceived of the Russian Enlightenment as a single project of predominantly rational orientation. However, increasing attention to the presence of multiple Enlightenments in Western Europe and of the importance of religious debates in the formation of various reform movements, necessitate a reconsideration in the role of spirituality in Eighteenth-century Russia. For this reason, this thesis contributes to the recent re-evaluation of the ways in which Russia appropriated foreign discourses, and provides thereby a more detailed account of the extent to which mysticism was able to radically redefine religious, personal and ethical organisational forms. Specifically, this thesis offers an analysis of normative arguments based on three inter-linked concepts of ecclesia, personhood and ascetic ethics. These were the constitutive elements of a sustained mystical critique of the Russian *Polizeistaat*. By means of a close reading of a select number of primary sources, this thesis provides an explanation of why mysticism had such a strong mobilizational capacity in comparison to more rational discourses in late Eighteenth-century Russia. By doing so, the thesis demonstrates how Eighteenth and early Nineteenth-century mystical writers were able to successfully orient the mind towards rational worldly action. From this analysis, a more complete picture emerges of how religiously-minded thinkers in Russia grappled with the imperative to rethink and rejustify their commitments to important worldly institutions, concepts and practices. I have, almost exclusively, focused on ideas rather than on their context. Because of this, broader social ramifications of mysticism have not been explored in this thesis. Future research needs to consult Russian archival material in order to remedy this. Hopefully, however, my research offers fresh perspectives on the trajectories of Enlightenment in Russia and raises a range of issues for further examination and debate.

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

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Andreas Berg

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CONTENTS

A worm! a god! — I tremble at myself,
And in myself am lost! At home a stranger,
Thought wanders up and down, surprised, aghast,
And wondering at her own. How reason reels!
O what a miracle to man is man,
Triumphantly distress'd! what joy! what dread!
Alternately transported and alarm'd!
What can preserve my life? or what destroy?

Edward Young, *Night Thoughts*

INTRODUCTION

This thesis will analyse the mystical thought of Grigorii Savvych Skovoroda (1722-1794), Mikhail Matveyevich Kheraskov (1733-1807) and Ivan Vladimirovich Lopukhin (1756-1816) as constitutive of a Mystical Enlightenment. Two crucial historiographical developments stand behind the need for such a reinterpretation of the role and the function of mysticism in Russian intellectual history. Firstly, over the past two decades, Russian and Western scholars have increasingly drawn attention to Enlightened aspects of spirituality in Russia, especially of its mystical variety. Secondly, approaches to the study of what has once been 'The Enlightenment' have undergone such a radical historiographical shift that presently, most scholars agree that Enlightenment was neither singular nor necessarily anti-religious. In fact, enough evidence has been gathered from many different contexts to suggest that religious concerns were often at the heart of Eighteenth-century reforms of knowledges and practices. The problem however, is that both of these advances have not yet been applied *together* to Russia's complex Eighteenth-century. Whilst outstanding work has been done in terms of detailing the importance of Masonic and in particular, Rosicrucian coteries in the formation of Enlightened attitudes and institutions in Russia, the mystical aspirations which have sustained the former, has not yet been subjected to sustained inquiry.

In response to this gap in existing literature, this thesis will prioritise mysticism rather than esoteric communities in which it has inhered. To that end, no major qualitative distinction has been made between those Russian intellectuals that were participants in Masonic societies and those that were not. This does not mean that all instances of Eighteenth-century Russian mysticism are the same irrespective of the contexts in which they have occurred. However, the consistency with which some Russian mystics foregrounded a metaphysically anchored defence of the autonomy of the person, rethought the relevancy of ecclesiastical structures and promoted ascetic ethics, suggest a shared commitment to speculative reasoning. An examination of how, personal, ecclesial

and ethical organisational forms were rethought from a mystical standpoint goes some way towards applying some of the more contemporary approaches to the study of religion and the Enlightenment to Eighteenth-century Russia.

The central argument of this thesis is that in Eighteenth-century Russia, mysticism fulfilled an emancipatory function in regards to ideas and practises that were deemed to be of outmost importance to individuals and society as a whole. The issue of what was personhood, what stance it ought to take towards organised religion and how it ought to live to remain authentic with itself became normative questions in Russian thought following their consistent foregrounding by the Mystical Enlightenment. This strongly humanistic orientation is what distinguished the content and the application of mysticism in Russia from other contemporaneous modes of thought. One key reason for this was that mysticism took on some of the duties of philosophy at a time when the latter had not yet taken a firm root in Russia. Distanced from its confessional affiliations and bolstered by assimilation of Western European and especially German speculative thought, mysticism became an intellectual space in which crucial concerns and aspirations were given critical consideration. Indeed, mysticism's metaphysical orientation made it particularly well-adapted to respond to the overly utilitarian demands of the Russian *Polizeistaat* upon the integrity of the human person. Thus, as this thesis will endeavour to show, mysticism's theoretical flexibility was used to defend and to rethink those aspects of life which were deemed to have been under threat from prevailing norms and practises.

The methodology employed in this thesis stems directly from the author's contention that mysticism represented an alternative mode of thought. As such, mystical ideas about how alternative forms self-consciousness can be achieved will be given prominence at the expense of important but nonetheless secondary issues of concrete socio-political attitudes. Consequently, this thesis will focus on three topics only: personhood, ecclesia and ethics. The selection of these three focus areas is far from arbitrary as any serious Russian Eighteenth-century attempt to critique established organisational forms must necessarily deal with them in some way. All of the case-study chapters in this thesis will employ similar

nomenclature, as it occurred in the primary sources, in order to foreground the consistency of thought patterns and broadly similar orientation towards transforming the inner life of the human subject. Overwhelming priority has been given to close analysis of the arguments advanced in largely untranslated Eighteenth-century works of various genres, containing strongly mystical themes.

One of the key conclusions which this thesis has drawn was that when applied as a kind of philosophy, mysticism could result in process-based approach to human identity and manner of interaction with the external world. That is, mysticism was found to have played an emancipatory role insofar as it sought to liberate the intellect from conflating the horizon of its being with that of tradition and especially that of historically-grounded systems of belief. In doing so, this thesis has been able to supplement existing literature with evidence as to the degree to which, mysticism was implicated in a search for a self-perpetuating and evolving intellectual existence independent of all external authority. All of the thinkers covered in this thesis, have placed the centre of gravity of human action within the intellect. By squarely focusing on how it transformed the inner life of its adherents, it has been possible to reveal more fully, the intentions and the uses of mystical thought.

Given the narrow focus of this thesis, there some limitations of research which need to be noted. Firstly, not much attention on social context has been made. Whilst this was a conscious choice on the part of the author, subsequent research ought to take into greater account, how intellectuals interrelated with each-other, the state and their intended audience. Secondly, this thesis did not make use of archival sources. It is unlikely that the content of the ideas put forward by mystics in Russia would be altered substantively as a consequence of archival research given the scope of already known material that has been published. However, a close scrutiny of letters, diaries and manuscripts would be particularly valuable in adding greater nuance and depth to what is already known and most importantly, potentially indicate more clearly, the foreign sources upon which Russian intellectuals have drawn. Thirdly, this thesis has not analysed the ideas of selected mystics in comparison to other contemporaneous Russian intellectuals.

This was unavoidable insofar as the contours of mystical thought had to be thrown into greater relief. Future research would have to address dialogue between intellectuals in the Russian Eighteenth-century as a matter of priority.

CHAPTER ONE: RETHINKING THE RUSSIAN ENLIGHTENMENT

The history of the Russian soul in 18th century has not been written. We know it only by its brief episodes. Yet, in them, can clearly be heard a general tiredness, pain and longing. From the most outstanding personages of the Catherinian epoch, we know what fiery temptations they had to pass through, in search of the meaning and of the truth of life.

Georgii Florovskii

Introduction

This thesis will conceive of Mystical Enlightenment as a movement that sought to place trust in non-epistemologically warranted sources with spiritual content and utilise these sources toward a radical reconfiguration of personal, ecclesial and ethical organisational forms. Whilst the meaning of the term mystical is contested, in Russian intellectual history, mystical usually implied a privileging of intuitively grasped and metaphysically anchored worldviews. Moreover, in Eighteenth-century Russia, adequate philosophical discourses have not yet reached maturity, thus allowing for mysticism to undertake the type of critical activity that would normally be within the purview of philosophy. So, whilst, across Western Europe, various forms of Enlightened heterodoxies with mystical dimensions abounded, mysticism in Russia had a wider horizon in part, because it emerged out of very different conditions. In this chapter, I will examine historiographical approaches Anglophone scholars have applied in their study of the Russian Enlightenment with the view to demonstrating that there is a need to reconsider interpretations of Eighteenth-century Russian intellectual culture. Until relatively recently, studies of the Enlightenment in Russia were broadly synchronous with advances in the conceptualisation of the Enlightenment as a unitary, pan-European phenomenon. The tension between this definition and its actual application to the Russian context was not always clearly understood. The

primary reason for my analysis is to determine how particular model of the Enlightenment influenced scholarly discussion of how the nascent Russian intelligentsia responded to the ongoing transformation of their country. In this chapter I will argue that, notwithstanding the impressive advances in contemporary treatment of the Russian Enlightenment, scholars have not yet taken greater advantage of recent debates on the possibility of multiple Enlightenments, especially as seen in the work of J.G.A. Pocock. By critically evaluating Anglophone secondary literature of the last fifty years on the Russian Enlightenment, I hope to draw attention to the challenges in the way of its further study and suggest some strategies in overcoming them.

Conceptualisations of the Russian Enlightenment

The application of Western models of the Enlightenment to Russian intellectual history by Anglophone scholars has rarely done justice to the complexity of that history, its stark difference from debates occurring in Europe, and its often contradictory character.[1] The emergent conceptualisations of the Russian Enlightenment were not only determined by inquiry into the circulation of ideas in Eighteenth-century Russia, but were also decisively shaped by the respective definitions of the Enlightenment that scholars have chosen to deploy as interpretive grids for their study of the Russian terrain. A historiographical grasp of theoretical preconceptions to subsequent observations of Russian adoption of a Western-oriented modernity is necessary in order to understand how these preconceptions have skewed scholarly discussions towards certain conclusions as to what the 'Russian Enlightenment' actually was.[2] The reasons used to justify a

[1] M.J. Okenfuss has convincingly argued for the impossibility of locating a Western European-like Enlightenment in Russia, albeit with the view to problematizing the very idea of the Russian Enlightenment as a "creation" on the part of Soviet and East German scholars committed to minimising the prevalence of religious discourses, see M.J. Okenfuss, *The Rise and Fall of Latin Humanism in Early-Modern Russia, Pagan Authors, Ukrainians, and the Resiliency of Muscovy* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), pp. 223-30. With some modifications, this approach intending to find *philosophes* and materialists in Russia was present in later Anglophone scholarship as well.

[2] Perhaps the most poignant example of the difficulties of defining the Russian Enlightenment on the basis of foreign models was the suggestion that Russia only had a Counter-Enlightenment without actually experiencing an Enlightenment. "In short, no matter how one defines the Enlightenment, no such phenomenon appeared in Russia." See M. Confino, 'Isaiah Berlin,

particular Russian thinker or a particular intellectual trend as 'Enlightened' have undergone immense change in the last fifty years rarely seen in accounts of other European Enlightenments. This was in part, due to the inherent tension between the application of a particular model of the Enlightenment and the concomitant need to locate a specific Russian context to fit that model.[3] As a result, works on Eighteenth-century Russia were prone to exhibiting a lack of either a sufficiently defensible theoretical framework enabling the interpretation of local intellectual processes, or of a sufficiently detailed analysis of these processes out of concern that the latter will no longer be reflective of the former.[4]

Such a mismatch between a framework and its content does not mean that there should not be an ongoing incorporation of historiographical advances evident in studies of non-Russian Enlightenments. What it does imply however, is the need to overcome a sense of dependency of accounts of Russian intellectual culture on foreign frameworks adapted to fundamentally different contexts. This dependency, which was especially noticeable in early Anglophone discussions of the Russian Enlightenment has at times led to an impoverished and a simplified view of Russian participation in Enlightened debates as merely an echo of much

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Alexander Herzen, and Russia's Elusive Counter-Enlightenment' in J. Mali, R. and Wolker, R. eds. *Isaiah Berlin's Counter Enlightenment* Transactions of the American Philosophical Society vol. 3, 5 (Philadelphia, American Philosophical Society, 2003), pp. 178-9. The latter example was indicative of the kind of irresponsible claims which can be made as a consequence of a dogmatic belief in a Western-centric understanding of the Enlightenment which obviously, was never successfully replicated in Russia.

[3] This may explain the ongoing argument in Anglophone and to a lesser extent, Russian scholarship over what other Enlightenment could either serve as a prototype for a Russian one, or at least function as a comparison. Pan-European, French and Protestant German Enlightenments have all been the favoured candidates for this purpose. Arguably, the importance of the *Aufklärung* as a comparison cannot be underestimated because of its strong religious overtones to which the Russians were quite susceptible. As M. Raeff noted, the prevalence of spiritual discourses, many of which were of German origin was so immense, that the character of the Russian Enlightenment needs to be reconsidered. See, M. Raeff, 'Preface' in R. Faggionato, *A Rosicrucian Utopia in Eighteenth-Century Russia: The Masonic Circle of N.I. Novikov* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), pp. xi-iii.

[4] The co-presence of a weak model of the Enlightenment and a detailed account of Russian intellectual culture has also lead to a deliberate reticence regarding the latter's significance in Enlightened terms. In otherwise ground-breaking study of the reformist implications of Russian Freemasonry, Douglas Smith nevertheless stated that, "It might be better to leave these contentious debates over the Enlightenment and instead to study the Masons' actions and words to discover what they reveal about the movement itself and not what conclusions can be drawn about the Enlightenment however defined." See D. Smith, *Working the Rough Stone: Freemasonry and Society in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (DeKalb, Northern Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1999), p. 17.

more critical Enlightened developments occurring elsewhere.[5] Russia was positioned as predominantly, a recipient of ideas with little capability to reproject and reinterpret autonomously, different modes of thought. The problem of shareability of ideas across vastly different cultural domains and of intellectual concerns unique to Russia, have received a relatively superficial treatment focused more on noting the imperfections of transplantation and not on the critique of its use as a basis for the functioning of the Enlightenment. In contemporaneous studies of Western European Enlightenments, even if a chosen framework dictated the incorporation of local Enlightened debates into larger pan-European or national contexts, the issue of the genealogy of ideas and their complex reception in a strict theoretical sense was never entirely overshadowed by the universalising intentions of the respective authors. Yet, in the case of Eighteenth-century Russia, the temptation to declare the presence of an Enlightenment and to define its character from the standpoint of whether it was a fair copy of the distant and sometimes not overly relevant intellectual experiences occurring in Western Europe, was often the predominant guide regarding the selection of themes signifying Russia's entry into modernity.[6]

Consequently, a vicious circle ensued as the absence of sophisticated Western Enlightened ideas in Russia indicated the poverty of the Enlightenment there, while indigenous Russian attempts to respond to local concerns in terms endemic to their own intellectual repertoire was often ignored because it did not harmonise with notions of what a Russian Enlightenment was, or should be. Whilst scholars have recognised Europe's cultural diversity and of the instability of its identity, emphasis on homogeneity of Enlightened ideas and of their capacity to circumvent its differences was nevertheless accepted, once they were seen to be

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[5] For a detailed critique of attempts to impose Western European typology upon Eastern European cultural forms, see T.S. Brnardic, 'The Enlightenment in Eastern Europe: Between Regional Typology and Particular Micro-History' in *European Review of History* 13, 3 (2006), pp. 415-6.

[6] One of the most interesting recent studies rethinking the linear passage of an Enlightenment from its supposed core to its periphery, suggested the need to for a much greater attention on the flourishing of ideas and attempts at reform hitherto relegated to the periphery and to see the latter as possible casse-studies on the basis of which, a more complex understanding of Enlightened reform could emerge, see G. Paquette, 'Introduction: Enlightened Reform in Southern Europe and its Atlantic Colonies in the Long Eighteenth Century' in Paquette, G. ed. *Enlightened Reform in Southern Europe and its Atlantic Colonies, c. 1750-1830* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2009), pp. 1-7.

in the process of diffusion into a pan-European Enlightenment.[7] Just how inaccurate such an approach could be was evident in a study of Balkan Enlightenments, *Enlightenment, Nationalism, Orthodoxy* (1994) by P.M. Kitromilides. This work raised the problem of an uncritical acceptance by scholars of a purely rhetorical espousal of basic pan-European Enlightened discourses by Eighteenth-century thinkers without a concomitant examination of whether the given context's institutional base was in any way supportive of these discourses.[8] The distinction between attitudes and institutions capable of embodying them is of crucial importance for gaining a more realistic picture of the spread of Enlightenment in Russia. Kitromilides was able to demonstrate that, irrespective of the sincerity with which thought patterns from Western Europe were welcomed further East, they often floundered against the social and political realities highly inimical to their further development.[9] Thus, a scholarly focus on a spirited reception of reformist ideas often backfired when the results of that reception were found to be inconsistent and underdeveloped.

The beginning of modern studies of Eighteenth-century Russia by the Anglo-American scholarly community was broadly contemporaneous with the ascendance of a pan-European model of the Enlightenment. In accordance with that model, 'The Enlightenment' was primarily a Franco-British project taken up throughout Western Europe with varying degrees of success. A major aspect of this model was its implicit insistence on the sufficiency of locating within a given geographical context certain Enlightened modes of thought originating in either France or Britain in order to determine the "authenticity" of an Enlightenment

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[7] This of course, is not a contemporary problem limited to scholarship, but goes back to the challenges Enlightened thinkers experienced in conveying their ideas to an overseas audience, especially in Eastern Europe. In his most original study of this topic, L. Wolff has argued that notwithstanding the intense relationship Catherine the Great had with the *philosophes*, this acceptance of the French version of the Enlightenment was not only largely restricted to the court, but build upon mutual misunderstanding and myth-making regarding Eastern Europe. The much lionised 'dialogue' between the Empress and Voltaire, Wolff found to be illusory and in some cases, bordering on play, see L. Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 166-97.

[8] P.M. Kitromilides, 'The Enlightenment East and West: A Comparative Perspective on the Ideological Origins of the Balkan Political Traditions' in Kitromilides, P.M. *Enlightenment, Nationalism, Orthodoxy: Studies in the Culture and Political Thought of South-Eastern Europe* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1994): 51-70.

[9] *Ibid.* pp. 55-6.

taking root in that location.[10] The definition of Enlightenment emerging out of such approaches was one that was directed towards the deployment of rationalistic, secular and materialistic philosophies worked out by an educated elite immersed in a rich reading culture geared to satisfy a sophisticated audience. Whether Russia was in fact capable of sustaining a similar cultural context conducive to a multiplicity of competing philosophical discourses, was a question which was either never properly posed or poorly answered. Indeed, as M.J. Okenfuss suggested in *The Rise and Fall of Latin Humanism in Early-Modern Russia* (1995), if one was to isolate a common ground on the basis of which a shareable Enlightenment could be laid, then it would have to be a deep commitment to classical humanist culture. Most members of the Russian educated class were not only often divorced from classical heritage for historical reasons, but also failed to develop a sustained interest towards it when the opportunity to do so was there, consequently placing themselves apart from a technical repertoire indispensable for a critical reception of Enlightened ideas and their utilisation for reform.[11]

The isolation of select thought patterns from contexts anchoring them and, the concomitant belief that the former flourished beyond the domain where they have emerged, was largely the result of the impact of Peter Gay's *The Party of Humanity: Essays on the French Enlightenment* (1964). It was this collection, rather than Gay's subsequent monographs which influenced scholars of Russia whose work appeared well after Gay's essays but before the publication of his two-volume study of the Enlightenment. Gay understood diverse French Enlightened thought in unitary terms and was "convinced that its argument could be extended to the European Enlightenment as a whole."[12] The thought and activity of the *philosophes* was seen by Gay to be paradigmatic of the entire Enlightenment project seeking to control nature and to maximise human self-reliance in matters of knowledge and morality.[13] The *philosophes* were approached as revolutionaries, due to their close identification of themselves as

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[10] L. Kirk, 'The Matter of Enlightenment' in *The Historical Journal* 43, 4 (2000), pp. 1130-2.
[11] M.J. Okenfuss, *The Rise and Fall of Latin Humanism in Early-Modern Russia*, pp. 223-30.
[12] P. Gay, 'Introduction' in Gay, P. *The Party of Humanity: Essays on the French Enlightenment* (New York: Norton, 1964), p. 113.
[13] P. Gay, 'The Unity of the French Enlightenment', pp. 130-2.

harbingers of a new civilisation founded on emancipatory principles. Yet, if the *philosophes* were indeed firmly bound to the society in which their thought operated as Gay claimed, then to make a case for their universal exemplary significance meant to imply that they were intimately bound to all other European societies irrespective of variations.[14] It is partly in avoidance of this conclusion that Gay's account was inclusive of select thinkers exercising a distinctly urbane method of exposition in a largely Francophone environment.[15] One crucial consequence of this interpretation was that, when the French Enlightenment failed to be emulated successfully outside of France, the blame was often apportioned to the foreign soil's immaturity due to the overwhelming strength of institutions and practices the *philosophes* were successfully critiquing in their own homelands.

The first and one of the most influential Anglophone accounts of the spread of Enlightened ideas in Russia was undertaken in *The Icon and the Axe* (1966) by J.H. Billington in terms broadly set out by Gay's understanding of the topography of the Enlightenment.[16] This work has exercised a particular sway over subsequent scholarship in its insistence on the need to analyse the Russian Enlightenment according to its appropriation of foreign, predominantly French and English Enlightened discourses towards the formation of secular and utilitarian attitudes. Whilst Billington has not actually referred to Gay's work, he was clearly informed by the privileging of the 'party of humanity' in light of his attempt to elucidate appeals to the latter's sentiments by Russian men of letters and especially, by Catherine the Great.[17] Within this rubric, Russia's openness to French culture, usually at the behest of and restricted to the court, implied the presence of an Enlightenment intending towards the refashioning of Russia in the image of Western Europe. That is why for Billington, the Enlightenment in Russia peaked during Catherine's reign (1762-1796), as only through an absolutist policy, sometimes bordering on personal whim, could such refashioning be attempted.

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[14] *Ibid*. pp. 118-9.
[15] J.A. Leith, 'Peter Gay's Enlightenment' in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 5, 1 (1971), p. 160.
[16] J.H. Billington, 'The Troubled Enlightenment' in Billington, J.H. *The Icon and the Axe: An Interpretive History of Russian Culture* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966): 213-268.
[17] *Ibid.* pp. 218-24.

The suggestion that Enlightenment in Russia proceeded "always in response to imperial commands and patronage" betrayed Billington's adherence to a rigid model of intellectual diffusion which could not allow a proper incorporation of the unpredictable and sometimes dissenting calls for Enlightened reform voiced by private reason.[18] Diverse and not state-sponsored intellectual traditions seeking to rethink existential and social issues were *a priori* ruled out as suspect and potentially anti-Enlightened not on account of their demonstrated obscurantism and negation of the spirit of critique, but primarily because they did not fit into Billington's model of the Enlightenment. In the absence of clear analogues in Western Europe, ideas in Russia had little chance of being impartially analysed as Enlightened because in accordance with the chosen interpretive paradigm, ideas were 'proved' to be Enlightened by virtue of originating in Western European contexts.

Billington was right in testing whether Russians have taken on some of the critical attitudes embedded in the cultural norms sustaining the process of Westernisation. However, the merit of confounding a clearly rhetorical acceptance of these attitudes with their entry into the intellectual repertoire risked the possibility of misunderstanding what that repertoire actually was. The intense communication Catherine had with the *philosophes*, her espousal of some principles from Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws* and her encouragement of the *Encyclopédie*, was only indicative of "Catherine's Enlightenment" shared by the court and some of the aristocracy, but it did not overshadow competing native projects to utilise Western notions of progress.[19] In distinguishing between the predominantly Francophile sentiments expressed by Catherine from other aspects of Russian culture, Billington was perceptive in noting a deep-seated reaction against the crude aping of French manners resulting in the alienation of the emerging Russian intelligentsia from the absolutist regime.[20] Yet, important as that assessment was in locating a point at which the paths of the educated elite and of the state have diverged, it was presupposed by a biased notion that this

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[18] *Ibid.* p. 213.
[19] *Ibid.* p. 227.
[20] *Ibid.* pp. 233-4.

justified parting of ways incurred the danger of a rejection of the progressive implications of Russia's participation in the Enlightenment. Opposition to some of the effects of Westernisation could only be expressive of an unfolding Enlightenment only on the condition of the use of Western social thought to critique the mode and the extent, but not the blueprint for Russia's transformation.

The characterisation of the Enlightenment in Russia as a process of assimilation of foreign ideas required a subsequent comparison of contexts in order to determine the success of the appropriation and most importantly, to work out whether the borrowing nation has culturally become part of Western Europe. That is, Enlightenment could not be defined merely by openness to new modes of thought a particular context exhibited, but also had to be judged on the basis of concrete results of that receptivity, be it in terms of practical reform or, theoretical reformulation of pressing concerns. Billington broached both of these imperatives in his approach to the Enlightenment and accentuated the difference of the Russian context from the pan-European terrain where Enlightened forces were in operation to their full extent. Even in the metropolitan core areas of the continent, according to Gay, notwithstanding its seemingly wide diffusion, Enlightened criticism was the work of a 'little flock' of minds loosely affiliated with one another.[21] If in one of the most developed nations, the task of rational critique depended on individuals pitting themselves against the entrenched conventions of powerful institutions and supporting systems of thought, then an expectation of a successful engagement with the same task in one of the least developed nations was overly optimistic. Indeed, the actual popularisation of the writings of the *philosophes* was undertaken by Catherine in the form of an imperial decree which was retracted when these writings appeared to pose danger to the regime. It is therefore difficult to speak of assimilation of thought, but rather of its use for political purposes without its proper mediation by way of a relatively free enquiry by intellectuals committed to analysis rather than political expediency.

[21] J.A. Leith, 'Peter Gay's Enlightenment', p. 160.

Billington did not quite share this optimism and conceded that when compared to its actual results, the Enlightenment in Russia did not so much transform as make the conditions for future transformation.[22] Yet, whilst the author was accurate in noting the limits of rational discourses in effecting change, he was firm in his insistence that it was only on the basis of the presence of these discourses that an Enlightenment could be deduced. Any deviation from this trajectory on the part of Russian literati was interpreted as a symptom of the anti-Enlightenment.[23] Paradoxically, having conceived of the Enlightenment in Russia as inextricable from the policies and the intellectual climate sourced in Catherine's desire to project herself as an Enlightened monarch, Billington was forced to account for its incapacity to result in any serious amelioration of social ills:

> The reign of Catherine illustrates dramatically the conflict between theoretical enlightenment and practical despotism that bothered so many eighteenth-century European monarchs. Few other rulers of her time had such sweeping plans for reform and attracted so much adulation from the *philosophes*, yet few others were so poor in practical accomplishment. In her failure, however, she created the conditions for future change – posing vexing questions for the aristocracy while creating intolerable conditions for the peasantry. As the only articulate ideologist to rule Russia between Ivan IV and Lenin, she changed the terms of reference for Russian thought by linking Russian culture with that of France, and by attempting to base imperial authority on philosophic principles rather than hereditary right or religious sanction.[24]

If attitudes inspired by Catherine's cultural leanings were taken to constitute the core of the Russian Enlightenment and if these attitudes were shown to have made a very limited impact beyond altering the terms of reference, then it is not clear on what grounds Billington privileged the role of Enlightened absolutism. Notwithstanding the sincere hopes some of the *philosophes* expressed for the possibility of an absolutist ruler taking up their ideas at a practical level, this hope always problematized when the monarch had to decide between a policy

[22] J.H. Billington, 'The Troubled Enlightenment', p. 217.
[23] J.H. Billington, 'The Anti-Enlightenment', p. 270.
[24] J.H. Billington, 'The Troubled Enlightenment', pp. 217-8.

promoting Enlightened reform and the maintenance of absolutist prerogatives.[25] In the case of Catherine, this tension was particularly pronounced as very few of the liberal propositions in her much publicized *Instruction* (1767) culled from the works by French, British and Italian thinkers were actually put into practice.[26] Within the bounds set by Billington, Russia was not substantively partaking in a commonly-shared Enlightenment and was therefore, peripheral to the more important processes occurring in Western Europe even though, Russia's progress continued to be measured by the very norms it failed to incorporate into its intellectual culture.

Apart from resulting in difficulties with providing an account of intellectual shifts in Russia, recourse to Gay's understanding of the Enlightenment could not properly account for individual freedom any given thinker could exercise in choosing the manner and the content of his or her critique. For Gay, the relative freedom to philosophise and to subvert some of the established truth-claims was not only a major condition for the flourishing of Enlightened discourses – it was the very element which imparted the thought of the *philosophes* with its highly dynamic character.[27] Consequently, neither the exact nature of this thought nor its course could be *a priori* determined until the debates it was engaged in, came to an end. However, the association of the spread of the Enlightenment with a single prototype denied the possibility of intellectual freedom by way of problematizing

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[25] D. Beales, 'Philosophical Kingship and Enlightened Despotism' in Beales, D. *Enlightenment and Reform in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (London: Tauris, 2005), pp. 54-5. On the basis of her analysis of the relationship between Catherine and Diderot, E.E. Prikazschikova argued that a genuine dialogue between a philosopher and a ruler was in principle impossible, see her 'Didero i iskushenie russkogo prosveschenia' in *Izvestiia ural'skogo federal'nogo universiteta* 2, 14 (2013), pp. 198-199.

[26] In the opinion of one of the leading scholars of the Catherinian epoch, Isabel de Madariaga, Catherine's legislative experiments and her *Instruction* should not be underestimated, even though they were predominantly motivated by Catherine's need to legitimise her usurpation of the throne by appeals to justice, see I. Madariaga, 'The Great Instruction' in Madariaga, I. *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* (London, Phoenix, 2002), pp. 160-3. In effect, the deployment of Enlightened discourse was used to strengthen absolutist claims, jeopardising the possibility of its employment to effect change in instances when it threatened the stability of the regime it helped to justify.

[27] Gay's emphasis on revealing the atmosphere rather than the development of a particular philosophical notion was presupposed by his estimation of the *philosophes* as, in the words of Hans Kohn, "essayists and, in the best sense of the word, publicists…" who depended on the relative autonomy of the public sphere, see H. Kohn, "The Multidimensional Enlightenment", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 31, 3 (1970), p. 466. To this one may add Gay's understanding of freedom as the philosophes' "essential atmosphere." See Gay, 'The *Philosophe* in His Dictionary', in Gay, P. *op. cit.* p. 43.

the possibility of a spontaneous emergence of a particular critique because it was instead, retrospectively shaped by the extent of its success in other contexts. Obviously, the *philosophes* were not constrained in their literary endeavours by the imperative to re-deploy entire modes of thought worked out in different geographical and temporal domains. Rather, it was the combination of some intellectual norms derived from antiquity with early-modern sceptical attitudes to authority, which allowed Enlightened men and women of letters to focus on specific issues as they arose, without being overly restricted by precedent.[28] Just as in Gay's interpretation, the *philosophes* were drawn into a cycle of argumentation and compromise facilitated by the various intellectual traditions, so must Russian thinkers be seen through their capacity to qualify their commitment to reform in terms reflecting the contours of the intellectual landscape where that reform was meant to take place.

Ernst Cassirer's *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (1932) was also an influential work in predisposing scholars of Eighteenth-century Russia to narrow down the definition of the Enlightenment to a few basic themes derived from a limited contextual base. Cassirer conceived of the Enlightenment as a movement which derived its strength from advances in natural science occurring in Britain and France as "its ideal" to be replicated in philosophy, politics and morality. In doing so, the Enlightenment was "following step by step the triumphal march of the modern analytical spirit."[29] Whilst Cassirer was right in underscoring the revolutionary import of scientific progress, he was nevertheless wrong in proposing a highly selective narrative seeking to demonstrate that, irrespective of the evident diversity of Enlightened thought, its subscription to a single method of inquiry has overruled its inner differences.[30] Such belief in the possibility of

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[28] Gay stressed the potency of this combination in Voltaire in particular, which was held to be exemplary for the Enlightenment as a whole. The "sovereign rights of criticism" Voltaire claimed to exercise as a practical endeavour to improve mores and practices has unified the heterogeneous sources he relied upon, see P. Gay, *Ibid.* pp. 10-1.

[29] E. Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* tr. Pettegrove, J.P. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 9.

[30] K.B. Price, "Ernst Cassirer and the Enlightenment," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 18, 1 (1957), pp. 109-10. Price has taken issue not so much with Cassirer's "single idealized pattern of analysis" as with his lack of a clear comparison of various thinkers out of which, a single framework could to emerge. *Ibid.* p. 109.

determining the contours and the spread of the Enlightenment largely in accordance with the diffusion of the application of the empirical method to non-scientific problems could prove deceptive insofar as it was followed in contexts clearly lacking a strong scientific culture. That is, the use of some of Cassirer's approaches outside of the domains set by the author without a prior discussion of their relevance, further compounded Cassirer's already rigid explanation of evolving intellectual trends.

In a preface to the first and still much-quoted Anglophone study of Eighteenth-century Russian thought and culture, *The Eighteenth Century in Russia* (1973), J.G. Garrard made an explicit recourse to Cassirer's model of the Enlightenment in justification of his reference to Russian intellectuals as borrowers rather than producers of thought.[31] Russia's peripheral location vis-à-vis the more developed Western European nations was retranslated to imply a relatively passive intellectual participation in debates springing up and proceeding overseas and in regards to which, Russian thinkers could exercise very little leverage:

> …The dominant national cultures of the period were clearly those of England and France, and the Enlightenment itself, *pace* Cassirer, appears at times to have been a private intellectual ping-pong game between the two countries, watched by either enthusiastic or apprehensive bystanders. The Russians, like other nations, received more than they contributed, but they were part and parcel of the century, which cannot be fully understood without taking their participation into account.[32]

The problem with this assessment was not in its emphasis on the superiority of English and French cultural norms which were indeed difficult to overestimate in some key areas. Rather, it was Garrard's reduction of a Russian participation in the Enlightenment almost to the level of spectatorship. From this standpoint, it is impossible to clearly ascertain the exact nature and scope of Russian acquisition of foreign modes of thought. Even if one was to agree that, borrowing was the

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[31] J.G. Garrard, 'Preface' in Garrard, J.G. ed. *The Eighteenth Century in Russia*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973) p. v.
[32] *Ibid.*

primary means through which Russia entered modernity, then one would have to concede a much greater activity on the part of Russian thinkers in attempting to deploy foreign ideas. Whilst the author was correct in responding to the need to rectify the absence of scholarly discussion of Russian experience of the Eighteenth-century, insofar as that experience failed to include a substantively-argued discussion of Russia's participation in a pan-European Enlightenment, the marginal status of Russian intellectual culture was upheld.[33] Arguably, the reasoning employed by Garrard was self-contradictory for at the same time as it brought Russia's Eighteenth-century out of obscurity, it positioned the latter in such a way that it was overshadowed by a Western-European dominated Enlightenment it was meant to participate in. Consequently, the use of Cassirer's definition of the Enlightenment to identify Russia's location in this process has risked a loss of identity on account of the obvious difficulties Russian educated classes faced in meeting Cassirer's highly technical criteria on the basis of which, participation in Enlightenment can be deduced.

Just how difficult it was to integrate Russian cultural norms into a rigid framework sourced in a relatively simplified reading of Cassirer was evident in Garrard's essay on Eighteenth-century Russian literature and thought. Notwithstanding the author's valuable summation of the most important developments in Russian cultural and intellectual life, there was very little attempt to interpret them on the basis of their interaction with the Enlightenment. Instead of the latter term, Garrard emphasised the process of Westernization through which, Russians have acquired a "European spirit."[34] Westernization is a far less

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[33] One of the ideas raised in contemporary studies of cultural, political and intellectual interaction between Russia and Western Europe is that for most of the Eighteenth-century, until the French Revolution, the educated elite in the West did not necessarily conceive of Russia as fundamentally different from the rest of Europe. The steps Russian monarchs took to modernise their country has made it appear to be relatively familiar in the eyes of the contemporary Western European audience, see V.E. Bagno, 'Russkaia ideia Zapada (K postanovke problemy)' in Bagno, V.E. and Malikova, M.E. *K istorii idei na Zapade: Russkaia ideia* (St. Petersburg: Iz-vo Pushinskogo Doma, 2010), pp. 7-8. This important assessment implicitly indicated the extent to which, a focus on familiar trends in foreign contexts is deceptive because in light of the resulting sense of predictability, there was less reason to actually follow up how these trends have taken root and what kind of discursive responses they have invoked. Belief in historical continuity across heterogeneous contexts was thus able to distance the object of inquiry in all of its complexity.

[34] J.G. Garrard, 'The Emergence of Modern Russian Literature and Thought' in Garrard *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.

exact notion than the Enlightenment and not all aspects of Westernization are necessarily examples of Enlightened thinking. A panoramic survey of how Russian rulers sought to adopt Western techniques of rulership and how Russian writers conceived of the rapid changes reshaping their country cannot be *a priori* be accepted as evidence of participation in the Enlightenment. Westernization merely means catching up with the technical level of development evident in a particular prototype whereas Enlightenment, in Cassirer's understanding, was predominantly an epistemic endeavour to locate and apply a unified method of inquiry to perceived divergence of empirical facts resulting in a relative truth not in contradiction with itself.[35] Inattention to the disjunction between the meaning of the terms Westernization and Enlightenment has served the purpose of allowing for the avoidance of having to detail Russia's location therein. Garrard's recourse to Westernization presupposed Russia's place in the family of European nations which was not risked by its almost non-existent contribution to the Enlightenment. Therefore, the author concluded his essay admitting that in an Enlightenment dominated by England and France, "Russia's part was minor" without actually analysing what that part actually was, insofar as it was distinct from its conformity to select Western norms.[36]

Some of the shortcomings evident in Garrard's preface and contributing essay have been considerably moderated in an essay by Marc Raeff, devoted to the trajectory of the Enlightenment in Russia on the basis of its heterogeneous sources.[37] Whilst appearing to be in agreement with the presence of a relatively unified Enlightenment, the author was one of the first Anglophone scholars to problematize the notion that Enlightened thought in Russia was reducible to a single origin in Western Europe. In the early Eighteenth-century, the term 'Europe' in Russia was not monolithic and entirely distinct from the domain of the Tsar because, as attested by native literature of that period, the term could be pluralised into 'Europes' thus, implying a lack of a single core area from which ideas

[35] E. Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, pp. 129-33.
[36] J.G. Garrard, *op. cit.* p. 21.
[37] M. Raeff, 'The Enlightenment in Russia' in Garrard, J.G. *op. cit.* pp. 27-30.

could be borrowed.[38] Rather than seeing Russians positioned on the sidelines of an unfolding Enlightenment project, Raeff emphasised an active engagement with an array of competing Enlightened discourses in a way which clearly singled out the educated elite as cultural agents and not, as an audience incapable of exercising autonomous judgement. The presence of that judgement did not always exhibit itself in an original formulation of borrowed ideas or in the emergence of a completely new mode of thought. Insofar as for most of the Eighteenth-century, Russian society was in the midst of a protracted reorientation towards Western European prototypes to solve its domestic problems, judgement was at least initially, synonymous with a selection of foreign material to be introduced into the native context. The author has drawn attention to this process of selectivity and tied it to an increase in receptivity to increasingly sophisticated intellectual traditions amongst the nascent intelligentsia to the point of being capable of applying "the dynamic creative elements at the core of foreign philosophies, ideologies, and values."[39]

Such a reorientation towards sources and receptivity represented a conceptual advance in the study of the Enlightenment in Russia in comparison to approaches by Billington and Garrard. Even though Raeff did not explicitly take issue with the pan-European model of the Enlightenment, his essay nevertheless, uncovered the weakness of that model when applied to a particular context. Unlike previous literature, Raeff argued against the presumed predominance of the French Enlightenment for Russian intellectual culture in favour of the *Aufklärung*

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[38] *Ibid.* p. 27. M. Raeff has mentioned this fact in reference to a tale circulating in the last years of Peter the Great's reign about a Russian sailor who travels overseas. The tale begins with the statement, "In Russia's Europes" lived a nobleman by the name of so-and-so. For M. Raeff this phrase was indicative of the fact that, Russia did not, as a consequence of its adoption of Western European intellectual norms become part of a single Europe, but of several Europes. Arguably, this analysis can be carried a little further. The reason for subordinating Europes to Russia is somewhat vague as the unknown author could have gestured towards Russia's version of its Europe existing in a multiplicity of other versions in Russia and overseas. Thus, the character of the Russian Eighteenth-century should not be conceived in simple polarities, but rather as period of constant tension between ideas and sources of influence, sometimes existing in opposition and sometimes coalescing into concrete programs, yet always in competition and in the process of reprojection. See, 'Gistoriia o rossiiskom matrose Vasilii Koriotskom i o prekrasnoi korolevne Iraklii florenskoi zemli' in Zapadov, A.V. and Makogonenko, G.P. eds. *Russkaia proza XVIII veka* Tom pervyi (Moscow: Izd-vo hudozhestvennoi literatury, 1950), p. 22.

[39] M. Raeff, 'The Enlightenment in Russia' pp. 41-2.

which was now held to be a movement towards which, the Russians were much more receptive.[40] The Russian men and women of letters saw in the *Aufklärung* a foregrounding of personal duty, the importance of civil institutions and predilection towards speculative thought within a firmly Christian worldview anchored in private experience of a metaphysical truth.[41] In making his case for a strong German influence in the development of Russian philosophical, political and spiritual discourses, Raeff drew attention first, to the relativity of foreign influences when taken separately and not seen in the larger matrix of other competing influences; and second, of a qualified autonomy of the Russian context in terms of its capacity to borrow some traditions at the expense of others. If established notions of the origin and of the manner of intellectual diffusion could be revised to the extent that, it was no longer credible to conceive of a uniform set of ideas transiting from one region to another, then faith in the homogeneity of a pan-European Enlightenment was questionable.

Studies oriented towards the explication of Russian intellectual, rather than cultural history have been more perceptive in noting the peculiarities of Russian responses to foreign ideas in a manner reflective of the predisposition of the local educated elite. Andrzej Walicki's *A History of Russian Thought* (1979) was an important text in this regard in light of its endeavour to provide a Russian perspective on the process of Westernisation through an examination of the various worldviews Russian intellectuals constructed in the course of that process. Whilst following the conventional trope, according to which the Russian Enlightenment peaked as a result of the influence of French Enlightened thought, Walicki nevertheless understood this influence to have been superimposed upon prior influences and depending on native initiative and reformulation for their

[40] Raeff has restated the same point in stronger terms elsewhere that for Russians, "…Germany furnished the most influential body of ideas and also served as a transmitter of French and English notions as well." Thus, even if the ideas percolating into Russia were non-German, the extent to which they were received in German terms is an issue to be considered. See M. Raeff, 'Introduction' in Bolotov A.T. *Zhizn' i prikliucheniia Andreiia Bolotova* (Cambridge: Oriental Research Partners, 1973), p. v.
[41] *Ibid.* pp. 32-39.

continuity.[42] Within such a framework, Walicki did not have to take issue with the problem of originality in his discussion of intellectual history and unlike Garrard, did not trivialise Russian thought on the basis of its modest contribution to pan-European master narratives. In his assessment of Nikolai Ivanovich Novikov (1744-1818), Walicki was prepared to state that the former was a "central figure of his age" without in the same time, being an original thinker in any sense of the term.[43] Indeed, the entire thrust of the author's discussion tended towards revealing the presence of individuals who were not always independent thinkers, but who introduced or amplified "forward-looking philosophical and social ideas" often in direct opposition to trends emanating from the court.[44]

The uniqueness of the Eighteenth-century in the history of Russian thought was precisely in its character as a period when originality was largely operable through personal commitment and manner of reprojection of truths already established in other contexts and not, through a clear contribution to discrete philosophical discourses at a Western European level. The reason why this kind of approach to knowledge did not entirely presuppose imitation was because for Walicki, the Russian Enlightenment gathered pace because Russian intellectuals were becoming increasingly self-conscious about what kind of Westernisation their country was being subjected to, what were its moral effects and what kind of worldviews could facilitate social progress.[45] In all of these cases, a critical glance at the challenges of rapid transformation and the sheer distance between theory and practice on the part of the nascent Russian intelligentsia meant that, conventional Western Enlightened discourses would be given new objects of critique and find new justification in ways suggesting a keen sensibility to perceived needs of the Post-Petrine state.[46] The considerable textual output of Enlightened Russian literati reflected the gradual ascendency of moral self-interrogation as a precondition to worldly action and indicated a desire to anchor

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[42] A. Walicki, 'Chapter 1: Trends in Enlightenment Thought' in Walicki, A. *A History of Russian Thought: From the Enlightenment to Marxism* tr. H. Rusiecka (Stanford; Stanford University Press, 1979), pp. 1-3.
[43] *Ibid.* p. 24.
[44] *Ibid.* p. 14.
[45] *Ibid.* p. 1.
[46] *Ibid.*

ideas into a world of inner experience and conviction. Insofar as for Walicki, the Russian Enlightenment came into maturity as a result of its capacity to foster moral intuition directed at other human beings via one's own self, his assessment formed the ultimate limit to the belief in a single Enlightenment because it was shown to have found a mode of operation quite unlike the one operating in its original context.

Roy Porter's and Mikulás Teich's *The Enlightenment in National Context* (1981) was instrumental in the gradual overcoming of a single Enlightenment approach. The primary reason prompting an analysis of localised Enlightenments was the realisation that there was little evidence for the existence of "socially disembodied ideas."[47] Whilst a cosmopolitan approach to the spread of ideas has not been entirely relegated, the contributors to this volume payed attention to the interplay between established institutions, social stratification and the push towards reform which has imparted unique characteristics to national Enlightenments, notwithstanding the shareability of some basic thought patterns. Apart from the varying national conditions, Porter was careful to note a much more subtle point of differentiation revolving around the difference of meaning that Enlightenment was imbued with, and the ends it was presumed to achieve in its respective locales.[48] Predictably, the privileging of the French Enlightenment model as one of universal applicability was reconsidered as erroneous and capable of obscuring national peculiarities.[49] Not only were some of the localised Enlightenments not necessarily atheistic, sceptical and contra conventional authority, but in some cases, have found their habitués in religious and state contexts in terms the *philosophes* were unlikely to accept as legitimate. By foregrounding national differences as decisive forces at a time when the concept of nationhood in a modern sense was quite underdeveloped, this new approach risked accusations of being overly retrospective. However, this risk was justified insofar as it served as a stimulant towards further engagement with the immediate

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[47] R. Porter, 'Preface' in Porter, R. and Teich, M. eds. *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. vii.
[48] *Ibid.*
[49] *Ibid.* p. viii.

ground of the Enlightenment and away from conceiving the latter through a highly generic prism not always correlatable with specific local conditions.

Some of these methodological advances were noticeable in an essay on the Russian Enlightenment by Paul Dukes in *The Enlightenment in National Context*. Of particular importance was Dukes' revision of the chronology of the Russian Enlightenment. If in the previous discussions, the foundational role of Peter the Great (1682-1721) in initiating Westernisation culminating in the Enlightenment was seen to contrast greatly with the established worldviews of early-modern Muscovy, Dukes' study lessened the tension between old and new Russia and posited some continuities. In order to substantiate his rightful claim that the Russian Enlightenment must be "seen as a local phenomenon" tied to the historical forces occurring on native soil and not entirely dependent on foreign influence, Dukes entertained the possibility of a Russian pre-Enlightenment developing well prior to the Petrine Revolution.[50] Unlike the undeniable impact of Peter on the structure of the Russian state, Duke believed that the modernising policies of his father, Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich (1645-1676), have received very little attention even though they represented an emphasis on institutional transformation without a concomitant displacement of cultural norms.[51] For Dukes, this early adjustment to Western modes of governance, influenced the manner and the attitude Russians exhibited towards Westernisation in a way which made it very difficult to conceive of Russia as an ahistorical context fertilized by Enlightened discourses. Implicitly, Dukes has directed future studies of the topic to pay heed to the Russia's extended process of modernisation sustained by a highly selective approach as to what kind of discourses were borrowed, thus invalidating a clear comparison between a Russian Enlightenment and its respective Western prototypes.

Innovative as Dukes' contextualisation of the Russian Eighteenth-century into a larger historical framework was, it failed to seriously alter the content and

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[50] P. Dukes, 'The Russian Enlightenment' in Porter, R. and Teich, M. eds. *The Enlightenment in National Context*, p. 179.
[51] *Ibid.* pp. 179-80.

the course of the Russian Enlightenment in comparison to its previous treatments. Instead of imbuing his definition of the Russian Enlightenment with an alternative trajectory intending to fulfil specific aims peculiar to the Russian national context, Dukes repeated some of the basic assumptions already presented in Billington. The author's almost complete conflation of a Russian Enlightenment with the cultural and intellectual climate fostered by Catherine the Great represented one of the most serious limitations to his analysis. Dukes was certain that, notwithstanding the originality of his claims about the sources of the Russian Enlightenment, they were nevertheless of introductory value only, and not reasons for a subsequent reinterpretation of the entire topos:

> Important though all these prolegomena have been, it is high time that we moved on to the Enlightenment proper, which in Russia coincides with the reign of Catherine II or Great. That basic fact constitutes one of the glories of the Russian Enlightenment, and also one of the chief obstacles to its full comprehension.[52]

What was meant by obstacles, was not so much an over-emphasis on Catherine's centrality as the neglect of other Russian thinkers who were nonetheless well within her orbit of influence.[53] Catherine's direct borrowing of some of the key ideas of Western Enlightened thinkers in her programmatic *The Instruction* (1767) received considerable attention and was promoted by Dukes as a highly valuable guide to Catherine's understanding of the Enlightenment and of the intellectual sources necessary to advance its progress in her polity.[54] Given such emphasis, it was difficult to work out the actual contours of the Russian national context because it was approached as a domain upon which foreign ideas could be imposed by decree rather than transformed by local intellectuals into native discourses. Whilst some mention was made of the various intellectuals whose thought enriched the Russian Eighteenth-century, the kind of direction Dukes wanted scholarship to take in the future would subordinate any dissenting conceptualisations of the Russian Enlightenment into a larger fabric of Russian culture dominated by Catherinian reform projects. Because of this, there was little

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[52] *Ibid.* p. 181.
[53] *Ibid.* p. 182.
[54] *Ibid*

opportunity to explore what kinds of ideas were most suited to the Russian national context on the basis of which, a genuinely Russian Enlightenment could be held to exist.

The appearance of *Nikolay Novikov: Enlightener of Russia* (1984) by W.G. Jones was indicative of a conscious attempt to apply some aspects of the national Enlightenment model to Eighteenth-century Russia. Jones was quite explicit in his condemnation of previous scholarly attempts to measure the Russian Enlightenment on the basis of its dependence on the *philosophes* because in his opinion, the French Enlightenment was foreclosed to transplantation into Russian soil.[55] In sociological as well as political terms, the author noted crucial differences in Russian national context which made some of the basic normative aspects of French Enlightened thought either unworkable or irrelevant. Specifically, the absence of a strong bourgeoisie and the relative acceptance of the nature of the Russian state by the Russian educated elite signified for Jones an alternative teleology of the Russian Enlightenment in comparison to its Western European counterparts.[56] As a result, the imperative to achieve the emancipation of a particular class, to circumvent the ailing religious institutions and to break the latter's alliance with the state was not felt to be of pressing concern. Instead, Enlightenment in Russia was believed to be more concerned with a much broader cultural reorientation towards Western discourses without at the same time, compromising Russian traditions through undue imitation of foreign manners.[57] From that perspective, the notion of the diffusion of foreign ideas was no longer directly correlated with their concrete institutional embodiment but rather, approached from their pedagogic capacity to reform the mores of society.

Novikov's thought and publishing activity formed the case-study of Jones' argument regarding the different trajectory of the Russian Enlightenment. The importance of Novikov's contribution to the development of Eighteenth-century Russian culture was recognised long before the emergence of this critical study.

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[55] W.G. Jones, *Nikolay Novikov: Enlightener of Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 1.
[56] *Ibid.* pp. 1-2.
[57] *Ibid.* p. 100.

Jones' monograph, however, apart from being the first full-length assessment of Novikov in English, was important because he noted several competing streams within the Russian Enlightenment. Novikov was shown to have been at one point, a purveyor of near-contemporary French thought, a later critic of Voltaire's influence in Russia and ultimately, a firm believer in basic humanist attitudes which were meant to regulate social existence.[58] It was emphasis on the latter which was one of the distinguishing features of the Russian Enlightenment. In Western Europe, the formation of humanist ideas and their circulation throughout the public sphere was established well prior to the Enlightenment. In Russia however, a Republic of Letters had to be created and critical reading as an ongoing pursuit instilled therein. Thus, if Novikov's aims were quite modest and not necessarily Enlightened in a technical sense, in light of the highly underdeveloped Russian context, his practical endeavour to institute a socially heterogeneous reading public was of revolutionary import because it elevated scholarly and literary pursuits as worthy activities critical to the moral welfare of the state.[59] The diverse literature Novikov promoted reflected his evolving commitments to the Enlightenment and most importantly, suggested an attempt to overcome specifically Russian shortcomings in the development of modern intellectual culture.

The Enlightenment in Russia then, was repositioned from its previous conceptualisation as a process of reforming social and state institutions, to a gradual reappraisal of what values the individual should aspire to within society irrespective of the latter's actual structure. To some extent, this implied recognition of an inward regeneration of the person and not necessarily of institutional transformation as the centre of gravity of the Russian Enlightenment. For that reason, Jones' discussion of Novikov's journalistic, publishing and philanthropic activities was particularly valuable because it elucidated the lengths educated Russians went to, in order to circumvent state institutions and attempt to gain direct access to individual minds making up the nascent intelligentsia. Yet,

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[58] *Ibid.* p. 142, 57.

[59] V.O. Kliuchevskii, 'Vospominanaia o N.I. Novikove i ego vremeni' in V.I. Novikov, ed. *Masonstvo i russkaia kul'tura* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1998), pp. 74-6.

the author's closer engagement with the actual possibilities of Russian national context and the respective teleologies it could sustain, was not followed up with a qualitative re-examination of the type of Enlightened discourses operating in Russia. An argument favouring the development of a humanistic outlook sensitive to the peculiarities of Russian history should have been much more reflective of attempts to deploy native intellectual projects in order to substantiate the earlier claim regarding the impossibility of a transplanted Enlightenment. In the absence of an analysis of philosophical, political and social ideas, Jones' otherwise important contribution to the contemporary understanding of the more practical and popular aspects of Russia's modernisation was liable to be misinterpreted as one of the decisive features of the Russian Enlightenment. Because of this, Jones' initial premise implying Russia's difference was considerably counteracted by his concomitant belief in Novikov's dependence on Western European Enlightened thought which the latter sought to popularise.[60]

Jones' study pointed towards a deeper problem in the understanding of the Russian Enlightenment as it did not make the distinction between the processes of 'Enlightenment' and 'Enlightening'. In her essay 'Russia and the Enlightenment,' Isabel de Madariaga was one of the first Anglophone scholars to apply this distinction towards an analysis of Eighteenth-century Russian cultural and intellectual trends.[61] Madariaga conceived of these different but overlapping terms as a distinction between the Enlightenment proper, defined as a circulation of rational, secular and scientific attitudes whilst Enlightening implied the latter's utilitarian popularisation. As a consequence, even though the role of Catherine the Great in fostering the Russian Enlightenment continued to be lionised, the essay provided a very critical assessment of Russia's embodiment of foreign thought patterns. On the basis of her analysis of Russian reading habits, Madariaga concluded that, notwithstanding the enthusiasm with which some Russian intellectuals sought to Enlighten the reading public, the readership was quite small

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[60] *Ibid.* p. 2.
[61] I. de Madariaga, 'Russia and the Enlightenment' in Madariaga de, I. ed. *Politics and Culture in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (London: Longman, 1998): 262-84.

and the percolation of ideas was superficial.[62] In addition to that, literate Russians had little opportunity to directly access contemporary Western thought and were instead, primarily relying on knowledge which was of normative value in Western Europe for almost a century.[63] These limitations foregrounded the problem of equating a diffusion of thought with the emergence of native discourses without which, a local Enlightenment cannot exist. Privileged as Novikov was in Anglophone literature, Madariaga problematized such privileging by virtue of sharply disaggregating predominantly consumerist from the creative approaches to Enlightened thought.

Indirectly, Madariaga's essay presupposed that, what previous scholars have taken to be the central features of the Russian Enlightenment, was in actual fact a process of transformation of complex Western notions into readily comprehensible literary summations. This did not minimise the value of the works of the *philosophes* and of the articles from the *Encyclopédie*, the latter being an especially important introduction to the French Enlightenment available to Russian readers.[64] Without actually expanding upon the 'real' Russian Enlightenment was to be found, Madariaga located a considerable divergence between clearly evident cultural attributes which were often mistaken for the Enlightenment and the much more elusive native intellectual projects which were symptomatic of a genuine process of reform.[65] Western influence was primarily of cultural rather than of intellectual import which implied the need to reconsider the empirical basis upon which the Russian Enlightenment was to be approached. If the hitherto irrefutable evidence derived from analysis of Russian reading culture could not in itself provide the contours of any given intellectual movements and if mere attitudes were also in themselves insufficient guides to the critical nature of the Enlightenment, then the latter's presence must be sought elsewhere. In this sense, Madariaga's essay represented a conceptual advance because it was oriented away from broad cultural trends which could never stand in place of intellectual

[62] *Ibid.* pp. 268-73.
[63] *Ibid.* pp. 264-5.
[64] *Ibid.* p. 275.
[65] *Ibid.* 265.

endeavours towards an examination of individual thinkers as key agents of an Enlightenment incapable of depending on a complex reading public.[66]

The absence of a sufficiently resilient educated class capable of absorbing a variety of ideas did not mean that the Russian Enlightenment did not extend beyond its socio-cultural impact. Rather, one of the defining features of the Russian national context might be the sheer impossibility of introducing a new mode of thought without at the same time, fostering the emergence of an intelligentsia capable of embodying it. Thus, when Madariaga noted the disjunction between cultural and intellectual norms, she was not only cautioning against an overly judgemental assessment of Russian capacity to engage in intellectual debates as was the case with J.G. Garrard. Most importantly, Madariaga implicitly positioned the location of the Russian Enlightenment as an intersection of parallel processes of firstly, the diffusion of ideas and secondly, of the creation of a milieu wherein the former were to be discussed. Catherine the Great's *The Instruction*, to which Madariaga paid considerable attention, exemplified this interrelation. *The Instruction* provided the readership with a clear digest of the most important Western European Enlightened principles and was used to justify the dignity of intellectual pursuits and the creation of the professional class.[67] Arguably then, one of the reasons why the Enlightenment was much harder to locate in comparison to the process of 'Enlightening', was due to the difficulty of following up the manner in which ideas were applied to strengthen the discursive possibilities of the educated elite which were meant to result in clearly-defined philosophical, political and social projects.

The publication of Raffaella Faggionato's *A Rosicrucian Utopia in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (2005) represented the most thorough and the most ambitious attempt to date, to rethink the Russian Enlightenment along national lines and to locate its hitherto elusive nexus of foreign ideas, socio-cultural action

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[66] Studies of Russian society have conclusively argued that the middle class was absent in Eighteenth-century Russia. As a result, Russian Enlightenment could not proceed along continental lines because it depended on individuals in ways Western European Enlightenments never needed to for their continuity, see E.K. Wirtschafter, *Social Identity in imperial Russia* (De Kalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1997), pp. 98-9.
[67] *Ibid.* p. 276.

and emergent local discourses. What immediately differentiated this study from its predecessors, was its focus on the extent to which, the conventional rational rhetoric associated with the Enlightenment was supplemented and in some cases, replaced by traditions normally presumed to be contrary to established characterisation of the age of reason.[68] For Faggionato, Russia's entryway into modernity was not reducible to the Petrine importation of rationalised Western systems of law and governance nor, to the Catherinian diffusion of secular and predominantly French mores. Apart from the immensely influential reforms of these two monarchs in opening Russia to more modern foreign precedents, was the much more difficult issue of a conscious attempt to determine the moral implications of modernisation and to work out what ideas to borrow and in what manner, without compromising the centrality of human capacity for self-improvement. That is, late Eighteenth-century Russian intellectuals who have turned to explicitly mystical thought in response to a deep dissatisfaction with the course of Russia's development thus far, were construed as pivotal agents of an unfolding modernity because they were prepared to critique its content without also rejecting its absolute necessity.[69] The Russian Enlightenment then, was not so much a phenomenon proceeding against its obscurantist detractors, but an intellectual space where competing views of what kind of modernity was to be pursued.[70]

In some respects, Faggionato's expansion of the Russian Enlightenment to include discourses usually associated with its antithesis was counterintuitive because she amassed a wealth of evidence to suggest that, a mystical turn was symptomatic of a mature Russian Enlightenment highly conscious of its sources, its context and its telos. Far from signifying the whims of conservative thinkers, the

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[68] R. Faggionato, *A Rosicrucian Utopia in Eighteenth-Century Russia: The Masonic Circle of N.I. Novikov* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), p. 2.
[69] *Ibid.*
[70] Here it is worth noting that Faggionato's belief in multiplicity of discourses informing a single, but highly rarefied Russian Enlightenment, replicated some semiotic approaches to Eghteenth-century Russian literary culture. Insofar as Faggionato analysed the mystical and spiritual discourses operating in the Enlightenment, she was in agreement with the semiotic privileging of multiple cultural codes on the basis of which, a moral community could exist. See, L. Steiner, "Towards an Ideal Universal Community: Lotman's Revisiting of the Enlightenment and Romanticism", *Comparative Literature Studies* 40, 1 (2003), pp. 41-2.

religious colouring of late Eighteenth-century intellectual culture which aimed at the reform of the soul and of outward institutions, was a realistic response to the challenges of Russian Westernisation and to the perceived relevance of select pre and post-Petrine norms:

> Russian Rosicrucianism was to reveal exactly what Russian Enlightenment shared with the Western Enlightenments, what Russian culture absorbed from *Enlightenment*, *Aufklärung*, *Lumières*, and what characterised *russkoe prosveschenie*, making it a separate phenomenon. Philosophical and religious movements that ran parallel in eighteenth-century European culture became so intertwined and confused in their Russian context that they created a cultural product with anomalous yet highly original features. Among the coexisting issues of the Moscow Circle's world vision we can find Hermetic themes, modern thought, libertarian and democratic demands, Mysticism, Orthodoxy, Rational Scepticism, loyalty towards institutions and the need for a radical reform of the Church and society, culture and religion. They were all put into daily practice, a fact that was to have a profound influence of the history of ideas in Russia.[71]

Behind the seeming eclecticism resulting from various influences to which Russian minds were subjected, loomed the peculiar Russian reception of ideas and practices which, irrespective of their familiarity when seen in their original contexts, have often been imbued with a different content and intended to solve different problems. The crucial emphasis in the above passage was on a conscious desire to implement radical reforms through an enactment of heterogeneous precepts in moral as well as practical spheres of life. This implied a conscious selection of discourses deemed to be capable of exerting decisive leverage over individuals in actualising the intended transformation of religious and social experiences. Faggionato's postulation of Rosicrucianism as a tradition revealing the structure of the Russian Enlightenment was therefore, not indicative of her view that mysticism was Enlightened in itself, but that its selection to extend the

[71] *Ibid.* p. 4.

Enlightenment into hitherto ignored domains, represented a wilful break with precedent in terms which resonated with Russian sensibilities.

Unlike preceding studies which have only hinted at the uniqueness of the Russian context without actually applying it to determine the characteristics of the Russian Enlightenment in any detail, Faggionato noted the contextual differences and proceeded to reconstruct the trajectory of the Enlightenment accordingly. Such an approach echoed Raeff's much earlier claims regarding the autonomous nature of Russian intellectual processes presupposed by a selection of discourses from a plurality of Western European sources to suit local needs.[72] In his preface to Faggionato's monograph, Raeff underscored his belief in the complex and protracted course of Russian Westernisation and suggested that in the case of Russia, a turn towards spiritual inquiry was one of the pathways through which, Russia "entered the world of Western Enlightenment."[73] In light of this pathway which stimulated a search for alternative Western ideas to the ones being diffused previously, Faggionato argued for a revision of contemporary conceptualisations of the Age of Reason. If Russian intellectuals defended the autonomy of the person, encouraged some democratic practices in select environments and stimulated a fundamental improvement of institutions through a mystical inquiry directed towards the essence of man and nature, then the freethinking and emancipationist aspect of mysticism must be recognised.[74] Since some of the leading Russian intellectuals were involved in various Rosicrucian activities intending to actualise a new vision of Russian modernity which included some basic features of most kinds of Enlightenments, Faggionato was confident in locating an "intersection between esoteric tradition and Enlightenment radicalism" that was almost absent in other national contexts.[75]

Notwithstanding the abstruse nature of some of the mystical discourses and the out-dated conceptions of the inner workings of the human person and of

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[72] M. Raeff, 'The Enlightenment in Russia', pp. 27-30.
[73] M. Raeff, 'Preface' in Faggionato, R. *A Rosicrucian Utopia in Eighteenth-Century Russia*, p. xii.
[74] *Ibid.* p. 129.
[75] *Ibid.*

nature they entailed, in the Russian context, they were far more successful in implementing an Enlightened attitude to learning, ethics and progress. It was probably for this reason that Faggionato focused much more on the purely organisational and ideological dimensions to Russian Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism and somewhat less on the purely intellectual thrust of mystical critique. It was primarily through their involvement in organisational and practical activity, argued Faggionato, that Russian Rosicrucians especially, have most closely approximated "Enlightened circles with radical leanings that dotted the history of the eighteenth century in the West."[76] Whilst there were radically-minded Russian intellectuals prior to the irruption of spirituality as one of the dominant themes in Russian Eighteenth-century culture, at no other time in the history of the Russian Enlightenment since the Petrine reforms, were educated Russians in a position to put into daily practice some of their most cherished theoretical presumptions.[77] Insofar as in many cases, these presumptions coincided with features common to several national Enlightenments, Faggionato could be said to have indirectly implied that in Russia, mysticism provided a far more powerful stimulus to achieve Enlightened ends than rational and secular discourses.

It was only with the publication of Faggionato's monograph that the key criterion informing the national Enlightenment model, namely that all ideas are rarefied by their contexts irrespective of their universal appeal, was unequivocally applied to the Russia.[78] It might at first sight, appear to be too strong a claim that the Russian Enlightenment became a truly national phenomenon when its spiritual orientation was privileged as its most distinguishing feature. However, the presentation of Faggionato's empirical evidence gives such a view considerable plausibility. Irrespective of how obscurantist and irrational various Western and Eastern Orthodox theosophic and mystical traditions were when taken by themselves and contrasted with the latest advances in philosophy, science and politics, their capacity to mobilise Russian cultural and intellectual elites to achieve

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[76] *Ibid.* p. 117.
[77] For Faggionato, the most practical expression of a mystical worldview was the book-trade which the Russian Rosicrucians expanded greatly, see *Ibid.*
[78] R. Porter, 'Preface' in Porter, R. and Teich, M. eds. *The Enlightenment in National Context*, p. vii.

social reform was unprecedented either in Western European or Russian history. Faggionato's exhaustive attention to the pioneering role of Rosicrucian organisations in the development of pedagogy, accessibility of useful literature and of philanthropy was meant to demonstrate how a diffusion of late medieval and early-modern spiritual discourses, resulted in the emergence of rational responses to the pressures of modernity. The uncovering of this unexpected causality between highly theoretical principles resistant to rational inquiry and their practical application was therefore sufficient for Faggionato to view mysticism as an Enlightened tradition strictly within the confines of its positive influence on the drawn-out Russian search for a meaningful conception of social action and an appropriate sense of individual worth. Within this schema, for Russian intellectuals, Western Europe was neither an object for emulation, nor of outright rejection, but a source of ideas capable of critiquing contemporary Western European as well as Russian experiences of the Enlightenment without actually repudiating it.

Russia's Enlightenment: A New Approach

In light of the strengths evident in Faggionato's reformulation of the Russian Enlightenment and in particular, of her attention to patterns of reasoning usually considered to lack an Enlightened identity, my thesis will use some of Faggionato's conclusions as a groundwork for further investigation of the mystical topos. The author's foregrounding of mysticism as an Enlightened discourse and its systematic correlation with practical postures towards political, social and personal spheres of life will be accepted as an established aspect of the Enlightenment in Russia.[79] However, precisely because of the meticulousness of research into the manner in which Rosicrucian ideology was translated into praxis, the speculative nature of a mystical worldview and its critique of transcendent and

[79] This does not mean that the Russian Enlightenment is presently conceived in static and finished terms. To the contrary, the very success with which, at least by Russianists, Freemasonry was included into the Enlightenment, contributed towards an expectation of future scholarly alteration of "the history of mentalities in Russia of the period." See, A. Kahn, "Russian Studies: New Synergies", *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 34, 4 (2011), p. 499.

temporal authority remained underdeveloped in Faggionato's monograph. This is not a criticism of one of the few successful attempts to trace the course of an entire and hitherto neglected tradition. Insofar as the latter was achieved, a detailed assessment of the thought and activity of Novikov and his circle can be said to have addressed the problem of "sparse evidence of home-grown engagement with the philosophical underpinnings of the Enlightenment" albeit, more in terms of their sociological significance.[80] This thesis will build on Faggionato's revision of Russia's manner of appropriating foreign discourses and provide a more detailed account of the extent of mysticism's radical redefinition of religious, spiritual and personal organisational forms. In doing so, it is hoped that, a more complete picture will emerge of how select Russian thinkers grappled with the imperative to rethink and to rejustify their commitments to institutions, practices and concepts which had to be reformed rather than negated. As a result it will be possible to have a clearer grasp of why mysticism possessed such mobilisational appeal in comparison to more rational discourses in late Eighteenth-century Russia and why it was sometimes capable of orienting the mind towards rational worldly action.

The national Enlightenment approach and its increasing sensitivity to the unique manner of localisation of otherwise unknown ideas, came under heavy criticism from adherents of the belief that in Europe, irrespective of local differences, there were only two Enlightenments, a radical and a moderate one. The appearance of Jonathan Israel's *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670-1752* (2006) directly threatened to subordinate the Russian Enlightenment again to pan-European discourses and to reject some of its most distinguished characteristics. Israel's methodology was criticised for its un-historical levelling of authorial intentions as seen in their texts and its predominantly ideological reappraisal of the roots of modernity.[81] For Israel, the diversity of Enlightened traditions could be set against their commitments to two principal kinds of Enlightenments, a radical and a moderate one. The Enlightenment was informed by an inner "antagonistic duality" between

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[80] *Ibid.*

[81] A.J. La Vopa, "A New Intellectual History? Jonathan Israel's Enlightenment", *The Historical Journal* 52, 3 (2009): 717-38.

its moderate and its radical streams which Israel considered to be the "most fundamental thing about it."[82] Irrespective of their contexts, Enlightened thinkers were approached on the basis of their commitments to Spinozistic monism, complete disbelief in supernatural agency and concern with human equality.[83] The compromising of these conditions meant a moderation of the radical Enlightenment into a movement which was far more tolerant of established authority at a cost to its critical capacity. Thinkers that have not been 'positively' influenced by Spinoza or, whose work could not be read as materialistic, are only Enlightened in a limited sense of wanting moderate reform and therefore, could not be deemed to be the decisive shapers of modernity in the way that explicitly radical thinkers were. One of the primary dangers of reconceiving all known manifestations of the Enlightenment in accordance with a single dynamic through which it developed as a pan-European phenomenon was the concomitant over-privileging of certain traditions which Enlightened thinkers must necessarily follow. Thus, whilst Israel was responsible for the most sweeping re-interpretation of the Enlightenment since Peter Gay, Israel's single vision of modernity called for a foregrounding of a very limited number of philosophical traditions.[84] If this model were to be fully applied to Russia, it would mean a complete reversal of how Russian intellectual history would be approached. It would be necessary to read into how Russian thinkers participated in foreign debates, irrespective of whether the foundational notions which made these debates possible, were actually accessible to them or to the Russian reading public at large.

Israel was one of the few Anglophone scholars who managed to integrate a discussion of the Russian Enlightenment into a larger narrative not devoted Russia. Because of this, his discussion deserves particular attention not only for historiographical reasons, but also because for some of the non-Russian specialists, Israel's claims regarding Russia are likely to be accepted as normative even though Israel was unaware of the full extent of the literature on the topic available in

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[82] J. Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1650-1752* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 10.
[83] D.M. McMahon, "What are Enlightenments?", *Modern Intellectual History* 4, 3 (2007), pp. 607-8.
[84] *Ibid.* p. 615.

English. Responding to scholarly unease regarding the brutality of the Petrine revolution, Israel construed Peter the Great as be the "most important vehicle of Enlightenment" in comparison to other Enlightened despots.[85] In this sense, despite some of the illusory features associated with Peter's forced introduction of the Enlightenment, Israel conceded that in their perception of the momentousness of Peter's achievement, the *philosophes* were right in their assessment of Peter's reign.[86] Whilst indeed at the level of statecraft and warfare, Peter may well have been ahead of all of the other Enlightened monarchs as Israel claimed, these accomplishments were not entirely synonymous with progress in the appropriation of Western thought. Yet, Israel's descriptive account of the leading Russian supporters of the Westernising course implied that, the Russian Enlightenment could conform to the radical and moderate distinction even though, there was no clear evidence for the existence of either of these kinds of Enlightenments in Russia. It is in this sense that Israel misconstrued the complexity of the Russian context in the Petrine era which has already evinced a disjunction between a successful transplantation of some foreign norms and the failure to transplant others, a circumstance which did not become apparent until later in the century. Thus, by highlighting Peter's Enlightened credentials, Israel merely re-narrated basic premises already criticised in more specialised literature which is no longer dominated by the imperative to prove that Peter was an Enlightened monarch because the term itself has lost much of its explanatory power.

Israel's more recent, *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights 1750-1790* (2011), repeated most of the same shortcomings as his earlier foray into the topic. Lack of first-hand acquaintance with Russian texts forced Israel to rely on very select, well-known and in some cases, outdated secondary material none of which, could in any way be supportive of the radical Enlightenment thesis. Thus, a very curious picture emerged. At a time when many Anglophone and Russian scholars were expanding the boundaries of the Russian Enlightenment beyond the policies and cultural proclivities of Catherine the Great,

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[85] J. Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, p. 296.
[86] *Ibid.* pp. 296-7.

Israel rediscovered Russian Enlightened absolutism as the "most dramatic instance of enlightened despotism's ability to transform society".[87] This statement is of course true in regards to fundamental structural changes a society may undergo at the behest of its rulers. Yet, in Israel's hands, this statement was a justification to construe Catherine the Great in overly privileged terms as either the source of change or a target of radical criticism. In either case, there was little room to investigate the internal dynamic of ideas apart from whether they emerged from or were aimed at, the regime. This is why, Israel's discussion of Diderot's complex relationship with Catherine and Alexander Radischev's (1749-1802) condemnation of serfdom could not be said to have contributed much to the understanding of the Russian Enlightenment because the author was more concerned with focusing on certain types of reactions rather than on ideas and motivations underpinning them. Quite paradoxically then, whilst Israel's discussion of Western European thinkers was often detailed, rich and almost always provoking, his desire to re-centre the decisive importance of ideas was compromised severely when he turned his eye to Russia's entryway into modernity.

If the term 'Radical Enlightenment' is to be applied to Russia, then its meaning would be better served by being aligned with how Margaret Jacob understood that phenomenon in her *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons, and Republicans* (1981). Jacob saw the beginnings of radical critique of established authority in the revival of the writings of Renaissance naturalists, especially of Giordano Bruno (1548-1600).[88] Such reconsideration of pantheistic and in some cases mystical and magical forms of thinking as intrinsic to the development of modernity is of course, quite at odds with Israel's prioritisation of materialism and atheism. Yet, precisely because of Jacob's much more sympathetic approach to religion, magic and Neoplatonism, she set an example of how to interpret seemingly retrograde intellectual traditions as crucially significant in the development of Enlightened attitudes. This is of especial importance for studies of

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[87] J. Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights 1750-1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 271.
[88] M.C. Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons, and Republicans* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1981), p. 35.

Eighteenth-century Russia given the often religious intentions of its leading writers and thinkers and the latter's considerable interest in Renaissance naturalism, especially via freemasonry. Thus, even though being an older work, Jacob's study provides a corrective to some of Israel's claims and can be used to probe the uniqueness of Russia's appropriation of foreign thought. Indeed, in a recent article that directly challenged Israel's distaste for religion, Jacob reiterated that ultimately, it was in the articulation of a universal natural religion that "the radical message of the Enlightenment" was to be found.[89] Despite the obvious differences between the Russian context and the ones that Jacob studied, emphasis on the search for a new religion resonated well with how the Russian mystics sought to unearth a different type of spirituality to the one that was associated with the Russian *Polizeistaat.*

The study of the Enlightenment in Russia has not taken full advantage of advances in the analysis of this phenomenon in other countries over the past decade. Whilst the Russian Enlightenment has been subjected to several conceptual frameworks, it has failed to keep in touch with a pluralised model of the Enlightenment, initially articulated by J.G.A. Pocock. In accordance with that model, Enlightenment could not be restricted in either pan-European or national terms because it exhibited too many variants "to be comprised within a single definition and history."[90] Unlike the emphasis on a common pan-European movement or its national reprojection, a pluralisation of the Enlightenment into discrete yet overlapping processes was no longer under the onus of needing additional justification in instances when the content of one Enlightened dimension contradicted the content of another. Not only was it presumed that various Enlightened trends could conflict with one another, but the very notion of a Counter-Enlightenment has lost some its force once it was evident that opposition to one Enlightened mode of thought might be sourced in a competing Enlightenment.[91] Forestalling criticism of his diverse historiographical framework

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[89] M.C. Jacob, "how Radical Was the Enlightenment? What Do We Mean by Radical?", *Diametros* 40 (2014), p. 113.
[90] J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion. Volume One. The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon, 1737-1764* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 9.
[91] *Ibid.* p. 7.

as one which subverted the hitherto inalienable commitment to exposing falsehoods on the basis of rational and secular inquiry associated with previous models of the Enlightenment, Pocock was careful in retaining the exploratory nature of Enlightened discussion of temporal and transcendent authority.[92] Insofar as renegotiation or subversion of that authority took place, Pocock was confident that there was no immediate need to subordinate that process to complementary processes of modernisation and reform understood in a literal sense.[93] Such a focus on intellectual history could be misconstrued to privilege the text over its socio-political impact. However, it is instrumental in facilitating the discussion of ideas which have emerged in contexts where their transition from a purely theoretical espousal to practical embodiment was difficult to achieve. In situations where the text offered the ultimate practical result of an evolving intellectual history and where its contextual genealogy was highly inimical to its actual socio-political setting, a reorientation towards the development of ideas distinct from their embodiment offered the possibility of examining traditions hitherto suffering from neglect.[94]

Since Pocock was looking for an inquiry into the nature of authority rather than, for a particular manner of philosophising as an indication of Enlightened discourse, the imperative to locate *philosophe* culture has become a relative concern. Indeed, Pocock argued for "aspects of Enlightenment which neither required nor produced the presence of *philosophes*" without explaining away the immense contribution of the latter to Eighteenth-century thought.[95] Obviously, previous accounts of the Enlightenment have to some extent, reconsidered the central role of the *philosophes* and suggested instances which did not quite reflect the hegemony of French freethinking. However, what differentiated Pocock's

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[92] *Ibid.*
[93] *Ibid.*
[94] In contexts where not only practical reform, but a systematic espousal of philosophy was difficult, philosophical attitude, rather than originality was already a virtue. R. Demos has noted in his study of Hellenic Enlightenment just such a context where the scholar was forced to contend with the "spirit of the Enlightenment" and not necessarily with its application either in theory or in practice. See R. Demos, "The Neo-Hellenic Enlightenment (1750-1821)", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 19, 4 (1958), pp. 532-1. Notwithstanding some major differences, the pressures and the challenges of Westernisation in Russia have evinced some parallels with Balkan experiences of this process.
[95] J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, p. 7.

contribution to the historiography of the Enlightenment was firstly, his commitment to an open society sustained by diversity of traditions and secondly, his privileging of the aims of the Enlightenment over the method of their attainment as a symptom of its presence.[96] That is why, even though Pocock discussed some of the foundational moments primarily in European history, he did so from a globalised perspective encompassing an array of discourses relating to non-Western European terrain in order to elucidate specifically Western Enlightened debates. The problem of relating intellectual processes in the periphery to those occurring in the core areas of the Enlightenment was therefore, shown to be less valid than previously assumed because, the very notion of the core was conceived less as a source of discourses than as a location where the latter have intersected with one another.

By late Eighteenth-century foreign and local Enlightened discourses intertwined sufficiently to create a large and varied textual base. Nonetheless, it was difficult to delineate Russia's place on the mental map of an Enlightened Europe. This was not only because rational and secular attitudes failed to penetrate to sufficient depth as a consequence of which, Russia could be presumed to be on a comparable course of modernity as Western European powers. Rather, because the Russian Enlightenment derived its continuity from reacting to foreign ideas and not merely attempting to embody them meant that, its reflexive dynamic could be easily compared to intellectual processes occurring elsewhere. If there was sense in applying a single Enlightenment framework due to similar contextual conditions shaping the reception of select reformist attitudes, when the Enlightenment is repositioned to also include substantive qualifications, reconfigurations and even outright rejections, then there is little sense of unity to the Enlightenment.[97] Explicit conservatism implying a return to a Muscovite mode

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[96] J.G.A. Pocock, 'Enthusiasm: The Antiself of the Enlightenment' in Klein, E. and La Vopa, A.J. eds *Enthusiasm and Enlightenment in Europe, 1650-1850* (San Marino, Cal.: Huntington Library, 1998), p. 7.

[97] T.V. Artem'eva alluded to this in her robust definition of the Russian Enlightenment, especially in its practical popularising aspects was not only a process of re-orientation towards scientific thinking, but also towards the "basis of Christianity and its morality." See, T.V. Artem'eva, *Ot slavnogo proshlogo k svetlomu buduchemu: Filosofiia istorii i utopia v Rossii epohi Prosvechsheniia* (St. Petersburg: Aleteia, 2005), p. 183. Arguably, such a combination of what was

of life was hardly a possibility because the cultural elite was sufficiently Westernised to make that position untenable just as, a complete support of state policies and their consequences was possible, but would not normally lead to any creative output beyond the panegyric.[98] Notwithstanding the smallness of the Russian intelligentsia, the responses of its members to pressing problems were of a personal nature not overly bound by conventions and precedent, resulting in multiplicity of traditions not directly dependent on Western European prototypes.[99]

Presently, the richness of scholarly output on the various features of the Russian Eighteenth-century requires a conception which on the one hand, does justice to the complexity of the period and on the other, attempts to work out certain continuities within the plethora of cultural and intellectual orientations.[100] Some aspects of Pocock's model of the Enlightenment are well-suited to be applied to the Russian context in order to provide an alternative emphasis on its already established contours and must be applied to further develop insight into how Russians compromised with, re-negotiated and created their version of modernity. Specifically, a de-centring of the role of the *philosophes* and the attendant freethinking rationalisation of authority, the collision of different Enlightened traditions resulting in competing projects and re-engagement with discursive practices grounded in the texts, are the most important historiographical advances

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deemed necessary for a human being to know, was premised on the sense of insufficiency of rationality without a strong religious component which was often held to be only sourced in religion.

[98] It is instructive to note here that one of the most outstanding Eighteenth-century Russian conservative thinkers, Mikhail Mikhailovich Scherbatov (1733-1790), in condemning the loose morals he associated with the loss of personal integrity and anchorage in strong local traditions in the wake of Russia's Westernisation, nevertheless provided a qualified support for Peter the Great's policies. See, M.M. Scherbatov, *O povrezhdenii nravov v Rossii* (Moscow: Imwerden, 2001), p. 17. See also, T.V. Artem'eva, *Mikhail Scherbatov* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo S-Peterburgskogo universiteta, 1994), p. 44.

[99] Again, Artem'va noted the ambivalent Eighteenth-century Russian attitude to historical continuity which was often approached in a utopian manner. The past and the present were important insofar as they could determine a "glorious future" and not necessarily valuable in their own right. Indeed, insofar as Russian history was often forced to recommence from a perceived new beginning, even if these determinants were located, their status was always unstable and at risk of complete negation, see *Ibid.* p. 6.

[100] This is particularly evident in current attention to the specifically Russian approach to the meaning, the function and the content of Eighteenth-century Russian literature which has altered some preconceived assumptions about the period, see A. Kahn, 'Russian Studies: New Synergies', pp. 495-7.

which I will apply in this thesis. Some precursory awareness of the impossibility of maintaining a rigid framework based either on a biased exclusion of most traditions or a well-meaning inclusion of most of them without the necessary alteration of the framework containing them, has already occurred in the most recent Anglophone literature. One of the most important implicit indicators of the need to alter the manner in which the Russian Enlightenment is conceptualised was recently voiced by W.G. Jones, indicating the distance scholarship has already covered, but the considerable change in accentuation in comparison to that author's earlier work on Novikov:

> The view once commonly held that the Enlightenment was a unified, bourgeois, anti-clerical and inherently revolutionary movement radiating out from its centre in Paris has given way to a kaleidoscopic picture of national varieties in which the continuous importance of religion and an array of political ideas and social attitudes are discerned. There could even be conservative and religious forms of Enlightenment. Its central core, however, was the urge to modify the way that men and women had traditionally thought and behaved, and to reform church and state institutions with the aim of bettering human condition.[101]

Jones' recognition that different modes of thought informing different expressions of the Enlightenment are only unified by a desire for human betterment, reflected the sheer diversity which may arise if the dominant criterion determining the presence of the Enlightenment is commitment to reform. Jones was right in diverting contemporary discussion towards the humanistic concern with establishing conditions of life better suited to the maturing human intellect because, such an impulse was instrumental in facilitating alternative visions of organisational forms irrespective of the actual discourses through which the latter were transmitted. Attention to a range of interpretations of reality following in the wake of the location of a single cause stimulating the deployment of critical

[101] W. Gareth Jones, 'Russia's eighteenth-century Enlightenment', in Leatherbarrow, W. and Offord, D. eds. *A History of Russian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 73.

attitudes, resulted in a loss of centre of a single Enlightenment which was now deemed to operate via many different undertakings.

Paradoxically, arguments in defence of the continuing relevance of cosmopolitan and to a lesser extent, national frameworks of the Enlightenment against the latter's pluralisation as envisaged by Pocock, strengthen the case for a re-categorisation of the Russian Enlightenment into multiple trajectories. John Robertson contended that such a radical fragmentation of the Enlightenment into Enlightenments was a form of deconstruction risking an "unduly parochial historiographical perspective."[102] The author suggested that certain ideas could successfully permeate national contexts and pointed towards the outstanding work of Franco Venturi as a fine example of a successful mediation of local peculiarities and pan-European debates.[103] However, whilst Robertson was indeed correct in supposing that Pocock's approach was a natural step after the national Enlightenment model, Venturi's method is not universally applicable.[104] This was particularly evident in Faggionato's insistence on the mystical turn Enlightened discourses have taken in Russia as one of the defining features of the Enlightenment there. Yet, precisely because the use of mysticism to achieve reform occurred primarily in Russia, while in other countries it was less important, the privileging of the cosmopolitan model would mean a return to a Francophone reading of intellectual culture Robertson wanted to avoid. To counteract this threat, Robertson defined the cosmopolitan analysis as "matching the elaboration of general principles with recognition of the limits of their application in specific circumstances."[105] In the Russian case, as the preceding review has shown, scholarship gradually recognised the difficulty of matching a general idea with its trajectory. This disjunction was chiefly responsible for denying the presence of the Enlightenment on account of a weak grasp of general Western trends or a labelling of local adaptations as anti-Enlightened. As a result, indispensable as cosmopolitanism might be in tying intellectually and commercially complex

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[102] J. Robertson, "The Enlightenment Above National Context: Political Economy in Eighteenth-Century Scotland and Naples", *The Historical Journal* 40, 3 (1997), p. 671.
[103] *Ibid.* p. 672.
[104] *Ibid.* p. 671.
[105] *Ibid.* p. 696.

societies broadly aiming at similar kinds of reforms, it is not entirely applicable to Russia because it would mean leaving out important trends, thus necessitating recourse to a more flexible conception.

It may be somewhat surprising to argue that Venturi's methodology must be held with some reservation in regards to Russia, given his immense contribution in locating the importance of peripheral nations in pan-European intellectual movements.[106] In contrast to such genuine inclusiveness, Venturi also thought that the core of these movements implied a distancing from religious and moral problems towards economic ones through which, an Enlightened Europe emerged.[107] This means that, if the nature of the Enlightenment always revolves around the notion of reforming thought patterns, religious conventions, social existence and political action, Venturi recognised the more tangible political relationship between ideas and transformation as the primary concern of Enlightenment studies.[108] Obviously reform in Russia, especially in the earlier phase of the Petrine Revolution was an undeniably political event with far-reaching social consequences. In the latter part of the Eighteenth-century however, reform in Russia was not entirely synonymous with political action and least of all economics, but has moved to tackle the much more intangible issues relating to a largely transcendent sense of enworldedness capable of providing practical guidance for temporal existence and betterment. These aspects of Eighteenth-century Russia could not be properly analysed through a cosmopolitan approach given Venturi's suspicion of religious topics and his certainty that it was possible to reconstruct the course of the Enlightenment by following up the reception, deployment and impact of an idea geared to bring about socio-political change.[109] The explicit incompatibility between the kind of processes Venturi deemed to constitute the essence of the Enlightenment and some of the most important

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[106] F. Venturi, *Utopia and Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 133.
[107] *Ibid.* p. 120.
[108] J. Robertson, "Franco Venturi's Enlightenment", *Past and Present* 137 (Nov. 1992), p. 197.
[109] If accepting aspects of established confessions as Enlightened under certain circumstances was difficult for Venturi because, the general level of scholarship was not yet oriented towards such an inquiry, his unease about Freemasonry is surprising given the explicitly reformist attitudes to be found in some lodges, especially in areas of organised philanthropy. See *Ibid.*

discourses operating in Russia indicates an interpretive limit to all totalising methodologies when applied to Russia.[110]

If one takes seriously Jones' assertion that betterment of the human condition conceived in varied terms was the reason for the Russian Enlightenment, then the inherent intellectual rivalry between the various claims to envisage the means to actualise it can only be treated with respect to their individual teleology.[111] It might be counter-argued that all Enlightenments sought betterment and that this does not in any way distinguish Russia from other countries hence, the continuing validity of pan-European or national readings of the topic. Yet, the meaning of betterment and the course of its attainment might differ greatly without ceasing to depend on discursive practices explicitly committed to critique. In the case of Russia, the desire for improvement was often clothed in spiritual sensibilities, transformed but not eliminated, by the process of secularisation in a manner very different from other countries. Stephen Baehr's *The Paradise Myth in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (1991) brilliantly followed up this sentiment premised on his understanding that, "the search for heaven on earth became the central theme in Russian culture."[112] This search was undertaken by some of the leading Enlightened literati and in fact, it may have peaked precisely as a consequence of secular marginalisation of established religious conventions. What particularly stands out in some Russian conceptions of betterment in comparison to Western European ones, is the replacement of gradual evolution

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[110] I am not arguing that Venturi's model is completely irrelevant to Russia. Indeed, studies of Eighteenth-century Russian economic thought are right in arguing for the importance of the Free Russian Economic Society, established in 1765, in providing a platform for an Enlightened discussion of economic matters without direct interference from the state. An analysis of how such discussions led up to reformulations of established economic models adhered to by the serf-owning nobility and the court, would be very much in tune with Venturi's approach to the Enlightenment. See, C. Leckey, *Patrons of the Enlightenment: The Free Economic Society in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (Lanham: University of Delaware Press, 2011), p. 12.

[111] Here I am using the word 'rivalry' somewhat out of its original context as used by Ian Hunter in his discussion of multiple Enlightenments in Germany. Specifically, Hunter argued for a pluralisation of the Enlightenment amongst other things, on the basis of multiple anthropologies, a notion pertinent to Russia because the meaning and purpose of personhood became the leading problem which Enlightened mysticism canvassed, as did some of the more rational philosophies in the last quarter of the Eighteenth-century. See, I. Hunter, *Rival Enlightenments: Civil and Metaphysical Philosophy in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. x.

[112] S.L. Baehr, *The Paradise Myth in Eighteenth-Century Russia: Utopian Patterns in Early Secular Russian Literature and Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 15.

towards felicity through an increasing rationalisation of human activities and capacities by an almost eschatological expectation that human beings will become different kind of beings existing in a transformed world. It is the latter reasoning which Faggionato saw as the hidden spring behind Rosicrucian worldly activity.

This thesis will presume that there were many different Enlightenments operating at the same time and sharing the same terrain and that one of these Enlightenments was of a mystical character. Since at this stage, specialised Anglophone literature has firstly, made important steps in breaking Russian dependence on Western European models of development and secondly, discovered certain traditions which fulfilled a critical Enlightened function in Russia and were largely peripheral elsewhere, there are no methodological obstacles to discern one Russian Enlightenment amongst others. Indeed, strictly speaking, even if only rational elements of the Westernising process were to be pursued, one would still have to contend with the resulting predilection towards highly diverse utopian thinking emerging out of faith in reason amongst the Russian nobility most committed to continuing the Petrine revolution.[113] Where there is still obstacles, is in delineating conceptual spaces where, some of the leading Russian intellectuals took stock of the direction of their country's transformation, had recourse to an alternative hermeneutic and provided a critical stance towards the most crucial organisational forms determining human existence. As was already mentioned, Faggionato has largely taken up the more practical side to this process and, even if she wanted to re-construct more fully, mystical reception of transcendent and temporal authority, she would have to revise her overall model of the Enlightenment and separate Masonic and Rosicrucian ideology from mysticism proper. To view the lodges as Enlightened was possible on the condition that one was re-discovering an additional dimension to a national Russian Enlightenment whereas, to expound upon mysticism itself and the worldview it engendered implied privileging an intellective praxis which was quite self-contained.[114]

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[113] M. Raeff, *Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia: The Eighteenth-Century Nobility* (New York: Harcourt, 1966), p. 153.

[114] Olga Tsapina premised her discussion of an Orthodox Enlightenment in Russia on a similar notion. Insofar as Russian Orthodoxy was a totalising tradition capable of cultural assimilation and

There are now enough studies of Eighteenth-century Russia, of considerable diversity and complexity to allow for a pluralised model of the Enlightenment to be applied to Russia. To assume that Western European Enlightenments need to combine strong cosmopolitan dimensions with national sensibilities is relevant only insofar as these Enlightenments have some commonality of sources, discourses and intentions. Perhaps with the exception of the Iberian and Balkan contexts, Russia was one of the few European nations where the Enlightenment was a very problematic process facing tremendous odds and forced to utilise unexpected patterns of reasoning. Because of this, supporting evidence for the transnational structure of the Enlightenment only favour contexts significantly more developed than the Russian one. Israel's explaining away of the diversity of Enlightenments as an obfuscation to an examination of "the chief Enlightenment controversies in balanced fashion" is a poignant example.[115] In contexts where a thinker could have access to a range of moderate or radical Enlightenment literature, to be a partisan of either and to contribute to the relevant debates, the homogeneity of critical outlooks might, up to a point favour a lessening of diversity. However, Israel was silent regarding contexts that failed to exhibit such a range and where the nature of the debates was so different, that they could not possibly be obscured through contextual splintering.

Pocock may not have intended for his approach to the Enlightenment to be applied to underdeveloped contexts. In Russia, however, the notion of precedent was problematic not only because of the upheavals of the early Eighteenth-century, but also due to the absence of philosophical, literary and aesthetic schools of thought prior to the Petrine revolution, Enlightenment was the work of individuals who often had to resort to multiple personae to avoid censure. Novikov was a tireless educational reformer, a fashionable journalist and also a sincere Rosicrucian. Novikov's associate, Ivan Vladimirovich Lopukhin (1756-1816) was an influential courtier passionate about the reform of the criminal code, an

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reprojection, it was in a position to inform more modern literary, aesthetic and philosophical attitudes, see O.A. Tsapina, 'Pravoslavnoe prosveschenie – oksiumoron ili istoricheskaia real'nost?' in Karp, S.Ia. and Mezin, S.A. eds. *Evropeiskoe Prosveschenie i tsivilizatsia Rossii* (Moscow: Nauka, 2004), p. 302.

[115] J. Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, p. 864.

owner of a clandestine printing press and a follower of German theosophy with strong Platonic leanings. In such cases, individual thinkers were not as much united by a ready-made tradition to which they adhered and which they may have developed further, but highly individualistic practitioners of a mystical discourse which helped them illuminate and ameliorate complex problems. That is why, the application of Pocock's methodology to a single theme deemed to be Enlightened is possible because, it is well-suited to matching individual peculiarity of thought and intentions with the multiplicity of sources informing it, resulting in a crystallisation of a unique worldview. Whether mysticism was expressed in explicitly Rosicrucian, Platonic or Pietist terms, its thematic blanketing of similar topics analysed through a similar line of inquiry is not therefore an obstacle to a detailed elucidation of a single mystical trope followed by secular mystical thinkers and proceeding alongside other reformist projects.

It is not expected that as a result of a fragmentation of the Russian Enlightenment into Enlightenments, Russian national context will reach parity with its Western European competitors. Whilst judgemental comparisons have added little scholarship, it must be nevertheless recognised that the Russian experience of the Enlightenments was a deeply troubled process prone to catastrophic distortions from within and brutal interruptions from without. Mystical Enlightenment was symptomatic of all of these limitations. Yet, in some key respects, it was very successful in promoting and defending humanist values by means of its speculative nature as well as being sufficiently resilient to bequeath to future Russian intellectual developments, a respect for metaphysics which later in the Nineteenth-century, was expressed philosophically rather than through mystical intuition only. Earlier scholarship often did not detail how Russian thinkers sought to overcome the constraints of their historical predicament and maintain their Enlightened self-identity. More recently, authors tended to focus on what patterns of thought were chosen to achieve specific aims without too much regard as to the accusations of anti-Enlightened thinking which might have ensued. This thesis intends to take a modest step forward by way of uniting the often eclectic stances of several of the most important Russian mystics have taken and applying

them to form a coherent mystical interpretation of the human condition as expressed in some of its most vital organisational forms. In doing so, it is hoped that a Western-centric approach to Russia will be shown to produce a relatively weak insight because it could not correlate limitations of local historical contingency with the identity and the trajectory of Russian Enlightened discourses which attempted to overcome it.

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the most important Anglophone conceptualisations of the Russian Enlightenment in the last fifty years. This has been far from a complete examination of sources. Primary emphasis was placed on determining the extent of dependency of Eighteenth-century Russian discourses on Western European thought. To do so, it was necessary to detail what definition of the Enlightenment scholars adhered to, and to follow up the chosen definition with elucidating the content the Russian Enlightenment was imbued with. It was argued that, all models of the Enlightenment applied thus far, resulted in serious compromises as to the selection of discourses, requiring considerable simplification of Russian terrain. This chapter noted the occurrences of conceptual advances, usually involving insights regarding the problem of transplanting ideas and in particular, discussions of specifically Russian trajectory of Enlightened reform and critique. This was especially evident in the recognition of mysticism as one of the defining features of Russian experience of the Enlightenment which marked it out from its experiences in other countries. On that premise, it was argued that the national Enlightenment approach exhausted its possibilities. By way of overcoming this challenge, it was suggested that the Russian Enlightenment ought to be analysed from a multiple Enlightenments perspective in order to do greater justice to its themes and to distance it further from Western-centric value judgements. This chapter advocated the rethinking of the mystical topos in the Russian Enlightenment into a Mystical Enlightenment, which will clarify the functionality of mysticism as an Enlightened discourse. The next chapter will analyse the reception of religion and mysticism in Anglophone literature in Russia, with the view to formulating the structure of the Mystical Enlightenment.

CHAPTER TWO: RETHINKING RELIGION IN THE RUSSIAN ENLIGHTENMENT

> *Russian philosophical thought of the 19th century will more than once, tragically rent itself in torturously giving birth to that which was already formulated by ecclesiastical consciousness of the 18th century. Yet, precisely because within that consciousness, political temptation has been relegated to the periphery, a space was opened up for Christian philosophy in the exact sense of the term. That is, for philosophy inspired by Christianity.*
> V.V. Zenkovskii

Introduction

In this chapter I will examine the treatment of the relationship between religion and the Enlightenment in Russia in Anglophone literature with the view to demonstrating the presence of a specifically Mystical Enlightenment with which scholarship needs to engage further. Whilst the religious topos has recently become an integral aspect of studies of the Enlightenment in Russia, it has not yet been subjected to a conceptual analysis above and beyond its interpretation as a source of alternative attitudes embraced by some of the leading Russian intellectuals. The primary purpose of the present analysis is to work out the extent to which, the resurgence of mysticism can be conceived as a distinctive Enlightened trajectory, capable of a sustained critique of the most important organisational forms such as the church, personhood and ethics. This chapter will argue that,

notwithstanding the impressive advances in its treatment of religion in Eighteenth-century Russia, most contemporary scholarship continues to evince limitations of perspective due to its over-simplification of the purposes and of the origin of mystical worldviews. By critically evaluating how the most representative secondary literature broached the relationship between religion and the Enlightenment in Russia, I hope to foreground the need to rethink the immensely rich mystical discourses as attempts to radically transform Russia's experience of modernity.

Approaches to religion and spirituality in the Russian Enlightenment

The role of religion and spirituality in the development of Enlightenment in Russia has rarely been subjected to a balanced analysis in Anglophone studies of the Russian Eighteenth-century.[116] The primary reason for such an oversight was the long-held assumption that Russia's Westernisation implied a secularisation of political organisational forms and of the intellectual discourses underpinning them.[117] With some exceptions, most of the historiographical approaches to the Enlightenment discussed in the previous chapter, have not proven to be conducive to a thorough discussion of the extent to which, religious and spiritual concepts and attitudes were shaped by, and have in turn, shaped Russia's entryway into

[116] One of the most potent indicators of the failure of secularisation in Russia as intended by its monarchs, which contemporary scholarship is slowly integrating into its narratives, was the increasing demand for Protestant devotional literature in Russia amongst lay Enlightened intellectuals in the second half of the Eighteenth-century. This implied that, religious ways of approaching the self and the world were considered to be necessary attributes of a developed mind, intending towards an intimate relationship with the Divine within and a sense of Christian patriotism without. See, M. Schippan, 'Retseptsiia protestanskih avtorov v Rossii v XVIII veke (Spalding, Crugot, Stender)' in Bartlett, R. and Lehmann-Carli, G. eds. *Eighteenth-Century Russia: Society, Culture, Economy* Papers from the VII International Conference of the Study Group on Eighteenth-Century Russia, Wittenberg, 2004 (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2007), p. 247.

[117] Within the rubric of secularisation however, religious topics could still be given a mildly sympathetic treatment, usually within the bounds of an uneasy church-state relationship imposing a limit to secularisation. Studies of the Orthodox Church's reaction to being enforced into the structure of the state are valuable insofar as they have problematised the workability of secular policies in Russia and pointed towards the need to inquire into the clerical participation in the Russian Enlightenment. O.A. Tsapina's essay on clerical responses to Catherine the Great's secularising policies is noteworthy in this regard because it gestured towards opposition to the absolutist regime without always implying an abandonment of its Enlightened agenda, see O.A. Tsapina, 'Secularisation and Opposition in the Time of Catherine the Great' in Bradley, J.E. and Van Kley, D.K. eds. *Religion and Politics in Enlightened Europe* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), pp. 334-5.

modernity. As will subsequently be analysed, religion was often canvassed from the standpoint of its interaction with rationalistic worldviews and a consequent lessening of its intellectual importance for the educated elite. The typical manner of framing religious commitments of Eighteenth-century Russians, involved an attempt to determine whether Enlightened attitudes have gradually displaced them or whether the latter's unfolding was compromised by the continuing resilience of spiritual outlooks. As a result, there was little opportunity to localise the transformation of spiritual organisational forms as distinct from their institutional embodiments as one particular mode of Enlightened thought operating alongside others.

Arguably, the nature of the Petrine revolution predisposed contemporaries and scholars alike, to view religion as a phenomenon needing to be controlled, circumscribed and re-channeled into socially-useful activities in terms external to its discursive repertoire. Peter the Great's vision of the Russian Orthodox Church as an extension of the Russian *Polizeistaat* geared to fulfil temporal undertakings, reflected this as it necessitated a reconsideration of the role of the church not through recourse to its patristic heritage, but by means of juridical prescriptions found in Northern European cameralism.[118] The *philosophes* may have initiated an overly progressive reading of Russian absolutism in its endeavours to practice rational governance, minimise the role of religion and to promote the arts and sciences.[119] That these aims were at the forefront of Peter's policies and, that their enactment incurred a fundamental re-justification of religion is beyond dispute. Yet, this did not mean that the state was successful in reorienting individuals' religious loyalties and spiritual anxieties towards a firm belief in its own

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[118] The increasing emphasis on the legal and temporal character of the Russian state, see O. Kharkhordin, "What is the State? The Russian Concept of Gosudarstvo in European Context," *History and Theory* 40, 2 (2001): 206-40.

[119] This should not be taken to mean that the *philosophes* were entirely naïve in their praise of Peter the Great and especially, Catherine the Great. Petrine reforms and the publication of Catherine's *The Instruction* (1764) in many languages across Europe was an indication that some of the key ideas for which Enlightened minds were persecuted, found official support from an absolute monarch. Franco Venturi provided an excellent analysis of the international reception of *The Instruction* and its significance for the Enlightened reading public, F. Venturi, *The End of the Old Regime in Europe, 1768-1776. The First Crisis* tr. R.B. Lichtfield (Princeton: Princepon University Press, 1989), pp. 6-7; 64-5.

bureaucratic *modus operandi* at the expense of salvific concerns. Indeed, these public pronouncements of how religious life was to be organised was not entirely correlatable with private commitments to inward and sometimes, esoteric experiences of spirituality shared by the very people Peter depended upon to transform Russian Orthodoxy into a civil religion. Such a dichotomy was particularly evident in Peter Collins' monograph, *The Petrine Instauration: Religion, Esotericism and Science at the Court of Peter the Great* (2007) wherein, Peter's policies were seen in light of his self-conception as a "prophetic instaurator" intent on re-sacralising his kingdom in non-Orthodox terms.[120] This meant that, a utilitarian approach to the titular confession of the state did not necessarily result in a straightforward marginalisation of religion and the emergence of secularity, but pointed towards its re-institutionalisation and most importantly, its supplementation with alternative spiritual traditions.

A more sophisticated approach to the interrelationship between religion and the Enlightenment in Russia, which has only recently been formulated, was not as much concerned with how religion was integrated into the post-Muscovite Russian state. Rather than examining the church-state relationship as though this dynamic exhausted the complex evolution of religious norms, a better line of inquiry involves an investigation into firstly, what was the impact of Orthodoxy's reform on the very notion of religion amongst the educated elite and secondly, what attitudes replaced the hitherto unequivocal subscription to Orthodox truth-claims. Peter Cracraft's *The Church Reform of Peter the Great* (1971), which is still a very valuable assessment of the political integration of the church into the state apparatus, did not broach the limits and the effects of secularising policies in terms reflective of a continuing relevance of belief amongst Westernised Russian intellectuals. At issue here, was the scholarly unease in discussing religion unless it was superimposed upon a seemingly objective and universal process of secularisation. This was precisely the view advanced by Cracraft as he insisted that his attention to Petrine religious reforms was informed by the notion that the

[120] R. Collins, *The Petrine Instauration: Religion, Esotericism and Science at the Court of Peter the Great, 1689–1725* (Turku: Annales Universitatis Turkuensis, 2007), p. 461.

"secularisation of society is one of the larger themes of European history" and that since Russia was a European nation, its full participation in this process was indisputable.[121] The actual vision of a secular Russian state with flourishing scientific and political cultures, reflected in the manner in which the Orthodox Church was re-justified to foster the emergence of individuated citizens firmly bound to temporal concerns, has been largely clarified in contemporary scholarship.[122] What has not been adequately clarified, was how spiritual worldviews operated in the absence of a fully secularised culture and to what extent, an incomplete secularisation facilitated the deployment of discourses seeking to modernise and in the same time, deepen individual spiritual autonomy as a critical aspect of the Enlightenment.[123]

In some of the earliest Anglophone literature, it was widely accepted that the Enlightenment in Russia operated primarily through imitation of select contemporary Western European contexts. The semi-secularised Russian setting was not analysed in a way which might have differentiated the trajectory of the Russian Enlightenment from that of its peers. Instead, the difficulties involved in reforming philosophical, spiritual and literary modes of expression, which were suffused with a liturgical understanding of enworldedness, was often construed as a limit to the Enlightenment itself and not, as a set of conditions as a consequence of which, it was forced to rarefy itself.[124] That such a rarefication was present,

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[121] P. Cracraft, *The Church Reform of Peter the Great* (London: Macmillan, 1971), pp. vii-iii.

[122] Post-Soviet Russian scholarship was particularly sensitive to the transformation of reality wrought by the Petrine revolution. Specifically, the contrast between Muscovite emphasis on the word as a cosmological entity and Petrine emphasis on matter, was interpreted as a radical shift from contemplating logos to acting in relation to matter as a dominant human activity. See, A.M. Panchenko, 'Russkaia kul'tura v kanun petrovvskih reform' in Panchenko, *Ia imigriroval v Drevnuu Rus'* (St. Petersburg: Zvezda, 2005), pp. 298-9.

[123] As was noted in a review article of Cracraft's seminal work, Old Belief and possibly sectarianism, offered the only viable opposition to Peter's political and religious policies, capable of providing some measure of autonomy from the absolutist regime. Thus, autonomy presupposed by a metaphysical understanding of freedom without risking literal separation from the structures of the state was not considered, reflecting the typical conflation of rejection of some aspects of Peter's Enlightenment with an irrational reaction, present in Anglophone scholarship. See, L.R. Lewitter, "The Church Reform of Peter the Great," Review Article *The Slavonic and Eastern European Review* 50, 119 (1972), p. 284.

[124] Recourse to Post-Soviet scholarship is again of considerable use here as it made a case for a fundamental trivialisation of Western European and especially French Enlightened thought amongst the educated Russian public. The problem was not that Eighteenth-century Russians participated in a watered-down Enlightenment which left room for patterns of thinking rational Enlightened

especially of a religious kind, has now been largely established without however, leading to a systematic reconsideration of how Enlightened reform proceeded in an intellectual climate highly inimical to straightforward borrowing of foreign ideas. It is nevertheless possible to catch sight of how, amongst the more conventional exponents in Russia, the Enlightenment evinced patterns of thought which showed clear signs of firstly, a conscious acknowledgement of the insufficiency of rationalism and secondly, a qualified return of a religious perception of reality. These outcomes were not universal, but they affected thinkers and writers from diverse traditions, ranging from an optimistic faith in the utility of Baconian science to scepticism regarding the power of reason. There was thus, a considerable intellectual space wherein religion could play an active role in shaping spiritual sensibilities not necessarily in complete agreement with the methods derived from science nor, with the moral truths derived from Orthodox dogma.

Perhaps the most poignant example of how both of these stimulators for belief operated in a single persona, is to be found in the thought of one of the most lionised representatives of the Russian Enlightenment – the scientist, poet and historian Mikhail Vasil'evich Lomonosov (1711-1765). Seemingly, Lomonosov's firm commitment to Wolffian methodology implied neutrality if not distaste, towards revelatory discourse. Yet, a close reading of Lomonosov's poetry suggested that, the greater the benefits of the experimental approach in explaining causality in the universe, the more reason the human intellect had to feel annihilated in the face of reality incapable of being entirely reduced to inviolable natural laws. In his 'Evening Contemplation of Divine Grandeur' (1743), Lomonosov described the paradoxical effects of his scientific investigations of atmospheric phenomena. In the course of that description, the poet accused nature of being fickle and contradictory and experienced profound existential doubt as he asked

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discourses sought to eliminate. Over and above the superficial acceptance of these discourses in Russia, was the deeper problem regarding the extent to which, Russian intellectuals were ultimately dissatisfied with French thought and as a result, redirected their search for alternative sources through which to express their unflagging commitment to Enlightened reform. See, T.V. Artem'eva, *Istoriia metafiziki v Rossii XVIII veka* (St. Petersburg: Aleteiia, 1996), pp. 17-20.

of it: "But where nature, are thy laws?"[125] This doubt was not occasioned by an *a priori* distrust of the idea of a stable and rational universe, but by empirically-established contraventions of the reasonable order of things evident in the creation, causing the author to conceive of it as mysterious.[126] Any sense of enworldedness which was founded on a purely scientific datum was therefore, in a constant state of self-invalidation. The mind could only perceive *present* coalescence of observed phenomena without being able to guarantee their future configurations. Because of this, the mind was not imposing its rational will upon the universe, but was constantly catching up with the universe's unfolding without actually apprehending the plan according to which it did so.

An inquiring mind was placed in a Job-like predicament wherein its power to structure the creation into regular processes led to the emergence of further questions which destabilised the validity of these processes thus, foregrounding the universe as too grand to constantly adhere to any laws. If the human mind was always confounded by the totality of creation and if God was even less knowable than the barely-graspable visible proofs of his potency, then revelation still had a role to play in demarcating the ultimate ontological horizon of human knowledge and experience. It was this demarcation which Lomonosov had in mind when, after convincing his readers of the unknowability of creation, he posed a more radical question which was meant to be answered by way of belittling awe: "Tell me then, how great is the creator?"[127] Revelation was not postulated as a mere supplement to scientifically-derived knowledge as was often the case in Eighteenth-century natural philosophy. Rather, in its negative sense, revelation *emerged* from a conscious failure to embrace the universe in all of its phenomenal diversity, disclosing a cosmic otherness which the human mind needed to address

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[125] M.V. Lomonosov, 'Vechernee razmyshlenie o bozhiem velichii pri sluchae velikogo severnogo siianiia' in Lepehina, M.P. and Morozova, A.A. eds. *M.V. Lomonosov: Izbrannye proizvedeniia* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1986), pp. 205-6.
[126] For an excellent discussion of how Lomonosov's scientific endeavours rarefied into explicitly religious discourse, as evident in this poem's concern with the impossibility of knowing the universe, let alone its maker, without falling into contradictions, see C.A. Moser, "Lomonosov's *Vecherneye razmyshleniye*," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 49, 115 (1971), pp. 194-6.
127 M.V. Lomonosov, *Ibid.*

symbolically in order to overcome its own anxiety. In this instance, the Enlightened concern to provide a rational account of the natural processes in the creation, was rarefied to also account for the latter's inscrutability, which was open to intuition to a much greater extent than to scientific analysis.

Anglophone accounts of the Enlightenment in Russia tended to disregard how some Russian thinkers circumscribed the limits of reason in the course of their reform of key philosophical, religious and political attitudes. If scientists such as Lomonosov could leave considerable room for intuitive sense of the divine, then it was only to be expected that thinkers dealing with explicitly humanist concerns would make recourse to speculative reason one of their guiding principles. Indeed, insofar as one of the characteristics of the Enlightenment is a movement towards intellectual and spiritual freedom, religious readings of what such freedoms entailed and how they were actualised, form a critical aspect of the Russian Eighteenth-century.[128] That is why, an exploration of "religious creativity" as a concerted response to human and institutional failings is an absolutely necessary part of Enlightened attempts to conceive of alternative pathways to human betterment.[129] The role of such creativity in a radical reformulation of transcendent and temporal authority and in mobilising human action towards moral and worldly transformation has not been subjected to systematic investigation even though, the importance of introspectively-given autonomy for many Russian intellectuals has been recognised.[130]

One of the most influential discussions of a secular Russian Enlightenment, perilously existing alongside reactionary religious obscurantism of an Orthodox and mystical bent, is J.H. Billington's *The Icon and the Axe*. Billington separated a rationalistic French-oriented Russian Enlightenment from its opposing other, the

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[128] D. Outram, *The Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 33.
[129] *Ibid.* p. 34.
[130] Raffaella Faggionato made a convincing argument for the continuation of Rosicrucian understanding of the Enlightenment in Russia beyond the Eighteenth-century, particularly evident in the need Russians felt for unmediated access to truth, largely conditioned by private reading of devotional and Biblical literature, see R. Faggionato, "From a Society of the Enlightened to the Enlightenment of the Society: The Russian Bible Society and Rosicrucianism in the Age of Alexander I," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 79, 3 (2001): 459-487.

Russian anti-Enlightenment which was receptive to a proto-Romantic understanding of the interplay between religion, the imagination and nationhood, prone to coalescing into conservative worldviews. In comparison to the progressive and optimistic Enlightenment, "the gathering dark of morbid romanticism" which opposed it, offered no intellectual guidance to troubled souls and represented a deeply irrational retreat into complacency:

> The main force behind this anti-Enlightenment was higher order Masonry. The Moscow "Martinists" had created higher fraternities dedicated to combating scepticism and license, but had not provided any clear idea of where new belief and authority were to be found. They had left Russians with only a vague belief in spiritual rather than material forces, in esoteric symbols rather than rational propositions. These occult, quasi-religious circles led the aristocratic retreat from the rationalism of the Enlightenment.[131]

Whilst it is true that a turn to mysticism was justified as a response to the inroads of disbelief, an espousal of freethinking sentiments was long noted for being superficial and unsuccessful in providing educated Russians with the necessary principles for virtuous existence in a secular world.[132] Re-engagement spiritual traditions and their institutional frameworks was interpreted as a retreat, on the spurious assumption that what was left behind, was a clear rational worldview capable of being reprojected into philosophical, political and social endeavours, if only individuals had stuck to it. Rather than viewing this trend as an indication of the limits of a Eurocentric Enlightenment and more closely, examining the reasons for the failure of secularisation and the reasons for the attraction of seemingly anachronistic doctrines, Billington merely interpreted it as a temptation into which impressionable minds have fallen. Temptation was definitely present in a sense that mystical knowledge was often approached as a commodity literally located in the lodges, leading several Russian brethren to expend vast energies in the pursuit of the physical manifestations of *philosophia perennis*, sometimes with ruinous consequences psychologically and financially.

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[131] J.H. Billington, 'The Anti-Enlightenment' in Billington, J.H. *op. ct.*, p. 270.
[132] T.V. Artem'eva, *Istoriia metafiziki v Rossii XVIII veka*, pp. 18-9.

Contradictions were evident in Billington's assessment of the role of religion in the Enlightenment when the former was not entirely reduced to irrational whimsy and instead, discussed as an intellectual force. If mysticism represented a conscious opposition to Catherine's Enlightenment and if nonetheless, its influence "on the development of Russian intellectual life can hardly be exaggerated," then mystical critique could not be so easily separated from its Enlightened variant.[133] After narrating the positive contribution which Freemasons and Rosicrucians have made to society through their philanthropic activity and the suspect theosophical doctrines sustaining these coteries, Billington was forced to discern a reformist agenda embedded within an otherwise obscure and eclectic collection of early-modern spiritualist discourses. Somewhat mockingly, recognition was made of the "inner reason" informing mystical praxis which was most useful when its adherents foregrounded care as a principled worldly stance and in doing so, could be considered to have partaken of "rational" activities albeit, both of these terms were qualified by being placed in inverted commas.[134] Whilst some connection between the search for more satisfying spiritual experiences on the one hand, and genuine concern for ameliorating social ills on the other, it was the sociable and not the mystical aspect of Rosicrucianism which was held to be decisive. A deployment of an explicitly mystical categorisation of reality, its teleology and of the status of the individual inhering in it, was seen as a "seductive belief" because, a focus on the possibility of transforming material conditions of life through intellection, overshadowed the social benefits of the lodges.[135] To what extent the surge in the concern with the plight of fellow-citizen was tied to an intuitive sympathy for the imperfect fellow-creature and consequently, to what extent practical aid formed a rational step towards transfiguration, was not analysed. Influencing subsequent scholarship was this very incapacity to properly account for how an irrational cosmology founded on textual sources which by Western European standards were out of date, could

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[133] J.H. Billington, 'The Troubled Enlightenment', pp. 254-8.
[134] *Ibid.* p. 257.
[135] *Ibid.*

nevertheless lead to a rationally sound assessment of social ills and ultimately, of the limits of human organisational forms.

When such a suspicion of mysticism was applied towards an analysis of some of the most important Eighteenth-century Russian intellectuals, the latter's contribution towards the development of the Enlightenment in Russia was lessened because, an interest in religion implied a limited capacity for meaningful contribution. Billington's appraisal of Novikov was illustrative of this contradiction as the latter was the subject of an extended discussion in his chapter on the Enlightenment and foregrounded as one of the foundational figures of Russia's modernisation on account of his progressive social thought. Yet, the Rosicrucian organisation to which Novikov belonged and which was responsible for the promotion of his vision, was condemned as a representative of a major anti-Enlightened trend. The problem here was not as much with the distinction between a positive set of reformist ideas and their negative, anti-Enlightened domain wherein they circulated. Rather, the problem was with a fundamental misunderstanding of the *leverage* needed to actualise the relatively conventional and universal Enlightened ideas in a specific historical context. For Novikov, progress of society was inseparable from the spiritual progress of the individual self. Practical reform was an expression of moral progress and therefore, to only view calls for social improvement as Enlightened and as somehow, divorced from spiritual growth, meant to ignore some of the basic motivations sustaining the pace of the Enlightenment in Russia.[136]

Avoidance of an objective account of these motivations and more importantly, an analysis of what kind of worldview engendered them, led Billington

[136] In order to promote the more rational dimension to Novikov's character and activities so as to contextualise him within a unitary Enlightenment privileging secular and scientific discourses, Billington postulated Novikov's distaste for the overly mystical aspect of Rosicrucianism with which he was forced to compromise. In doing so, Billington replicated some of the basic arguments of Soviet scholarship on the topic. In order to satisfy the Marxist-Leninist demand to demonstrate a clash between progressive rationalism and conservative spirituality without at the same time, minimising the role of Novikov, a certain antagonism had to be shown between the latter and some of the more mystical Rosicrucians, see G. Makogonenko, *Nikolai Novikov i russkoe prosveschenie* (Moscow: Izdetel'stvo hudozhestvennoi literatury, 1951), pp. 446-56.

to view Russian mystics who were most responsible for interrelating speculative praxis with worldly action, as hindrances to the spread of the Enlightenment. Lopukhin was labelled the most dedicated promoter of the anti-Enlightenment in Russia, second only to De Maistre, to whom he was compared.[137] Particularly criticised was the doctrine of the 'interior church' advanced by Lopukhin in his writings and which Billington misunderstood as an example of reactionary Pietism without assessing its metaphysical significance.[138] Whilst Lopukhin was not as intimately involved in the organisational side of Rosicrucian philanthropic activities, his mystical thought provided an original theoretical justification of charity as a principle governing nature which was cognisable through an introspective intuition of the inner church freely available to all individuals who have discovered their transcendent freedom. Billington saw anti-Revolutionary attitudes as symptomatic of a conservative anti-Enlightenment were not indicative of the impossibility of a radical rethinking of authority. This was a major misreading of the manner in which mystical critique upheld established authority in its mundane context in order to safeguard individuals from irrational products of their own imagination and at the same time, to annihilate that authority in a transcendent context. What Billington missed in his negative view of Pietism was that in Russia, this movement offered a way of overcoming confessional confines and of discussing theological problems of immediate relevance without allowing historically-developed religious norms to encroach upon personal intellective experiences of the truth. Thus, Lopukhin's tacit espousal of civil religion, albeit in Orthodox guise, his deep concern with enthusiasm and credulity and his de-mystification of historical faith was ignored because these Enlightened notions were the intellectual results of an existential mystical conversion Billington explained away as irrational. Despite these shortcomings stemming from an avoidance of engaging with the complex authorial intentions in mystical literature, Billington was the first Anglophone scholar to recognise the immense cultural importance of Lopukhin and the richness of the mode of thought in which he operated.

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[137] J.H. Billington, 'The Troubled Enlightenment', p. 271.
[138] J.H. Billington, 'The Anti-Enlightenment,' pp. 280-1.

Significantly, notwithstanding Billington's recognition of the cultural influence of mystical worldviews and the impact the latter made on some of the most creative Eighteenth-century Russian literati, very little attention was given to one of the most outstanding Russian poets of the age, Mikhail Matveyevich Kheraskov (1733-1807). Without a grasp of the content and of the intentions of Kheraskov's immense literary output, it is difficult to surmise how a predominantly intellectual and a non-confessional religion oriented towards moral rebirth, was promoted beyond the semi-clandestine literature circulating throughout the lodges. The reorientation of the Enlightenment in Russia towards humanist politics, belied by a Pietist-like emphasis on inner judgement in regard to spiritual matters, was particularly evident in Kheraskov's works. Billington merely mentioned Kheraskov's participation in Rosicrucian philanthropic activities without actually broaching his contribution to the Enlightenment.[139] Billington's negative view of mysticism when compared to social progress founded on secular reason were likely to have been revised if Kheraskov's emphasis on creating a Christian civic culture in which the commonwealth was composed of personhoods enjoying a flourishing inner life, was subjected to scholarly scrutiny. The criticism of mysticism on account of its obscurantism and its predilection for clandestine institutional settings was largely irrelevant because, it was taken up at a literary level for the public, aimed at fostering a critical exposure of personal and social ills and encouraging learning for the common good.

In the absence of the Rosicrucian establishment and its reprojection of Pietist attitudes which contrasted with Catherine's understanding of what the Enlightenment was meant to achieve, Billington was quite vague in his assessment of mystical currents which depended on alternative traditions. This was particularly evident in the author's attempt to determine the location of Grigorii Savvich Skovoroda (1722-1794) in the history of Russian thought. Billington considered Skovoroda to have been one of the most brilliant and also one of the most radical critics of secular worldly values, prone to "rejecting the high culture

[139] J.H. Billington, 'The Troubled Enlightenment', p. 249.

of the Enlightenment" in favour of a Platonic pursuit of wisdom.[140] What is striking however, is that this rejection was not construed as an explicit symptom of the anti-Enlightenment, even though indirectly, references to the proto-Romantic nature of such intellectual wandering would presume this to be the case.[141] Arguably, the key difficulty here was with categorising a predominantly intellective religion founded on Platonic asceticism and cleansed from the typical enthusiastic projections which have often made religion inimical to the development of Enlightenment. On the one hand, to view this kind of religion entirely as anti-Enlightened was impossible due to its foregrounding of freedom and discursivity. On the other hand however, religion of the intellect could not be an integral part of the Enlightenment either because of its re-spiritualisation of the individuals' relation to their own selves and to the larger world containing them. As a way of avoiding either of these assertions, Billington foregrounded Skovoroda as a thinker whose ideas reflected the troubled nature of the Enlightenment in Russia. A state-sponsored program of reform could not be carried through because it was met with a complex set of responses by one of "Russia's first original speculative philosophers" who felt alienated from a reality engendered by the secular regime.[142]

Either minimisation or misinterpretation of the religious sources of the thought and activity of these mystical thinkers as evident in Billington's otherwise outstanding survey of Russian cultural trends, were apparent in subsequent Anglophone scholarship.[143] For this reason, it is important to detail these shortcomings in order to circumscribe the more typical scholarly suspicions of religion which dominated accounts of the Enlightenment. One of the most pervasive misconceptions was the dichotomy between a conservative and backward oriented religious outlook and the liberal and future oriented secular

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[140] *Ibid*. p. 239.
[141] *Ibid*.
[142] *Ibid*. pp. 239-40.
[143]The only dedicated analysis of Lopukhin's thought in English, replicated Billington's antagonistic reading of the interaction between 'age of reason' and theosophy evident in Lopukhin's efforts to counteract the influence of the former through recourse to the latter, see A. Lipski, "A Russian Mystic Faces the Age of Rationalism and Revolution: Thought and Activity of Ivan Vladimirovich Lopukhin", *Church History* 36, 2 (1967), p. 172.

approach to reform. Whilst there was indeed a strong Orthodox conservative movement arising at the close of the Eighteenth-century, eschewing many foreign influences and seeking to restore the authority of traditional Russian religiosity, it was primarily a patriotic phenomenon not predisposed to speculatively inquire into the nature of religious norms.[144] When mysticism was divorced from its devotional and varied institutional contexts however, notwithstanding the political conservatism of its adherents, it was evident that it was far from being reactionary. To uphold institutional norms without substantiating their truth-claims and their *modus operandi* was very different from applying mysticism to re-justify and in some cases, to transform historically-developed spirituality into transcendent organisational forms. In the latter case, deployment of spiritual discourses was not meant to conserve the religious *status quo*, but to extend mystical insight into domains conventional religion failed to properly penetrate. It is this projection of mystical inquiry which was often minimised to the level of imagination gone awry or misinterpreted to imply a retrograde desire to institute a theocratic polity at odds with the modern concern to foster an open public culture.[145]

The challenge of examining the content of spiritual discourses without unduly reducing them to their context was particularly evident in attempts to chart the difficult history of the Russian Orthodox Church's adaption to Petrine reforms. Exactly how, at an intellectual level, religion could be said to have creatively responded to the inroads of Western European rationalism, without succumbing to obscurantist policies has not yet been einvestigated. To date, one of the most thorough discussions of this trend is the collection of essays, *Russian Orthodoxy Under the Old Regime* (1978) edited by R.L. Nichols and T.G. Stavrou. Previous assessments of Orthodoxy, most notably by Billington, have positioned it as an

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[144] Much of the conservative opposition to some of the imperial policies and more broadly, to foreign influences was sourced in Moscow and was coloured by the nationalist appeal associated with the old capital, see A.M. Martin, *Romantics, Reformers, Reactionaries: Russian Conservative Thought and Politics in the Reign of Alexander I* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1997), p. 59.

[145] For one of the most uncompromising criticisms of Russian Rosicrucian organisations and the worldview they engendered, see I.H. Ryu, 'Moscow Freemasons and the Rosicrucian Order: A Study in Organisation and Control' in Garrard, J.G. ed. o*p. cit*, pp. 198-9.

object of secular reform and a source of opposition to the progress of the Enlightenment. Nichols suggested however, that Orthodoxy's educational establishment with its emphasis on Latin curriculum, was instrumental in the development of a sufficient number of intellectuals to make possible the emergence of learned societies in the latter part of the Eighteenth-century.[146] Whilst in Western Europe, denominational control over education did not necessarily imply a denominational contribution to the Enlightenment, in Russia however, the situation was rather different. Catherine the Great's desire to replicate the Austrian school system was forced to depend considerably on clerical participation in her educational projects due to a lack of secular pedagogues.[147] This implied not only that Orthodox institutions were resilient enough to be involved in some of the most progressive policies of the state, but that a confessional worldview in general was a much more dynamic and a much more prominent public presence in Russia. Consequently, at least in terms of its practical activities, religion was gradually repositioned from being a limit to intellectual culture to being one of its critical formative agents without which, the picture of the Enlightenment in Russia would be incomplete.

Obviously, a predominantly institutional account of the role of religion in the spread of the Enlightenment in Russia was limited insofar as it did not attend to Orthodoxy's intellectual dimension. Yet, Nichols' essay represented a major conceptual advance because religion was shown to have been a relevant and in some cases, a decisive force which future historians ought to analyse further.[148] Since the Orthodox establishment was not passive in the course of Russia's Westernisation, its spiritual relevance should have exceeded its functional role, notwithstanding its loss of prestige. To what extent this was actually the case, was

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[146] R.L. Nichols, 'Orthodoxy's and Russia's Enlightenment' in Nichols, R.S. and Stavrou, T.G. eds. *Russian Orthodoxy Under the Old Regime* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1978): 67-90.
[147] *Ibid.* pp. 67-8.
[148] Nichols' insistence on a more nuanced reading of the connection between religion, institutional practices and the wider public was taken up, with more emphasis on non-Orthodox spiritual traditions hitherto considered anti-Enlightened. F.A. Walker analysed how Pietism contributed to an Enlightened ethos to reform through education, see F.A. Walker, "Enlightenment and Religion in Russian Education in the Reign of Tsar Alexander I", *History of Education Quarterly* 32, 3 (1992): 343-60.

not clear given the parameters of the essay. However, Nichols gestured towards an Orthodox response to rationalism and materialism through its educational network which had far reaching consequences for Russian intellectual history. A combative attitude towards secular trends predisposed a converged deployment of mystical and of German idealist alternatives to what was presumed to be, an overly reductive approach to being and knowledge early in the next century.[149] At work here, was the process of rarefication of religious sentiments, stimulated by Orthodoxy's continuing hold on the minds and perhaps more deeply, the imagination of contemporary Russians. That is, neutrality in relation to spiritual authority beyond their utilitarian value was impossible because the former has overstepped its pedagogic significance to become an agent capable of shaping individual worldviews. It is due to the possibility of such conclusions that a focus on an otherwise narrow field of analysis of Eighteenth-century Orthodoxy is crucial to a reconsideration of the evolution of spiritual culture in Russia.

In his *History of Russian Thought* (1979), A. Walicki was forced to grapple in greater detail than preceding authors, with the paradoxical manner in which, mysticism overcame the teleology of a state-sponsored Enlightenment project and with the challenge of determining its contribution to intellectual progress. If Orthodoxy could be argued to have advanced some of the Enlightened aims of the state by virtue of its hierarchical structure, the much more pluralised context of mystical belief posed an obstacle because it was not directly controlled by the state and therefore, was far more autonomous. Because of this, Walicki had to contend with a largely deinstitutionalised spirituality anchored in private reason and very adaptive at meeting personal emotional and intellectual needs. That is why, notwithstanding his otherwise anachronistic reading of the Enlightenment, Walicki's argument that mysticism acted as a moderniser of religious sensibility is of vital importance because it allowed for a more sophisticated analysis of spiritual discourses.[150] The author did not expand this conceptual advance by way of

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[149] R.L. Nichols, 'Orthodoxy's and Russia's Enlightenment', pp. 84-5.
[150] A. Walicki, 'Trends in Enlightenment Thought' in Walicki, A. *A History of Russian Thought From The Enlightenment to Marxism*, p. 21.

analysing the specifically modernising tendencies of mystical thought. Nonetheless, the concept of spiritual reform and critique was tentatively redirected from its primarily outward institutional manifestation towards its inward disclosure in the interior life world of the human subject. Due to this preference for the structure of ideas rather than that of their socio-political embodiments, Walicki was able to see mysticism as having a place in the history of Russian thought.

Because of this tension between mysticism's modernising aspects and the model of the Enlightenment which could not properly accommodate it, Walicki could not take advantage of his endorsement of the seriousness of mystical critique. Hence, it was not clear whether the latter's effects were representative of the Russian Enlightenment. This vagueness may have been sourced in the larger problem with including religion as an aspect of the Enlightenment. For Walicki, what made a resurgence of interest in spirituality a noteworthy trend in Eighteenth-century Russian intellectual culture, was its reflection of secularisation of belief:

> Basically, Freemasonry was a specific secularised form of religious life, the product of the disintegration of feudal society and the authority of the Church, as well as of the total or partial loss of faith in traditional religious beliefs. For men who, like Novikov, stood halfway between traditional religious faith and rationalism, Freemasonry became a surrogate for religion while the Masonic lodges, with their hierarchic order and elaborate cult, became a kind of surrogate church.[151]

Spiritual discourses were construed here as symptoms of secularisation, occupying the middle ground between the Enlightenment and its antithesis. Here, Walicki was quite right in seeing modernity emerging from the transformation of faith. However, the labelling of this process as a form of secularisation is doubtful in light of the emphasis on re-sacralisation of personal organisational forms amongst the religiously-minded Russian literati. The Masonic and Rosicrucian establishments

[151] *Ibid.* p. 19.

could be deemed to be 'surrogate' churches not because they represented weaker, perhaps more liberal religious organisations better suited to serve the needs of urbane laymen who felt no immediate need to be supervised by the clergy. Rather, they were 'surrogates' because they were able to bracket spirituality with due respect to human subjectivity in ways which seemed to have suggested a concerted attempt to make-up for the perceived deficiency of Orthodoxy in an intellectual culture which was becoming increasingly concerned with individual reception of the truth. Notwithstanding the unqualified interpretation of modern religiosity as a secular phenomenon, insofar as it approximated interest in spirituality to the course of the Enlightenment in Russia, it provided an analytical vantage point from which to assess the contradictory nature of Russian intellectual history.

Of particular value was Walicki's relocation of the multi-faceted quests for a more personal religious experience amongst the emerging intelligentsia from the margins of the development of Russian modernity to a location in-between the forces involved in the latter's emergence. This reorientation represented a major interpretive shift in Anglophone historiography. Instead of examining the resurgence of religion as a peripheral event not needing special emphasis which should be reserved for Enlightenment proper, Walicki attended to the conceptual spaces not filled by Enlightened thought as immensely important in their own right. As a result, it became even more difficult to maintain a straightforward clash of Enlightened and anti-Enlightened ideas because certain types of spiritual discourses were shown to have flourished, due to the tension between an Enlightenment which has not fully unfolded and the irretrievability of traditional faith. Hence, the conception of the anti-Enlightenment as a conservative religious response was indirectly implied to have been a false target because, a genuinely religious alternative to rationalism was as modern as the phenomenon it aimed at displacing and crucially, also independent of traditional religious authority. This did not mean that Walicki introduced the notion of 'multiple modernities' into a

hitherto unitary approach to intellectual developments.[152] What the author did introduce however, was a degree of complexity into the Russian Eighteenth-century which presupposed mysticism to have been a symptom of an inherently unstable and pluralised intellectual climate which was instrumental in the subsequent pluralisation of Russian modernity along religious lines, evident in more recent scholarship.

The difficulty of continuing to conceive of spiritual aspirations as anti-Enlightened by default due to the sheer diversity of the pathways of Westernisation, was made more evident in Abbot Gleason's essay, 'Ideological Structures' which dealt with the varied perception of Western Europe amongst Russian intellectuals. Gleason critiqued the conventional trajectory of Russia's adaptation to foreign norms which was presumed to have been primarily concerned with transplanting knowledge needed to develop the Petrine state. For Gleason, "Beginning in the 1770s, Russia's cultural apprenticeship to Western models began to grow more complex."[153] The complexity was not merely the result of the difficult penetration of ideas into the Russian context. Rather, it was sourced in an opposing pattern of intellectual borrowing from Western Europe to the one initiated by the state. Specifically, whilst it was noted that this formed a conservative reaction against the Enlightenment, this claim was understood by Gleason to mean the rejection of scepticism in moral and religious matters.[154] Thus, instead of a genuinely reactionary stance which would have involved the deployment of a pre-Petrine Russian Orthodox worldview, many educated Russians turned to early-modern Western mystical theosophic literature and in doing so, deepened the penetration and widened the scope of the Westernising process.[155] The influence of Pietism became especially strong as it on the one hand, involved a mass translation of devotional literature encouraging personal spiritual

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[152] The term 'multiple modernities' is taken to mean "continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs," see S.N. Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities", *Daedelus* 129, 1 (2000), p. 2.
[153] A. Gleason, 'Ideological Structures' in Rzhevsky, N. ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Russian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 104.
[154] *Ibid*. p. 106.
[155] *Ibid*. pp. 106-7.

autonomy and on the other, fostered the need for organised philanthropy as a practical expression of inward detachment from temporal authority.[156] Consequently, with this essay, scholarly suspicion of mysticism reached a limit. It became apparent that by late Eighteenth-century, no single ideology had a monopoly on Westernisation as evident by the distinctly religious search for 'wisdom' from Western Europe by the Russian cultural elite. More importantly, in light of this diversity, the status of the Enlightenment in Russia became quite vague as greater scholarly emphasis was placed on outright rejection of its freethinking symptoms and not its reformist agenda by religiously-minded intellectuals.

Paradoxically, the increasing amount of information on the richness of Eighteenth-century Russian spiritual culture, has had the effect of muting discussions on its relationship to the Enlightenment. Gleason's implicit unease as to how theosophical currents could either be effectively integrated into, or opposed to the progress of reason have found a far more explicit expression in D. Smith's *Working the Rough Stone: Freemasonry and Society in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (1999). This was the first proper study of Masonic organisations and culture in Russia in English and as such, was of considerable importance in drawing attention to the social context which predisposed and subsequently was shaped by, the rediscovery of religion as a central theme informing thinking and action. However, precisely because of the proliferation of non-Orthodox religious organisations and the attendant redefinition of the meaning of teleology of human life in social and transcendent terms, Smith deliberately avoided discussing whether this hitherto neglected topic necessitated a revision of contemporary approaches to the interaction between the Enlightenment and Freemasonry:

> …is a criticism of Freemasonry a criticism of the Enlightenment? Or, can one criticize the Enlightenment and simultaneously look to the lodges as laudable features of the eighteenth century? It might be better to leave these contentious debates over the Enlightenment and instead to study the Masons' actions and words to discover what they reveal about the movement itself and

[156] *Ibid.*

> not what conclusions can be drawn about the Enlightenment, however defined.[157]

What was striking about this disregard for the Enlightenment was the sense that it was not a useful category which if pursued, might actually obscure the complexity of the topic. In this case, even though the author may not have had this in mind, the fact that the central cultural and intellectual force of the period could be so easily dismissed, can be taken to imply that the explanatory capacity of the old secular model of the Enlightenment has become irrelevant in the treatment of certain topics.[158] That is, the wealth of information on the importance of religion in private and public domains could not be accommodated to the definition of the Enlightenment which depended on the gradual decrease of the role of religion.

It may have been the case that Smith sidestepped the Enlightenment because he was not prepared to modify its definition in order to better reflect the increasingly vocal presence of religion in the nascent Russian public sphere. This incapacity to orient the discussion towards historiographical issues was one of the key reasons why Anglophone scholarship on Eighteenth-century Russia failed to keep abreast of the wider field of Enlightenment-studies, resulting in serious limitations which have weakened the monograph's interpretive thrust. Firstly, Smith was of the view that attention to the neglected history of Russian Freemasonry offered insight into one of the "associative forms" on the basis of which, it might be argued that Russia indeed possessed a public sphere in terms envisaged by Habermas.[159] Yet, if one of Smith's aims was to concretise aspects of Russian civil society and if according to Habermas, the emergence of the public sphere represented the Enlightenment's capacity to transform and to emancipate, then Smith implicitly engaged in a debate on the Enlightenment despite explicitly refusing to do so.[160] Secondly, Smith misconstrued Margaret Jacob's work on

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[157] D. Smith, *Working the Rough Stone*,, p. 17.
[158] For a view that the popularity of Freemasonry suggested that, a successful "antidote" was found against the secularising effects of the Enlightenment, see O. Tsapina, "Working the Rough Stone: Freemasonry and Society in Eighteenth-Century Russia" Book Review, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33, 2 (2000): 301-5.
[159] D. Smith, *Working the Rough Stone*, p. 55, 90.
[160] D. Outram, *The Enlightenment*. pp. 10-1.

Freemasonry and the Enlightenment by suggesting that, interpretations of Freemasonry supposed contribution to, or detraction from, the progress of the Enlightenment, placed "too much weight on the Masons' modest shoulders" which could not sustain such interpretations.[161] Considering the case-specific nature of Jacob's reformulation of Freemasonry as at times Enlightened, as well as her nuanced recognition of the presence of rationalist *and* theosophical trends in shared contexts, only specific types of Masonic ideologies needed to be shown to be Enlightened and not Freemasonry in general.[162] In both of these cases, far from facilitating a greater insight into masonic culture, the dismissal of the Enlightenment obscured the intentions of some of the leading Russian intellectuals whose religious thought could not be isolated from its underlying interaction with the Enlightenment.

Despite the dubious methodology which insisted on the possibility of a neutral presentation of Masonic culture as though it had no intentionality beyond its own technical *modus operandi*, Smith's study was instrumental in underscoring the decisive role of spiritual discourses in personal and social experience of the self. The function of clandestine esoteric doctrines was pivotal in this regard. Smith was quite right in conceiving of Freemasonry as a concerted attempt "to create a new symbolic order" distinct from society, yet not entirely inimical to it.[163] The publication in Russian of numerous Western European spiritualist and theosophic texts was meant to draw attention to the cosmic and ultimately, to the transcendent sources of human identity and motivations in order to minimise the effects of the presumably corrupt mundane reality.[164] Whilst involvement in society was necessary and indeed, whilst the establishment of novel religious forms represented a leverage upon the direction of social progress, Masonic and especially Rosicrucian discourses stressed the primacy of inner individual life at the

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[161] D. Smith, *Working the Rough Stone*, p. 16.
[162] M.C. Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 187.
[163] D. Smith, *Working the Rough Stone*, pp. 134-5.
[164] *Ibid*. pp. 133-5.

expense of socially-derived truth.[165] Thus, when reconceived as a distinctive kind of self-relation and as a critical stance towards external reality, mysticism was shown to have been capable of being applied towards reform. In the absence of a more rigorous analytical method however, which would obviously involve an engagement with the concept of the Enlightenment and with the worldviews engendered by various spiritual discourses in a more systematic manner, Smith's ground-breaking study was not as attentive to the implications of its own content.

The most ambitious reconsideration of the character of the Enlightenment in Russia along religious lines occurred in R. Faggionato's *A Rosicrucian Utopia in Eighteenth-Century Russia*. In far stronger terms than previous authors and with exhaustive archival research which has not yet been matched, the monograph foregrounded late Eighteenth-century intellectual culture as one suffering from a deep spiritual crisis which decisively shaped the trajectory of the Enlightenment.[166] The purposes of a state-sponsored Russian Enlightenment project may have been to bracket and limit spiritual and salvific concerns. However, the forces which this project unleashed in order to achieve its aims have found a radical reapplication to rediscover and rethink these very concerns as paramount aspects of a continuing evolution of inward and outward organisations of life. For Faggionato, at issue here was not mere revival of religion, but the perception amongst Russian intellectuals that the progress of the state resulted in the regress of the person, necessitating a reorientation of the Enlightening ethos towards a moral regeneration of personhood as a practical precondition for all other improvements.[167] In the absence of strong scientific, philosophical and religious cultures in the Russian national context capable of rationally debating topical issues, early-modern mysticism was particularly attractive because it seemed to contrast greatly with the mere pretence of knowledge with which Western European discourses were often purveyed by the Westernised elite.[168] It is this fundamentally different approach to spiritual literature in Russia as one conducive to charting out personal

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[165] *Ibid*. pp. 127-9.
[166] R. Faggionato, *A Rosicrucian Utopia in Eighteenth-Century Russia*, pp. 1-3.
[167] *Ibid.* p. 25.
[168] *Ibid.* pp. 78-9.

teleology in the larger creation without doing injustice to the intellect's speculative capacity – which made this literature such a powerful stimulus towards a substantive critique of established transcendent norms.

Faggionato postulated spirituality *sue generis*, as a possible agent of modernity, once it was recaptured by the lay cultural elite in alternative terms to those set by the clerical establishment. The problem of obscurantism associated with recourse to mysticism was lessened because it was seen as symptomatic of a crisis rooted in the perceived insufficiency of Western organisational forms imported into Russia and most crucially, was undertaken with a considerable degree of awareness of developments in contemporary European sciences. Here, Faggionato located a particularly baffling trope to be actualised more fully in Russian existential tradition subsequently: the propensity to turn to presumably false or outmoded patterns of thought in full knowledge of the presence of more acceptable or modern alternatives. The Russian Rosicrucians were aware of the immense progress in the natural sciences, yet have conscientiously opposed it with ideas preceding the rise of the scientific worldview without at the same time, thinking that in doing so, they were stifling humanity's capacity to evolve intellectually and institutionally far beyond its present confines:

> …The notion of a machine world and a secular view of scientific research were widely known in Russia during the last few decades of the eighteenth century. Consequently, the choice of the members of the Novikov circle to dedicate themselves to the dissemination of hermetic literature was made with their full knowledge of the facts. It was a choice of interpreting a world defined by religion that was in contrast to the new scientific course and new outlook which were gaining ground.[169]

It is this knowing rejection of the main-stream approaches to the empirical world which ultimately, reflected a highly conscious discrimination between which kind of a world was a fit habitation for spiritually-free human beings and which kind was not. From that standpoint, the separation from the readily accessible truth of

[169] *Ibid.* p. 165.

science was undertaken in order to defend aspects of individual and communal existence deemed to have been threatened by the march of secularism. That is, the perceived risks of an unfolding rationalistic modernity were felt to outweigh its benefits and necessitated a radical reorientation to preceding modes of thought.

As a result, spiritual systems flourishing in Russia in the last quarter of the Eighteenth-century were of secondary importance in comparison to the general aims of the intellectuals who have applied them to reformulate the Enlightenment along religious lines. If religious sensibility is liable to a charge of providing a vague and abstract guidance when it intersects with the imperatives of practical reform, Faggionato noted a complete inversion of this relationship between transcendent belief and temporal practice, when it occurred in Russia. Far from obscuring the aims of the Enlightenment to usher in an age of "liberty, tolerance and brotherhood," in its Russian context, religion concretised these principles into meaningful aims of individual and social action.[170] In Faggionato's original interpretation, the continuity of the Enlightenment in Russia depended on the extent to which, various esoteric doctrines could be merged with Orthodox ethic to produce an ethos of this-worldly engagement supported by strong ontological commitments independent of empirical reality.[171] Consequently, religion and spirituality were no longer accepted as phenomena existing apart or in opposition to social and intellectual norms on account of their emphasis on faith, but as organisational contexts in which, theoretical and practical concerns were elucidated with the aid of speculative reason. That is why, the author was able to directly connect the Rosicrucian focus on the transformative power of speculative reflection with the rise of the notion of the intellectual as an independent critic of the established order of things.[172] Feeding this capacity was not an enthusiastic subscription to a specifically religious form of truth, but an intuitive refusal to accept existing notions of human dignity and of its context as just. It was therefore, not too important whether a particular mystical doctrine derived from antiquity or

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[170] *Ibid.* p. 129.
[171] *Ibid.*
[172] *Ibid.*

the Renaissance, as long as it circumscribed the essential features of human identity deemed to be in need of defence and provided a stable anchorage from which to survey the course of the Enlightenment.

One of the cardinal implications of Faggionato's study was the understanding that, a turn towards spirituality was an autonomous gesture on the part of the Russian intellectuals undertaken when state control over thought and expression was relaxed. This was evident not merely in the flourishing Masonic culture and the burgeoning trade in religious literature, but in the very possibility of committing one's self to a predominantly spiritual teleology without undue fear of repression at the hands of the state which continued to privilege temporal utility. The extent of the divergence between the aim to foster conditions conducive to salvation on the one hand, and the aim to bring about a regulated police state were most poignantly revealed in the attitude to the Orthodox Church. From the perspective of Peter the Great and his successors, Orthodoxy was one of the pillars of the state's worldly authority, a source of its legitimacy and in some cases, an executor of its will. In all of these cases, whilst the transcendent nature of the church militant was not denied outright, it was nevertheless massively curtailed and redirected into a bureaucratic mode of being. For the lay mystics however, despite Orthodoxy's humiliating submission to the state and its flawed historical character, it fulfilled its ultimate mission by mobilising the intellect to pursue a transcendent truth which it in itself did not have, but which it posited in imagistic terms. Insofar as Orthodoxy was an object of intense mystical critique and as a consequence, its state-ordained role was explicitly reformulated, the degree of independence the Russian literati believed they possessed was actualised by virtue of their capacity to question the purpose of one of the most sensitive domains of national life. Thus, when Faggionato pointed out the Rosicrucian attempt to revive Orthodoxy by merging the latter's worldview with alternative mystical precepts, she was in fact, foregrounding the unexpected

reform agenda some of the Russian elite developed, once the paternalistic state temporarily relinquished some of its prerogatives.[173]

Alternative approach to religion and spirituality in the Enlightenment

This thesis will incorporate Faggionato's reappraisal of the role of religion and spirituality in the formation of the Enlightenment in Russia as its foundation. The need for further argumentation regarding the positive presence of spiritual concerns in Eighteenth-century Russian thought is not necessary anymore in light of the state of the literature on the topic. Yet, even though important reconsiderations of the Enlightenment have taken place, this does not imply that the materials which served as the basis for these reconsiderations have been exhaustively interpreted. Some of the most decisive argumentation favouring a more balanced approach to the rise of mystical worldviews has in large measure, occurred on the strength of empirical information sourced from the Russian archives. What gave Faggionato's monograph such cogency, was her detailed presentation of the sheer number of Masonic lodges in Russia together with a close analysis of their documentary trail focusing on their organisation and worldly activities, as well as the diverse spiritual literature circulating amongst literate Russians. Due to the weight of such evidence, it was no longer possible to disregard the resurgence of belief as a sophisticated Enlightened phenomenon seeking to harness the transformative power of mystical critique in more modern progressive terms. Precisely because of this however, there remains a tremendous scope for a more interpretational approach to the specific nature of religious understanding of the Enlightenment, focusing to a greater extent, on the foundational features of mystical critique.

Greater attention needs to be given not so much to the institutional significance of mysticism or to its cultural appeal, but to the conceptual apparatus at the disposal of Russian mystics and crucially, at the results of its application. This is not a criticism of Faggionato and of some of the authors preceding her. Rather, it is a suggestion that, in order for the momentum in Enlightenment-studies in the Russian context to continue, spiritual discourses ought to be analysed apart from

[173] *Ibid.* p. 82.

their socio-cultural implications. Insofar as the previous chapter gestured towards a separate Mystical Enlightenment, greater attention to the intellectual core of such an Enlightenment is imperative because, it is only through the presence of a distinctive set of ideas that any intellectual movement can be conceived as autonomous from competing movements. Contextual analysis is an integral aspect of clarifying what kind of ideas were in circulation, by whom and why, but its chief value is in revealing and then anchoring the presence of intellectual debates. Once the contours of the given context are agreed upon, the content of spiritual discourses can become the focus of attention.

In order to concretise the intellectual thrust of mysticism's insight into the structure and teleology of human organisational forms, this thesis will not categorise mystical thought according to the institutional affiliations of its adherents. One of the side-effects of Faggionato's exclusive attention to the rise of the Masonic and Rosicrucian ideologies, was the sense that Enlightened spirituality was primarily located in lodges. Obviously, there is some truth in such reasoning given the overall intention of the lodges to reverse the poverty of perceived social and personal modes of existence. However, a discussion of these ideologies, their symbolism and significance cannot stand in place of a discussion of the resulting mystical perception of the world and the self. For this reason, it seems necessary to identify mystical thinkers as primarily mystical, rather than as representatives of particular milieus. This does not mean that mysticism is implied to be one and indivisible. The thought of the selected individuals in this thesis will testify to the varied use and understanding of the meaning of mystical experience and of mystical cognition. So, in order to unify these thinkers' work as representative of a single Mystical Enlightenment, thematic and conceptual continuity will be privileged at considerable expense to shared socio-cultural contexts.

Such an approach calls for the redefinition of intellectuals already firmly established in the religious trajectory of the Enlightenment in Russia, attention to intellectuals who were hitherto, considered to be of peripheral importance and,

discussion of intellectuals not usually seen to reflect this trajectory. Specifically, the bulk of the preceding literature lionised the writings and activities of Novikov as the fulcrum of the rise of indigenous Russian social consciousness through recourse to spiritual discourses as mobilising agents. Insofar as the general tenor of previous discussions was to depict cultural trends operable at certain social levels by means of organisations deemed to be capable of exercising leverage upon the moral well-being of their members. Yet, when distanced from his practical concerns and approximated towards patterns of thought underlying the latter, Novikov emerges, in Walicki's apt assessment, as a populariser and not a thinker in a strict sense.[174] Because of this, central as Novikov's role was in promoting an Enlightened Rosicrucian utopia, it did not include a theoretical justification or indeed a demonstration of the efficacy of a spiritual renegotiation of temporal and transcendent authority. Thus, insofar as this thesis' principal aim is to attend to concepts which sustained mysticism's viability and evinced its critical purchase, emphasis on thinkers most committed to speculative exploration is essential. It is hoped that a combination of the relatively broad contextual analysis undertaken in previous literature with the narrower conceptual focus attempted presently, will result in a more balanced understanding of how a resurgence of belief predisposed the intellectual elite to engage in intense intellectual speculation and to passionately advocate for the improvement of society.

It is for this reason that this study focuses on thinkers for whom spirituality was a form of knowledge and of relation to their own selves, the selves of others and to the creation, over and above the obvious concern with cognising God. When not exploring these transcendent topics, the mystics covered in this thesis descended to the more practical task of theorising the role of conventional religious authority in the development of a peaceful civic life. Both of these dimensions of mysticism have been given some attention by previous authors, most notably by Faggionato, but the manner in which mystical thought transformed and re-justified the objects of its critique was never their key theme.

[174] A. Walicki, 'Trends in Enlightenment Thought', p. 24.

This complex deployment of mystical insight which was ultimately geared to re-encountering at a higher ontological level, the very institutions it dissected in order to establish their conformity with an intuitively-derived truth, was never the focus of previous scholarly study. What is implied here is the inherently dialectical nature of mystical perception when it is grounded in an ascetic stance towards the world. When an ascetic turns away from the established norms through which reality is rarefied in favour of mystical certainty unbeholden to any conventional mediation, it often does so for the sake of the entities being rejected, in order to restore their dignity in the face of an ineffable transcendent vision. This shuffling between the ultimate purpose of the vision to witness God and the necessary return to investigate the temporal conditions of human life which have prompted the initiation of the mystical ascent in the first place, is responsible for the practical insight religious attitudes are capable of generating.

Mystical perception becomes a critique in the proper sense of the term when some attempt is made to firstly, clarify the personal and institutional constraints standing in the way of the intellect's transcendence and secondly, when these constraints are shown to be necessary aspects of the process of becoming and are capable of enriching temporal existence. This dialectic initially emerged in the history of Russian thought in a religious guise as a salvific strategy whereby, the fate of the created world was not insulated from that of the individual soul resulting in a complex and sometimes deificatory relationship between the two.[175] It might seem that mysticism cannot serve an Enlightened function if it is the dominant intellectual force determining the contours of human enworldedness because, its application is a form of re-enchantment which Enlightenment sought to overcome. This would be a fair assessment, provided it

[175] This particularly evident in the largely religious art and literature of pre-Mongolian Rus, with its explicit "sense of the universe" seeking to "embrace the world" in its totality and avoid a one-sided privileging of the transcendent over the material as though the latter was evil. Long before idealistic philosophy's integration of the particular and often mundane instances of life with the universal principles deemed to sustain the absolute character of being, Russian literati were at least symbolically engaged in a sustained *metaphysical defence* of the creaturely order of things from a disparaging attitude deeming it to be inherently unworthy, see D.S. Likhachev, *Razvitie russkoi literatury X-XVII vekov* (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 1998), pp. 62-3.

was restricted to include only the cultural and at the most, psychological aspects of belief which, especially of a Masonic kind, did indeed sometimes result in individuals literally subscribing to the mythological content of faith at the expense of rationality. The mystical topos however, cannot be seen through the prism of the process of re-enchantment if it could be shown that it was capable of divesting historical religion of its revelatory authority as well as of approximating human consciousness to temporality in ways that straightforward materialism could not. In fact, insofar as mysticism re-enchanted without this necessarily being its central aim, simply by virtue of re-symbolising its own developmental trajectory, it did so to lead the intellect into a position where it would recognise that the world was "suffused with value."[176] A. Bilgrami made a powerful argument in this regard, when he suggested that the ethical demands stemming from early-modern dissenters' defence of a divine world order served as a strategy aiming at facilitating a moral engagement with temporality:

> A brute and disenchanted world could not move us to any such engagement since any perception of it, given the sort of thing it was, would necessarily be a *detached* form of observation; and if one ever came out of this detachment, if there was ever any engagement with a world so distantly conceived, so external to our own sensibility, it could only take the form of mastery and control of something alien, with the view to satisfying the only source of value allowed by this outlook – our own utilities and gain.[177]

Emphasis on utilitarian gains promoted by the Russian state, which diminished the value of personhood and its capacity to sympathetically relate to other personhoods, was precisely one of the aims which predisposed the recourse to alternative spiritual traditions most conducive to a heightening of intellectual sensibility. The ascetic outlook of the lay mystics was instrumental in instituting detachment for the purposes of analysis and closeness for the purposes of engagement due to its sensitivity to the "normative constraints" which force the intellect to reckon with the world's *modus operandi*.[178]

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[176] A. Bilgrami, "Occidentalism, the Very Idea: An Essay on Enlightenment and Enchantment", *Critical Inquiry* 32, 3 (2006), p. 397.
177 *Ibid.* p. 398.
178 *Ibid.*

Mysticism mobilised individuals to act as ontological as well as earthly agents. The ensuing engagement can therefore, be construed as an example of how a seemingly "retrograde religion moved humanity forward."[179] Such a democratic approach to the sources of modernity is of course viable only if there is some agreement as to the goals towards which humanity progressed. In the Russian Eighteenth-century, to align a personal pursuit of metaphysical truth with the process of self-consciousness, to demonstrate the dangers of the coalescence of historicity with the imagination and to postulate participation in worldly betterment as a necessary condition of a future intellective existence – implied a commitment to progress. What needs to be understood is that the tasks Russian philosophical, religious and artistic thought set out to undertake, notwithstanding their variety and even mutual antagonism, can often be bracketed in anthropological terms. In his *Religious and Anti-Religious Thought in Russia* (1968), G.L. Kline referred to this deep anti-epistemic tendency by suggesting that, "Russian speculation has generally centred on man."[180] Consequently, an actualisation of any of the aforementioned progressive ends, which all dovetailed on personhood, required a corresponding rise in speculative thinking which at that stage of Russian intellectual development, could only be provided by mysticism. Because of this, it is important not to conflate the abstruseness of the theosophical language employed by mystical writers with the emancipatory goals these writers thought they could successfully advance by means of speculative inquiry occasioning such language.[181]

If the thought and activity of Russian mystics was symptomatic of one modernity existing alongside others, it is necessary to recognise the novelty of mysticism and its reprojection of neglected early-modern religiosity in conjunction

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[179] D.M. McMahon, "What are Enlightenments?", p. 615.

[180] G. Kline, *Religious and Anti-Religious Thought in Russia* The Weil Lectures (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 4.

181 Peter the Great's efforts to create a simple and practical language to serve temporal needs of a bureaucratic state was major shift in "linguistic consciousness," see V. Zhivov, *Language and Culture in Eighteenth-Century Russia* tr. M. Levitt (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009), p. 46. Attempts to discuss spiritual matters in a language not intended to sustain such a discussion can be interpreted as an instance of an alternative linguistic modernity utilising and in the same time, counteracting the unfolding of secular linguistic consciousness.

with the novelty of the problems it illuminated. Late Soviet scholars were attuned to this paradox which made a wholesale condemnation of the resurgence of mysticism difficult because it could not be proven to have entirely resembled pre-Petrine approaches to spirituality. Specifically, the terrain upon which mysticism was thought to operate, came into being as a consequence of the mystics' contact with radical Enlightened free-thought and its subsequent repudiation.[182] This repudiation however, was not complete as intellectuals who have experienced it and as a result, turned to religion, could not wholeheartedly accept Orthodoxy or any other creed which did not satisfy their aspirations for an experiential vantage point upon which personal and social well-being could be premised.[183] Implicitly then, since mystical thought was shown to be irreducible to the established conventions of pre-Eighteenth-century past and at the same time, caught up in a critique of the established conventions of the Eighteenth-century present, it was not less modern than the mode of thought of its competitors. Thus, if adherents of an Enlightenment centred on rationalism perceived the need to carry on the project of modernising Russian institutions, adherents of an Enlightenment centred on human spiritual capacities perceived the need to modernise the forms in which these capacities could be expressed and actualised. From such a perspective, the emphasis on abstracting certain principles and processes held to be of decisive importance for the identity and continuity of human personhood by means of speculative language, was ultimately intended to isolate key objects of inquiry for investigation.

A qualified disengagement from church dogma and the truth-claims of its ceremonial repertoire, in favour of speculative freedom which Russian mystics discovered, was directed at replicating in the minds of their readers, the powerful sense of intellectual autonomy they have experienced. Unusual symbolic constructions, repeated suggestions regarding the inexhaustible abyss of the self and of God and the chaotic ground of pure potential for human and divine action,

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[182] N.F. Utkina and A.D. Sukhov, *Russkaia mysl' v vek Prosvescheniia* (Moscow: Nauka, 1991), pp. 160-1.
[183] *Ibid.*

served to agitate the intellect as a highly dynamic force incapable of being entirely contained in historical conventions. Hence, behind the spiritualistic rhetoric, was an exceptionally charged discourse of freedom which, on account of its irrepressibility stemming from its deeply transcendental nature, could not be discussed in terms reflecting straightforward rational causality. In their *Russian Thought in the Age of the Enlightenment* (1991), N.F. Utkina and A.D. Sukhov, despite their typically Soviet distrust of Russian mysticism, have nevertheless brilliantly pointed out how Lopukhin's thought on freedom, chaos and potential was capable of empowering the intellect in its concrete, this-worldly existence:

> Lopukhin did not say anything about how God created the things of this world out of chaos. It was as if he dissolved God in chaos in order for the latter to reveal himself more actively later, in the course of the moral searchings of the now mature man in whom, like the sun in a drop of water, God will be reflected. This inadmissible attitude from the perspective of Orthodox teachings, accentuated a particular importance in Masonic consciousness of an ethical problematic and the importance of moral self-improvement. God for the Masons, is primarily a moral ideal and a guarantor of the moral order in the world.[184]

What was striking about this assessment, which will be developed in much greater detail in the present thesis, is its recognition of how metaphysical infrastructure can arise as a consequence of the stimulus the intellect can receive in the course of its engagement with temporality. A vision of the ontological order of things was not an *a priori* measure to be applied to guide human endeavours to improve and to transform, but was itself a result of the undertaking of these endeavours. A foregrounding of the chaotic was a way of foregrounding and prioritising the human, with a radical lessening of the authority of all intermediary norms. This was an example of a specifically mystical, rather than a Masonic dialectic and the mystics' adherence to it, is the extent to which they can be integrated into a single tradition.

[184] *Ibid.* p. 167.

The three mystics constituting the core of this study were chosen primarily on the basis of their commitment to locating a transcendental vantage point from which, the ensuing mystical critique would make finite human existence bearable. Skovoroda was the most potent and the most sophisticated representative of this underlying intention because of his emphasis on predisposing the intellect to 'awaken' itself to an immense variety of symbols expressing the infinity of the creation, of which it will partake by virtue of contemplation. At some cost to the critique of socio-political establishment with which Skovoroda enjoyed an ambivalent relationship, this itinerant thinker introduced the enduring notion that human beings displayed their ultimate worth and uniqueness by way of submitting to a process of becoming towards being by means of innate resources, into Russian philosophy. The deployment of a combination of Platonic and Neoplatonic hermeneutic with early-modern Western spiritualism, resulted in an intensely processual anthropological framework whereby, an individual human being was conceived as a being capable of increasing his or her humanity not by virtue of recovering a hidden essence, but by virtue of recovering a capacity for intellection. The significance of conventional religious, political and social authority was not directly challenged as fundamentally wrong or defective. Rather, temporal authority was annihilated together with the earthly 'outer man' in the course of the intellect's becoming, thus indirectly suggesting that their role in enriching the natural human capacity for transcendence was limited. Yet, this preference for the intellect did not imply disrespect for matter and material existence, to the contrary, it necessitated its joyful acceptance as an ethical condition of earthly life.

The thrust of such a mystical projection towards an intuited ontological horizon was considerably narrowed down into the confines of personhood to serve practical civic purposes in the Masonic poetry and prose of Kheraskov. The existence of this ontological horizon which formed the absolute limit to the process of becoming and by implication, of all intellective experiences, including those of God, was not denied. What Kheraskov was concerned with however, was the imperative to integrate the content of mystical perception into a civic order which would be reflective of the higher truths it disclosed. Skovoroda was not overly

concerned with the latter problem firstly, because of his personal temperament and modest social status and secondly, because of his unshakeable conviction in the efficacy of private contemplative praxis. Kheraskov's thought however, was intended towards emancipating the spiritual identity of the person in strongly Pietist terms and the subsequent extension of a reborn self into a radically transformed civic sphere capable containing its spiritual richness without doing injustice to its autonomy. This in turn, led Kheraskov to postulate a rational civil religion as an external guarantor of the mystical inner workings of the divine in the depths of personhood. Thus, a sense of social responsibility was derived from the datum of speculative inquiry which was translated into an explicitly utopian vision of a moral commonwealth existing temporally and composed of transcendentally-free personhoods.

Two of these ambitious aims, to approximate the intellect towards its ultimate experiential horizon and to develop a civic setting capable of properly contextualising individuals possessing such intellects, were synthesised in the thought of Lopukhin. As in Skovoroda's thought, mysticism was used to disengage the intellect from its bodily constraints and orient it towards a vision of infinity, although in Lopukhin, this was sometimes equated with a vision of the void out of which infinity arose. As in Kheraskov's thought, the cognizance of a metaphysically-derived truth, necessitated a transformation of the temporal order of things, including historically-developed institutions, religion in particular. Yet, unlike either of these thinkers, Lopukhin was neither satisfied with an ongoing contemplation of the creation conceived symbolically, nor did he agree with a straightforward application of mystical thought which threatened to literally subvert existing authority. Rather, for Lopukhin, an almost unmediated experience of the divine was the result of a prior experience and of a purely theoretical overcoming of historicity. This experience, together with a very specific kind of overcoming, justified historicity as an initial stimulus for the intellect's ascent. Thus, temporality was not transformed directly, but rather in terms of the individuals' attitude towards the fallen historical reality as unavoidable and incapable of fundamental improvement and therefore, requiring those who have

managed to overcome it, to exercise compassion through a highly active ethic of care. Paradoxically then, the intensity of worldly activity was reflective of the intensity of transcendence, resulting in a sympathetic attitude towards a predominantly material world to which all human beings must in some measure consent.

This thesis will concentrate on these distinctive approaches to the meaning and function of mysticism as three instances of a Mystical Enlightenment. When seen together and when recognised as potentially theurgic, these moments exemplified the trajectory of mystical thought as it manifested itself in the history of Russian intellectual culture with few substantive additions subsequently, apart from a much more comprehensive treatment of themes which have been already raised in the Eighteenth-century. Skovorda was the first thinker in Russia to realise the impoverishing effects of the absence of transcendence in the intellect's sense of the world and of its own self relation, leading the thinker to concentrate primarily on finding ways of expressing how experience of infinity was possible. Kheraskov was not as much concerned with foregrounding the transcendental object of the intellect's orientation as he was with working out how knowledge of that object within one's personhood could be used to reverse the negative effects of its absence in historical immediacy. Lopukhin recaptured Skovoroda's ambitious endeavour in order to demonstrate that the intellect's sense of the transcendental was impoverished without a proper account of the value of historicity and that historicity was impoverished if it was not made into an object of love stemming from the intellect's proximity to divine otherness. In all of these three cases, albeit not in the same manner, passive ascetic withdrawal, the absolute validity of historical norms and violent projections of a privately imagined truth were heavily criticised and served as a reason to find alternative ways of decisively acting upon the world.

The presence of such aims alone, irrespective of the success of their theoretical development and practical actualisation, is indicative of a tectonic shift in the way religion was approached and most interestingly, in the novel functions with which it was imbued. This contrasted with clerical efforts to apply aspects of

Enlightened thought to their respective confessions without actually broaching the reasons for their confessions' very existence and their mode of operation. Thus important as Metropolitan Platon was in the opinion of E.K. Wirtschafter, in sincerely trying to reconcile Orthodoxy with the Enlightenment, this reconciliation was too moderate to be expressive of the more far-reaching transformational possibilities which could emerge out of an intersection of religion and the Enlightenment.[185] Consequently, a specifically mystical religiosity can offer a much better analytical vantage point from which to view this intersection because the selected mystics were far more attuned to the fact that, a truly Enlightened justification of any already existing institution or mode of thought was always presupposed by its prior rethinking. Arguably, there were few representatives of the Russian clerical elite who were sympathetic to a Western oriented, rational Enlightenment and who were able to temporarily separate themselves from the thought-world of Orthodoxy for the purposes of its analysis and subsequent justification as a progressive repertoire.

This does not mean that the only instance of a religious Enlightenment in Russia occurred in the guise of mysticism or that it must rethink religion to the same extent as the Enlightened mystics have done. Rather, what is contended is the particular efficacy mysticism had in the specific context of its occurrence. If David Sorkin was right in claiming that a more balanced approach to religion by contemporary scholars was the real test of the workability of Pocock's plurality of Enlightenments, then the present study can be seen as an attempt to apply this model beyond the confines of its intended application.[186] Even though all of the mystics under discussion have identified themselves as Orthodox and have done so not out of prudence but because it was an integral aspect of their respective worldviews, the latter represent a valuable example of how religious attitudes could evolve far beyond their established frameworks. The value then, was not in noting how adherents of an entrenched confession adapted and responded to

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[185] Wirtschafter, E.K. *Religion and Enlightenment in Catherinian Russia*: *The Teachings of Metropolitan Platon* (De Kalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2013), pp. 12-13.
[186] D. Sorkin, "Reclaiming Theology for the Enlightenment: The Case of Siegmund Jacob Baumgarten (1706-1757), *Central European History* 36, 4 (2003), p. 530.

ideas which have opposed it, but in noting how a new form of religious sentiment came into being which by virtue of its very origin, was a response to Enlightened trends. Obviously, the textual output of the mystical writers did not merely perpetuate mysticism's viability, more crucially, it broadened its application and enhanced its critical capacities. As a result, the plurality of Enlightenments is not tested against a backdrop of opposing institutions and practices which nevertheless proved to be receptive to reform, but against repertoires engendered by the penetration of an Enlightened ethos and which reinterpreted the latter's aims and methods.

Sources of the Mystical Enlightenment

The diffusion of mystical discourses represented a complex blend of aspects of Russian understanding of the nature of knowledge preceding the Petrine revolution as well as some of the most decisive intellectual implications of that revolution evident in late-Eighteenth-century. The foregoing argument regarding mysticism's ability to act as a force of modernity, can be better understood if its specifically Russian function is outlined. Anglophone literature has not adequately reflected upon the co-presence of continuity and discontinuity in Russian thought from the standpoint of its more positive appraisal of the role of religion in the Enlightenment. If Peter the Great's reforms have been rethought to the point where it is difficult to think of them as *ex nihilo* creations, then the sources of modern Russian spiritual culture are yet to be explored further. Arguably, modernity can be understood as a rejection of some aspects of established norms and a qualified acceptance of alternatives which may be derived from reason's idealistic projections into the future as well as into the past, resulting in a genuine sense of the novelty of the present. Emphasis on un-repeatability does not exclude an unexpected re-emergence of neglected or intentionally suppressed patterns of thought which may, by virtue of their disruptive effects in contexts where they were never intended to thrive, strengthen the unfolding of the historical present.

Attention to the discursive possibilities of mystical praxis by Russian intellectuals was heightened in moments when a particular worldview tried to monopolise itself as the only firm guide to reality. Since late medieval times, mysticism in Russia was a concretising force, seeking to pronounce and to justify features of reality in the same time as it sought its limits. In his *History of Russian Philosophy* (1948), V.V. Zenkovskii gestured towards this early-modern function of mysticism which made it the fulcrum of a native Russian religious understanding of the creation and of the role of the divine within it:

> If to express this in philosophical terms, then we are dealing here with *mystical realism* which recognises the complete substantiveness of empirical reality yet, it sees behind the latter a different reality. Both of these spheres of being are real, but are hierarchically unequal. Empirical being is based solely on the basis of its participation in mystical reality. The theocratic idea in Christianity is tasked with affirming the necessity of illuminating the totality of the visible and the empirical, by tying it with the mystical sphere.[187]

Conceiving of mysticism as an agent of realism may seem like a major contradiction in terms. Yet, what Zenkovskii was proposing here, was not a vague Platonic recognition of the noetic order as the only reality, but a mode of thought which necessitated the postulation of the mystical realm in order for temporality to become the object of engagement. Notwithstanding the emphasis on participatory relationship where dependence of one reality upon another was the norm, it was nevertheless a relationship presupposed by an *a priori* affirmation of materiality as a partner and not a post-Fall flaw in the creation, needing to be circumvented. From that perspective, mysticism was a form of realism not merely because it revealed the truth of the transcendental, but primarily because it sought to raise the truth of the empirical to the level of goodness it perceived metaphysically. Such earthly orientation of spiritual insight was a constant feature of Russian intellectual tradition which usually avoided the extremes of Gnostic dualism and strongly upheld the dignity of finite existence. As a result, if reality which needed illumination and the reality from where the illumination was derived were

[187] V.V. Zenkovskii, *Istoriia russkoi filosofii* Tom I (Paris: YMCA Press, 1948), p. 41.

endowed with being, both of them were by implication, totalities capable of greater orientation towards one another through human effort.

Overemphasis on the earthly threatened to obscure the means through which, the worth of finitude could be ascertained and through which, it possessed teleology. Concurrently, overemphasis on the transcendent could obscure one of the most decisive vectors of spiritual insight by negating an integral aspect of the creation wherein that insight was deployed. Thus, each of these polarities risked transforming themselves into absolutes at the cost of one another's validity. Indeed, mysticism gained an additional claim to being a realist mode of thought by intending to integrate different aspects of reality with one another, which it did within the rubric of illumination. It is this relational aspect of mysticism which was an enduring feature of Russian intellectual history, re-emerging in critical moments of that history, either to serve as a reminder of the irreducibility of the divine, or as a defender and promoter of earthly life. Because of this, there was considerable room for creativity, conditioned by the unavoidable tension between faith in the intellect's ability to perceive beyond empirical reality and anxiety regarding the possibility of realising the truth derived transcendentally, in temporal life. Arguably, the great Russian iconographic tradition which climaxed in late medieval times, was the most potent indicator of concrete attempts to envision corporeality illuminated by spiritual experience and to express in highly sophisticated terms, a fervent hope for the future bliss of all creatures inhabiting creation.[188] Here, it would be important to add J.H. Billington's view that for Russians, unlike for Western Europeans, Christianity was primarily a manner of "aesthetic appeal".[189] Theological reasoning, when present, was peripheral to the typically Russian understanding of truth as something that is present only if it is given some concrete expression. The diffusion of mystical attitudes can be thought of as a continuing

[188] E.N. Trubetskoi, 'Umozrenie v kraskah' in O.V. Kir'iazev ed. *E.N. Trubetskoi: Izbrannoe* (Moscow: Canon, 1997), pp. 351-2. Trubetskoi brilliantly argued how, if Russian iconography is considered as an intellectual enterprise seeking to express and to clarify complex theological topics, it is possible to see how it simultaneously, subordinated corporeality to the spirit illuminating it *and* provided the motivation for autonomous corporeal action. *Ibid.*
[189] J.H. Billington, *The Icon and Axe*, p. 9.

Russian fascination with seeking to conceive of the content of spirituality in imagistic terms, especially through a sustained use of allegory and symbolism.

In more conventional theological discourses, this dual intentionality of mysticism is best approached from the latter's role as a mode of thought which was responsible for the penetration of aspects of the Renaissance into Russia. In one of his most penetrating insights into the course of Russian cultural development, D. Likhachev noted the absence of the Renaissance in Russia. That is, in early-modern Russia, rebirth was only pending without actually fully taking place.[190] The Russian context did not evince systematic attempts to develop autonomous and comprehensive humanist tradition as a consequence of which, human capacity for knowledge and creativity were recognised as decisive features of human identity. There was very little evidence of praise of human powers which C. Lohr saw as one of the cornerstones of Renaissance metaphysics.[191] In turn, this further implied that Russian intellectuals did not "struggle" to self-transcend and as a result, did not produce a culture oriented towards spiritual autonomy.[192] Instead, Russians have sought to derive spiritual individuality from the newly-translated Greek theological and apocryphal literature. Thus, if Western European Renaissance was emancipatory insofar as it foregrounded classical heritage, in tandem with neglected Platonic, Neoplatonic and Gnostic textual sources which have problematized established scholastic conventions, Russian intellectual culture was forced to rely on mystical literature to modernise personal and spiritual organisational forms. The Renaissance-like intellectual shifts in Russia between the Fourteenth and Sixteenth centuries occurred as a consequence of a mystically-derived sense of the autonomy of finite human intellect and of its capacity to serve a deificatory function.

Mysticism contributed to the emergence of early-modern Russian modernity in at least two important ways. In its first instance, mysticism attended

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[190] D.S. Likhachev, *Razvitie russkoi literatury*, pp. 71-2.
[191] C. Lohr, 'Metaphysics' in Skinner, Q. and Kessler, E. *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 573.
[192] *Ibid.* p. 574.

to the formation of distinct individuality – a personhood capable of relating to God via the rigorous Hesychast monastic practice supported by complex devotional literature. For Likhachev, the spread of Hesychast praxis was a progressive phenomenon because, its dynamic understanding of the relationship between creature and the creator, necessitated the formation of a "mystical individuality" which in turn, necessitated new forms of self-expression.[193] The resulting realism was particularly evident in the increasing concern with locating and describing spiritual states of the individual and in a belief that it was possible to have an intellectual communion with God.[194] This evolution of Orthodox spirituality towards a more self-conscious approach to belief represented a major departure from the far less reflexive, poetic understanding of Christianity prevalent in early medieval Russia. Indeed, it was the growing awareness of the presence of a transcendental object of human contemplation, strengthened by the translation of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus at the close of the Sixteenth-century, which was responsible for the emergence of an "absolutely new" approach to the structure of reality and ways of apprehending it.[195] The emancipatory outcomes of the spread of Hesychasm and of Neoplatonic thought was evident insofar as the former privileged intellective receptivity as a form of praxis whilst the latter, privileged autonomous philosophical discourse capable of articulating the interpenetration of earthly and divine realities.[196]

In its second instance, mysticism contributed to the formation of a distinct earthly polity – a state capable of reflecting divine order via a rigorous application of eschatological justification of temporal sovereignty. One of the most important promoters of a centralised Muscovite state un-beholden to the authority of the Orthodox Church was the so-called Possessors monastic movement. This movement, directly opposed to that of the Hesychasts, emphasised political action on the basis of sheer unintelligibility of Divine *logos* when seen apart from its

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[193] D.S. Likhachev, *Razvitie russkoi literatury*, p. 73.
[194] *Ibid.* p. 90.
[195] V.V. Mil'kov, 'Neoplatonicheskaia traditsiia v drevnerusskoi mysli' in Gromov, M.N. and Mil'kov, V.V. eds. *Ideinye techeniia drevnerusskoi mysli* (St. Petersburg: RHGI, 2001), p. 233.
[196] *Ibid.* p. 231.

historical envelopment and a firm conviction that it will not be cognizable intellectively until Christ's second coming.[197] On the presumption that all human beings replicated the God-like capacity for will by virtue of being *logos*-birthing creatures, the absolute authority of the prince was redeemed because it represented the presence of such a will in its most concentrated historical form.[198] Human organisations were therefore, emancipated on account of the perceived weakness of the human intellect, emerging in comparison to the expected strength of spiritual insight which will unfold in the end of times.[199] Sensitivity to the hitherto absent various eschatological notions circulating at the time, translated into a typically mystical sense of the privation of the transcendent Good, obligating secular authority to moderate the strain of historical existence by developing a well-functioning polity wherein, the ecclesiastical establishment served primarily a philanthropic purpose.[200]

In both of these instances, the influence of secularising reason was almost absent in the promotion of philosophical and political attitudes which have prefigured some of the transformative effects of the Renaissance because, the sources responsible for these effects were almost entirely religious in nature. The respective concerns of the Hesychasts and of the Possessors were briefly outlined to demonstrate how two diametrically opposite views regarding what kind of human activity was particularly valuable and towards what kind of reality it intended, could be based on different applications of mystical intuition. These were not the only positions taken up by early-modern Russian intellectuals, but these were the limits of attempts to justify two types of opposed worldviews. The Hesychasts responded to the danger of an exceedingly ritualised Christianity by gesturing towards silent contemplation of the totality of the divine creation through an intellective gathering of the energy emanating from God's essence. The

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[197] A.F. Zamaleev, *Vostochnoslavianskie mysliteli. Epoha srednevekovia* (St. Petersburg: Iz-vo Sankt-Peterburgskogo universiteta, 1998), p. 143.
[198] *Ibid.*
[199] D. Goldfranck, "Old and New Perspectives on Iosif Volotsky's Monastic Rules", *Slavic Review* 34, 2 (1975): 279-301.
[200] *Ibid.* p. 285.

corporeal and the mundane aspects of personhood and of existence in general, were integrated into this deificatory process. The Possessors on the other hand, responded to the danger of an overly passive attitude towards historical existence by gesturing towards historical forms of truth and authority which were of paramount significance. The unavoidability of primarily depending on very imperfect embodiments of the *logos* was conditioned by an eschatological expectation that what was foreshadowed historically, will be actualised beyond history. Thus, the absence of strong secularising influences was not necessarily an obstacle in the development of new theological and political discourses made possible by concerted efforts to assimilate heterogeneous spiritual traditions from the Orthodox *ecumene*.

The Mystical Enlightenment was reflective of these early-modern uses of mystical thought. The interplay between acquisition and translation of religious literature, the application of novel spiritual norms for reformist purposes and the resulting emergence of new forms of religious worldviews, was the key dynamic which resurfaced in the Eighteenth-century with particular vigour. It is the contention of this thesis that the Mystical Enlightenment was sourced in the deeply problematic nature of Russia's experience of the Renaissance.[201] Insofar as the latter reform movement was abridged prior to systematically reshaping the intellectual landscape to the point where, a predominantly religious rethinking of established authority was only one mode of critique amongst several others. The various religious trends which have made inroads into early-modern Russia and raised the philosophical content of native Orthodox religiosity exposed Russian intellectuals to more sophisticated critical tools with which to investigate the validity of metaphysical and historical structures. Consequently, due to the

[201] According to Robert Casey's brief, but nevertheless interesting observation, since Russia did not undergo the processes of Renaissance or Reformation, its titular confession failed to incorporate some important secular trends of thought on the basis of which it could rejustify itself. This opinion is valuable insofar as it attested to the necessity of *supplementing* the established religious repertoire with alien philosophical and spiritual traditions, a process which occurred in Russia several centuries later than in Western Europe. The surge in mystical spirituality can be thus seen as an instance of such supplementation. See, R.P. Casey, "The Cultural Mission of Russian Orthodoxy", *The Harvard Theological Review* 40, 4 (1947), p. 271.

absence of the kind of qualified secularisation present in Western European contexts which allowed for the prioritisation of humanism, Russian intellectual culture could participate in intellectual processes only through recourse to explicitly religious terms of reference.[202] These terms could not be easily invalidated because there were no adequate discourses which could have provided a completely alien, outside view of spiritual culture and to undertake its critique. The Mystical Enlightenment was reflective of this difficulty of achieving critical distance and it sought to overcome it within the bounds of religion. Notwithstanding the sweeping Petrine reforms which transformed the Muscovite state, their modern import was seriously compromised by the almost medieval terrain in which they were meant to unfold. D.D. Blagoi was even more forthright than Likhachev in claiming that Russia experienced, some aspects of the Renaissance only in the course of the Eighteenth-century thus implying the difficulty of any kind of clear-cut periodisation of Russian intellectual history.[203]

The seemingly retrograde and impractical aspects of Eighteenth-century Russian mystical thought were symptomatic of an incomplete Renaissance. The current belief that humanism represented "the deepest and the broadest current in Russian philosophy must be seen as an extended process to actually have a humanist orientation in the absence of conditions which would facilitate its development in terms comparable to those which have operated in Western Europe.[204] Whilst this circumstance predisposed Russian thinkers to be exceptionally sensitive to issues relating to human freedom and dignity and to guarantee the latter metaphysically, the underlying concern was with the fragility of the humanist tradition and with its underdeveloped character in Russia. Western European Enlightenments, together with their colonial diffusions have

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[202] As A.I. Boldyrev noted, one of the distinguishing features of Russian freemasons was their humanistic, Renaissance-like ethos, see his *Problema cheloveka v russkoi filosofii XVIII veka* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo moskovskogo universiteta, 1986), p. 87, 100.

[203] D. D. Blagoi, 'Zakonomernosti stanovleniia novoi russkoi literatury' in Blagoi, D.D. *Literatura i deistvitel'nost'. Voprosy teorii i istorii literatury* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izd-vo hudozhestvennoi literatury, 1959), p. 22.

[204] G.M. Hamburg and R.A. Poole, 'Introduction' in Hamburg, G.M. and Poole, R.A. eds. *A History of Russian Philosophy 1830-1930: Faith, Reason, and the Defence of Human Dignity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 5.

been influenced, indeed made possible, by the prior advances in philosophy, politics and science which have occurred during the Renaissance. This is why, an absence of Renaissance, insofar as this implied an absence of a critical formative period, was crucial in determining the course of Eighteenth-century Russian thought. Scholars have thus far, not paid sufficient attention to the impact that the absence of this formative period had on the manner, the content and the purpose of some Russian Enlightenment projects. At issue here is the possibility that some of these projects were engaging with problems foregrounded by the Enlightenment but in a Renaissance-like fashion.

There is some scholarly support for viewing the Russian Eighteenth-century as an arena in which a "delayed Renaissance" continued to make its appearance.[205] For Likhachev, insofar as the core of pre-Petrine Russian literature was concerned with the task of emancipating personhood, indeed of discovering it as an object of its sustained enquiry, it was working towards the actualisation of this central Renaissance theme.[206] However, this concern did not become an explicitly conscious one until quite late, almost on the threshold of Petrine reforms, problematizing the possibility of easily replicating the seemingly universal stages of development Western European countries went through, in the Russian context. Old Russian literature, inclusive of philosophical and theological genres, faced an almost impossible task of seeking to engender the results of the Renaissance without Renaissance:

> For Russia, problems which should have been posed by the Renaissance were particularly difficult. A delay in their formulation not only pointed towards inherent conservatism, but also towards their fundamental importance for Russian literature in the course of its incremental movement towards personhood. One after another, these problems were posed and solved in difficult historical circumstances, reflecting a torturous maturation of humanist ideas.[207]

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[205] D.S. Likhachev, *Razvitie russkoi literatury*, p. 203.
[206] *Ibid*. p. 205.
[207] *Ibid*. p. 203.

Thus, whilst the teleology of Russian intellectual forms might be conceived to have a European character, the historical conditions in which the latter was expressed and the sources which it utilised were quite different. Because of this, the familiar themes of humanism were given an unfamiliar presentation to the ones they may have received elsewhere, primarily because Russian intellectuals could not directly rely on classical heritage. Likhachev's observation needs to be taken as a warning not to expect an overly linear progress of ideas in Russia and to take note of the degree to which, various intellectual commitments were prone to overlap with one another. The fact that the anthropological topos was shown to be so enduring that it was capable of development in the absence of close engagement with discourses needing to be re-birthed, suggested a capacity to pursue alternative sources and to interpret them creatively.

This thesis will accept the notion of a 'delayed Renaissance' and suggest that the latter's development combined with the forces of the Enlightenment. Likhachev was only partly right in claiming that the closest Russia came to experiencing the Renaissance was in late Seventeenth and early Eighteenth centuries via Baroque influences from Polonised Ukrainian intellectual elite.[208] W.G. Jones called this cultural phenomenon, in inverted commas, a 'Slavonic Renaissance' and presumed it to be the initial "fount of western Enlightenment."[209] However, these claims are valid insofar as the stylistic, authorial and linguistic innovations have greatly expanded the discursive capacities available to Russian literati. Apart from this evolving attitude to text and authority, reinterpretation of the place of the individual in the cosmos and of the individual's value vis-à-vis the divine remained underexplored. In fact, whilst the rich translated and native early-modern apocryphal literature gestured towards a microcosmic definition of the person, the preference for intellective gnosis ensuing from such a definition was not evident, as was the case in most Renaissance contexts. E. Cassirer made a case for the progressive results of a microcosmic

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[208] *Ibid*. pp. 203-5.
[209] W.G. Jones, 'Russia's Eighteenth century Enlightenment' in Latherbarrow, W. and Offord, D. eds. *A History of Russian Thought*, p. 78.

approach which emerged in the course of the Renaissance, because it was often reflective of openness of the creation and of the self to speculative inquiry.[210] Such an inquiry into the extent to which, the structure of personhood replicated that of the creation and whether mutual influence was possible, developed only to a rudimentary level in Russia, without actually culminating in a humanistic deification of the individual.

The Mystical Enlightenment, insofar as it represented a conscious orientation towards spiritual discourses which have operated in Western European Renaissance and insofar as the former developed an explicitly humanist rhetoric encompassing the totality of the creation, was symptomatic of a much delayed appearance of some aspects of the Renaissance on Russian soil.[211] The three mystics discussed in this thesis, have taken advantage of the relatively liberal intellectual climate, to acquaint themselves and their audience with Platonic, Neoplatonic, theosophic and gnostic traditions as privileged modes of thought in terms highly reminiscent of how these very same traditions were promoted in Renaissance settings. Despite its shortcomings, Cassirer's broad epistemic perspective on the history of ideas as a "hierarchy of symbolic forms beginning with myth and culminating in science" can illuminate the progressive role of mysticism in Eighteenth-century Russia.[212] This movement from myth to science, insofar as it was conditioned by individual human endeavour to achieve self-knowledge, accelerated greatly in the Catherinian epoch and was in key respects, retracing some patterns of development of other nations which have been involved in this movement as well.[213] The loss of Russian Orthodoxy's near-monopoly on directing spiritual debates and the state's limited toleration of the non-Orthodox direction these debates have taken, allowed for the Renaissance-

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[210] E. Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 63-5.
[211] A.I. Boldyrev noted the Eighteenth-century Russian use of the 'man as microcosm concept' and suggested that it had a progressive end despite its Renaissance anchorage, see his *Problema cheloveka v russkoi filosofii XVIII veka*, p. 100.
[212] D.A. Wisner, "Ernst Cassirer, Historian of the Will", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58, 1 (1997), p. 146.
[213] *Ibid.* p. 146.

like conditions in which, according Cassirer, reason focused on positively relating knowledge to freedom through an independent application of symbolic worldviews.[214] In Russia, a relatively independent deployment of complex symbolic forms reflecting a process whereby, reason matured beyond the datum it received from established religious sources of knowledge, was not possible until late Eighteenth-century when the religious topos was opened up to lay thinkers who freely selected the sources of their thought.

Russian modernity, as it developed between the Fourteenth and the Seventeenth centuries, was almost entirely dependent on the clerical establishment, apart from the obvious exception of several heretical movements. Neither Hesychast praxis, nor Muscovite realpolitik emphasising temporal power nor indeed, the vast apocryphal literature with its promise of an open cosmos accessible in all of its diversity to the spiritually elect, led to a systematic redefinition of human agency. Considerable maximisation of individual discursive capacity did in fact occur as a consequence of all of these repertoires however, this maximisation did not result in the explicit emergence of a "new sense of historical consciousness, a new sense of the place of the thinking and acting self" as expected in more developed modernities.[215] That is, the penetration of Greek religious, philosophical and to a lesser extent, political ideas into Russia did not engender the formation of sophisticated native traditions of thought capable of fundamentally rethinking existing organisational forms. When Likhachev mentioned the conservative challenge to the unfolding of the Renaissance in Russia, he may have meant the situation whereby, emergent traditions could not be actualised to their full extent because they were limited by the existing power arrangements.[216] Whilst ecclesial and political authorities have undergone extensive modification, their identity was not questioned because very few of the clerical intellectual elite responsible for the diffusion of new spiritual and political trends, were engaging in the general pursuit of humanist inquiry. The primary

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[214] E. Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos*, p. 37.
[215] B. Wittrock, "Modernity: One, None, or Many? European Origins and Modernity as a Global condition", *Daedalus* 129, 1 (2000), p. 56.
[216] D.S. Likhachev, *Razvitie russkoi literatury*, p. 203.

motivation for the selective borrowing of texts and traditions was to buttress ecclesiastical and political institutions and not to extend and to deepen the conception of human worth apart from its representation within the dynamic of these institutions.

Prior to Petrine reforms, there was little opportunity for educated clerics to involve themselves in cultural and intellectual trends as relatively autonomous agents. Until the beginning of the Eighteenth-century, attempts to make cultural pursuits more independent of their immediate religious and political applications were often forcefully interrupted by state and religious authorities, usually on the pretext of heretical implications of secular learning. Because of this, knowledge was predominantly understood to result from praxis undertaken in religious and political contexts, rather than from analysis. These peculiarities of Russian intellectual landscape are particularly evident in the activity of one of the most outstanding representatives of Greek and Italian learning in Sixteenth-century Russia, Maxim the Greek (1470-1556), a monk of Greek extraction. Maxim's direct acquaintance with Byzantine and Florentine humanist traditions made him one of the pivotal figures in the development of Neoplatonic thought in Russia.[217] It might be presumed that given the overall orientation towards the acquisition of aspects of Orthodox tradition hitherto unrepresented in Russian spirituality and a greater openness to Western cultural trends would provide fertile conditions for the utilisation of Maxim's erudition, resulting in the development of native humanist attitudes. Maxim was indeed able to impart greater respect for classical philosophy, demonstrated how rational argumentation counteracted superstitious practices and most importantly, argued that it was by means of the "cunning" divine artistry that the enquiring mind could be either distanced from or approximated to, metaphysical truth.[218] In addition to Hesychast focus on the gathering of grace with which Maxim agreed and, in direct opposition to overly temporal character of Possessors' religiosity, Maxim was one of the first thinkers in Russia to gesture towards an erotic openness to God as an inherently elusive

[217] A.I. Ivanov, "Maksim Grek i Ital'ianskoe Vozrozhdenie", *Vizantiiskii vremennik* 33 (1972): 119-136.
[218] *Ibid.* p. 122.

object of knowledge. This was a significant advance in the development of a theoretical understanding of spirituality, particularly because it depended on considerable knowledge of Patristic literature in its case for a greater degree of freedom of thought and will, made possible by the absence of permanent possession of grace.[219]

Yet, these complex and progressive attitudes could not be actualised more fully. Even though one of the reasons why Maxim was invited to Moscow was to assist in the translation of Greek religious literature and in the correction of existing translations, his technical expertise could not be properly used because, almost not a single Russian possessed sufficient mastery of Greek in order to engage in complex scholarly discourse.[220] Therefore, one of the preconditions for a functioning Renaissance namely, the capacity for a philological investigation and discussion of texts could not take place given the absence of the republic of letters. Paradoxically, quite soon after his arrival, Maxim's desire to scrutinise existing Russian religious literature on the basis of Greek originals, resulted in him being charged with perverting the meaning of the Scriptures and to his exile to a distant monastery.[221] This was a poignant example of the limits of a predominantly technical insight into the validity of truth-claims authorities could tolerate and of the difficulties in the way of any substantive textual critique undertaken independently of received opinion. When seen in combination with Maxim's adherence to conventional Orthodox worldview, notwithstanding his appreciation of philosophy, there was very little scope for sustained intellectual activity beyond ecclesial confines.[222] Thus, if one of the more religious aspects of the Renaissance foregrounded the continuing realisation of divine forms through individual intellective efforts symptomatic of the Sophiological structure of creation, then

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[219] It is the combination of the ebb and flow of grace with Divine creativity which imparts an erotic element to Maxim's thought and which in turn, reflected emphasis on the "never ending progress into the mysteries of spiritual life" undertaken without threatening the individuality of the believer, found in some Patristic literature, see N. Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 244-5.
[220] G. Florovskii, *Puti russkogo bogosloviia* (Paris: YMCA-Press, 1983), pp. 22-3.
[221] A.F. Zamaleev, *Vostochnoslavianskie mysliteli*, p. 167.
[222] *Ibid.* p. 170. Although, it must be noted that nevertheless, Maxim exercised considerable influence over native Russian literati.

notwithstanding Maxim's acceptance of such efforts, the emancipatory effects of belief in a conscious human partnership with God was minimised.[223] The presence of progressive ideas did not necessarily result in a straightforward progress because they were either simplified through their subordination to ecclesial needs or suppressed, preventing the emergence of a relatively neutral intellectual space in which ideas could be discussed as concepts and not merely as constituents of practical religious life.

The limit posed to autonomous knowledge and at the same time, attempts to partially circumvent it via a mystical understanding of reality were particularly evident after the middle of the Seventeenth-century in Russia. The need for greater conceptual clarity and autonomy of discourse from immediate religious needs re-emerged again in the wake of Baroque influence emanating from the re-conquered Western regions of Russia which had been subjected to considerable Polish cultural influences. Yet, it is difficult to determine the extent to which, genuine Baroque trends were experienced in Russia rather than lingering vestiges of a delayed Renaissance in more modern Baroque packaging. If in its more intellectual guise, one of the Baroque's aspects was a highly aestheticized expression of human mortality, dependent on rich symbolic repertoire intended to evoke wonder and sometimes dejection, then its Russian version had a contrary aim more in tune with the Renaissance assertion of life. It is for this reason that Likhachev understood the Baroque as a 'functionary' of the Renaissance and possessing a distinctively Russian trajectory.[224] If an earlier evolution in Russian thought was stimulated by greater exposure to Byzantine texts, resulting in new religious sensibilities, greater availability of Western literary and theological norms have provided the resources for some Russian intellectuals to advance Russian modernity further in its pursuit of an increasingly discursive spirituality.

Specifically, in contrast to the predominantly monastic context of previous approaches to the self and to creation, the influence of the Baroque foregrounded

[223] C.H. Lohr, 'Metaphysics', pp. 570-5.
[224] D.S. Likhachev, *Razvitie russkoi literatury*, p. 195.

language as a context and most importantly, as a model of the relationship between the individual soul and its world. The theoretical content of spirituality derived from the Patristics was supplemented and in some instances, displaced by an autonomous poetic praxis which strengthened the notion of personal creativity as a form of inquiry. Professional poetic activity, which hitherto barely existed in Russia, took the form of an objective *techne* anchored in a world conceived grammatically and seeking to deify the written word as only second to *logos* in importance.[225] Such attention to the significance of writing and by direct implication of the importance of the writer as a deifying agent, was unprecedented. Rather than intensifying contemplative gathering of divine grace and instead of justifying temporal action, the emergence of poesis in Russia necessitated the capture of the external world in as many different metaphors as possible.[226] The transformation of language into a generator of symbolic meaning unfolding in an almost infinite variety represented the birth of the first truly self-sufficient discourse which was not directly geared to fulfil the role of a mediator of established religious conventions. There was a clear humanistic undertone informing this emancipatory trend because individual authorial control over the emergence and intentions of the resulting explosion of poetic rarefication was paramount.

These developments were particularly evident in the writings of the first serious and the most notable Russian poet and monastic scholars of the age, Simeon of Polotsk (1629-1680). For Simeon, the objective world was not necessarily independent in itself, but an object to be transformed into an emblematic repertoire, "waiting to be manipulated in the interests of spiritual truth."[227] That is why, in one of his poems, Simeon likened all of creation as well as God to different types of texts which on the one hand, overshadow all human writing but on the other, are nevertheless accessible through the act of reading. Even Christ was allegorised as a "useful book people read" in order to then "enact

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[225] A.M. Panchenko, 'Russkaia kul'tura v kanun petrovvskih reform,' pp. 295-6.
[226] *Ibid*.
[227] A. Hippisley, "The Emblem in Simeon Polockij", *The Slavic and East European Journal* 15, 2 (1971), p. 169.

its words into deeds."[228] As with the preceding evolution of Russian intellectual culture, the present percolation of new literary sources was representative of modernity insofar as it led to the emergence of fundamentally different themes and ways of expressing them hitherto absent from the concerns of Russian literati. Indeed, expression became the ultimate theme in itself insofar as Simeon sought to disclose the word inhering in all things which he meticulously described for the purposes of moral instruction.[229] Thus, neither God nor the world could possibly be experienced as meaningful without language's capacity to enliven inert matter which then served as a context wherein divinity became open to a transcendent reading.

What was particularly remarkable about this type of espousal of the Baroque was that once more in Russia, modernity proceeded in religious terms. In critical respects, a further distancing from a de-individualised medieval worldview and its inattention to a more conscious use of select discursive forms, occurred as a consequence of greater engagement with the possibilities of spiritual perception for epistemic ends. Knowledge was no longer presumed to result solely from an illuminated personhood attuned to receiving grace, but also from the dexterity of the writer in combining seemingly unrelated descriptions of the qualities of things into a web of associations reflective of specific topics. When seen in their totality, Simeon's poems represented an encyclopaedia of mutually related symbols derived from disparate objects. A poet had to be prepared to unexpectedly encounter and to reveal the hidden content of objects and in some respects, in a Renaissance fashion, to know everything in order make this revelation effective.[230] Such faith in the presence of the word and in the power of the intellect to assert its will and to synthesise its heterogeneous reflections into a coherent image of the creation was inherently mystical. Mysticism evolved from an almost ineffable praxis which required attention to inward states of consciousness but not always

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[228] S. Polotskii, 'Kniga' in Polotskii S. *Virshi* ed. V.G. Korotkii (Minsk: Mastatskaia literatura, 1990), p. 367.
[229] A.M. Panchenko, 'Russkaia kul'tura v kanun petrovvskih reform,' p. 296.
[230] J. Bucsela, "The Problems of Baroque in Russian Literature", *Russian Review* 31, 3 (1972), p. 265.

their detailed description and its qualified avoidance of the external world, to a form of narrative seeking to dramatise examples of concrete embodiments of ideas constituting the world of intuitive experience.[231] Consequently, whilst it might seem that concerted gravitation towards independent literature signified a gradual secularisation of creativity, this was true only insofar as secularisation is understood as a shift in the definition and therefore, in application of religious sensibilities.[232]

One of Simeon's decisive contributions to Russian intellectual culture was his reformulation of how the totality of finite earthly life related to the perceived infinity of divine existence. Instead of defending the integrity of one totality against encroaches by another, Simeon's insistence on symbolism foregrounded the means through which both could be known in a single expressive act. Crucially then, what was held to be of particular importance, was the integrity of the medium through which temporal and transcendent realities revealed themselves and were unified into a discourse existing between divine self-sufficiency and earthly contingency. It is in this sense that the predilection of Russian thought towards mystical realism continued, albeit in a new key. There was no need to argue for the prioritisation of one type of reality conducive to one form of activity over another. A symbol was treated as the real content of a material thing from which it was derived and signified a divine otherness informing it. Consequently, material conditions of life had to become objects of poetic fixation in order to be transformed into a textual *speculum mundi* which depended on God for its thematic unity. This was not a promotion of a purely literary understanding of poetry as that would only be possible in a culture already possessing strong literary tradition, but an attempt to find a universal mode of description capable of doing justice to the endless process of signification through which God could be known.

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[231] *Ibid*. p. 264.

[232] The difficulty of applying the term secularisation to instances whereby certain intellectual and artistic postures were becoming autonomous of established religious conventions was apparent in the vague status of the first Russian play, by Simeon which was neither a completely religious nor a lay event, see M. Swoboda, "The Furnace Play and the Development of Liturgical Drama in Russia", *Russian Review* 61, 2 (2002): 220-234.

Yet, the emancipatory potential inhering in a conscious privileging of language had a very limited chance of leading towards a more systematic transformation of intellectual norms. Simeon and some of his younger compatriots have indeed become the leading intellectuals – if not Muscovite intelligentsia as such – and were responsible for the unfolding of Westernisation of a different kind to the one later promoted by Peter. Because of the explicitly foreign nature of the thematic and stylistic innovations, powerful conservative elements within the Orthodox Church were deeply suspicious of Simeon's activity especially given that he was the first intellectual to discuss spiritual matters aimed for the consumption of the educated elite outside of the monastic confines. In fact, the bulk of Simeon's literary output was published personally for the tsar and his immediate circle, thus limiting the percolation of its content. Entrenched views on how and where and perhaps most importantly, to what end should spiritual discourses operate could not be directly surmounted. As a result, the evident autonomy of mystical perception from external authority and its almost total conflation with the dynamic of expression, prematurely terminated in an overly narrow readership without actually supplanting the much older Russian understanding of how to relate to God and the world.

The intensification of mystical praxis and the privileging of poetic enquiry, can be seen to be the basic constituents of Eighteenth-century Russian mysticism. As has been outlined in the briefest of terms, some of the most progressive aspects of the evolution of spirituality could not be actualised more fully due to the absence of an independent cultural context capable of containing individual creativity without interruption. The existing configurations of knowledge, method and authority could not act upon and allow themselves to be comprehensively transformed by conceptual advances emerging from Russia's increasing contact with foreign religious and literary traditions. In fact, one of the primary obstacles standing in the way of a more decisive modernisation of intellectual culture was a conflict between the dynamism of new sources and the immutability of old authority which stifled the unfolding of alternative worldviews. External conditions in which spiritual discourses operated and acted as agents of modernity had to be

radically transformed in order for the latter to engage in a sustained critique without being either redirected to fulfil traditional religious roles or made impotent by the minuscule lay intellectual milieu.

Whilst it was the case that Eighteenth-century resurgence of mystical thought represented a reaction against the effects of the Petrine revolution, especially in religious matters, that reaction was made possible by the conditions set in place by the unfolding Russian *Polizeistaat*. The Enlightened aspect of mysticism was sourced in the space opened up by relegation of the Orthodox establishment and crucially, in the transformation in the very notion of individual discursive capacity. That these aspects proved to be conducive to the development of mystical realism was quite contradictory of their original intentions to form a temporal sphere wherein, discrete individuals were not too pressed by other-worldly concerns. In rejecting some of the remnants of old Muscovite religiosity as well as the overly refined and seemingly impractical outgrowths of Baroque modernity, Peter the Great was actually substituting the dignity of the word for the utility of the object as the primary focus of human action.[233] For this process to be initiated, hitherto insurmountable spiritual limitations to worldly activity had to be subverted, creating the rudiments of a lay culture in which new forms of spirituality could emerge in the future. By removing some of the ecclesiastical constraints and the various prejudices associated with them regarding the trajectory of human existence in a world where salvific concerns were relegated, Petrine reforms allowed for a radical reformulation of these concerns.

The most defining feature of Russia's cameralist modernisation was its dependence on an altered sense of sacredness which has gone some way in re-enchanting temporality. This may appear to be surprising given the generally secular orientation of Russia's Westernisation. It was not enough to merely weaken the power of the church, it was also necessary to demarcate and to justify the sphere of human finitude as to a considerable extent, self-sufficient and self-

[233] A.M. Panchenko, 'Russkaia kul'tura v kanun petrovvskih reform,' pp. 299-300.

referential. Peter succeeded in doing so by firstly, promoting the image of the monarch as a temporal sovereign exceeding in power all forms of authority derived from approximations to a saintly ideal associated with old Muscovy and secondly, by fostering discursive practices which aimed at reflecting and promoting this new conception of sovereignty. A.M. Panchenko called this alternative reality a 'secular saintliness' and argued that it created the very conditions in which future Russian literature and thought could exercise their spiritual mission in radically different terms to the discussion of spirituality in Western Europe:

> That the poets – some more successfully than others – have withstood the test of longevity is proven by time itself. They have no age limit, they are recognised to be and remain, the spiritual teachers of the nation notwithstanding attempts to unseat them. Their works, like the creations of the church fathers do not succumb to ageing and maintain their pedagogic value after many decades. This is a specifically Russian situation. Neither Catholics nor Protestants look for answers to life's problems in Goethe, Balzac and Dickens despite all due respect shown to them. In the West, there is no 'secular saintliness' whilst in Russia, its foundations were laid by Peter as unintended consequences of his church reform.[234]

What differentiated Russian intellectual culture was not merely a different approach to texts brought on by difference in the latter's content. At the heart of the matter, was the issue of functionality as reflected in authorial intentions and readers' expectations. That the most essential metaphysical questions were raised in literature to meet the spiritual needs of the soul suggested that in Russia, creative output was projected onto a fundamentally different plane which was given very unique contours as a result of the institutional marginalisation of Orthodoxy. Because of this, a sustained foregrounding of temporality ultimately led to a sharp intensification of religious discourses, insofar as the latter were tasked to perform a quasi-liturgical role. Secularising intentions have therefore, raised the meaning of creativity far above the temporal and the non-ecclesiastical level of its occurrence, sometimes fusing literary endeavour and the various philosophical and spiritual concerns underpinning it, into meta-narratives not easily categorised into genres.

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[234] A.M. Panchenko, 'Tserkovnaia reforma i kul'tura petrovskoi epohi' in Panchenko, A.M. ed. *XVIII vek. Sbornik 17* (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 1991), pp. 9-10.

The Mystical Enlightenment can be seen as a development of spiritual worldviews emerging in the context of a transformed attitude to the mundane world. Long before the flowering of Russian literature and the emergence of Russian philosophy in the Nineteenth-century, native late Eighteenth-century mystical texts have already broached some of the most important themes which were actualised more fully and in more sophisticated terms subsequently. In fact, at least in a formal sense, it is possible to detect the emergence of mysticism as a meta-narrative insofar as, efforts to describe and to promote mystical perception of reality were evident across many genres ranging from an ode to a Neoplatonic treatise. The nascent philosophical content inhering in these multiple ways of expressing spiritual concerns of the age and their overwhelming drive towards moral transformation are indicative of the relative unimportance of purely fictional aspects apart from their usefulness for the purposes of narrating important truths. The possibilities of the emerging republic of letters were not solely used as intended for the enactment of practically-oriented individual duty owed to the monarch, but also to demarcate the presence of an infinite horizon which human life had to experience as its own, in order to be truly human. It is in the realisation of this horizon as a normative aspect regulating intellectual, spiritual, emotional and indeed social demands that various mystical postures have found common ground and where their dependence on culture as a relatively autonomous sphere of action was most evident.

Notwithstanding the often arbitrary and sometimes obscurantist nature of Russian absolutism, its maintenance of 'secular saintliness' was directly responsible for the emancipation of creative forces even though, the latter's products were almost always deemed to be suspect by the centralised state. In comparison to the preceding shifts in the history of Russian thought which foundered against the conservative elements within Orthodoxy or due to the limited aims of the reformist intellectuals themselves, the modernity unleashed by Petrine innovations was maximalist in character and aimed squarely at neutralising all opposition, especially that posed by the church. The leading Orthodox clerics were either co-opted into

the vision of a new Russia or silenced or ignored on account of their sheer passivity in relation to the politics of the day. There was considerable dependence on educated clergy and the vast Orthodox educational establishment for the promotion of state policies. Yet, this was not a dependence on the specifically religious ideas which the former could generate to help the regime deal with new challenges as much as it was a vested interest in the functional utility of Orthodox institutions, not least for the benefit of social control. This resulted in a crucial re-negotiation of the role of the church which was now positioned to fulfil rationally-discernible tasks for the common good over which it had little direction and which was totally extrinsic to its traditions. Consequently, the intense bureaucratisation of belief which continued throughout the Russian imperial period, fractured the Orthodox monopoly on spiritual life allowing for the multiplication of spiritual discourses.

It is at this point that it is possible to discern one of the defining peculiarities of the trajectory of Enlightened thought in Russia which was directly responsible for the importance of mysticism as an Enlightened tradition. Eighteenth-century Russia did not witness a prominent contribution of the clergy as a class, to native intellectual culture. Yet, if as Pocock argued, theological issues underscored much of what the Enlightenment stood for and what it sought to repudiate, clerical participation on both sides of the debate must be accepted as the norm.[235] This situation was quite paradoxical because in Russia as in many other European contexts, notwithstanding problems in education, the clergy often remained one of the best informed members of society.[236] The roots of this complicating factor lie in Peter's shrewd use of Orthodox intellectual elite for the benefit of his reforms but in a way which prevented the latter from ever becoming capable of moderating the influx of Enlightened ideas. Learned clerics were of particular danger to the new regime due to their capacity to critique emerging policies in theological terms, leading Peter to prefer clerics who were capable of

[235] J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion. Volume One*, pp. 7-9.
[236] This was particularly evident in the case of the Polish Enlightenment where the Catholic clergy were the most important participants, see W. Dzwigala, "Voltaire and the Polish Enlightenment: Religious Responses", *The Slavonic and East European Review* 81, 1 (2003), p. 71.

doing the exact opposite: to undertake a politically-grounded assault on established theological conventions.[237] That is why, the promotion of Archbishop Feofan Prokopovich (1681-1736) as an ideologue of Orthodoxy's integration into the cameralist aims of the state was so revolutionary because it signified a surrender of the church's right to judge worldly life in accordance with authority not immanent to the domain of its application. Whilst some individual Russian clerics were indeed informed by Enlightened attitudes towards governance, education and most commonly, credulity but not in a way which fostered a sustained engagement with Orthodoxy as a progressive force in society able to critically respond to the effects of Russia's rapid modernisation.

Such notable absence of religious moderation of Enlightened trends allowed the Russian state a relatively free hand in imposing its version of progress whilst also, creating a vacuum which was increasingly occupied by non-Orthodox spiritualities. The growing unease at the perceived narrowness of individual spiritual horizon provided by state institutions must be seen in the context of Enlightened absolutism unchecked by strong confessional culture. The problem was not with monarchical authority as such but rather, with the difficulty intellectuals had in identifying all of their temporal and transcendent aspirations with the actual capacities of the regime to which most of them remained loyal.[238] Specifically, Prokopovich's rationalisation of how Orthodoxy was to be restructured internally, signified the extent to which a domain hitherto at least nominally held to be sacrosanct and out of direct reach of temporal power was in actual fact, as open to modification as any other humanly-created establishment. Assault on credulous practices had a devastating effect on the dignity of Orthodoxy as a relevant guide in existential matters not merely because it was shown to be lagging behind other denominations in practical matters but because its spiritual repertoire was submitted to the tyranny of common sense.[239] That is, the reform of the church did not seem to occur in order to benefit its spiritual mission

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[237] L.R. Lewitter, "Peter the Great, Poland, and the Westernization of Russia", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 19, 4 (1958), pp. 502-4.
[238] G. Florovskii, *Puti russkogo bogosloviia*, p. 114.
[239] *Ibid.* pp. 94-5.

presupposed by its distinctive intellectual repertoire but was rather, an external imposition intending to make religion itself more secular. Thus, in the same time as educated individuals' need for Orthodoxy in their life-worlds was lessened and in some measure, replaced by allegiance to a de-personalised state, the need for ways of expressing private religious sentiments has increased.

Yurii Lotman once noted that one of the features of the Catherinian state was its disregard for the ideals it expressed in a way which suggested that there was a deliberate attempt to make sure that actual politics would not be contaminated by humanistic outlooks.[240] Thus, for many Russians who believed in the critical significance of ideals, it was challenging, if not impossible to be completely reliant on the progressive ethos of the state. Mysticism offered a way of carrying on intellectual inquiry into the more practical aspects of life which the state intentionally failed to reform in accordance with the self-image it wished to purvey. This is why, in some cases it is more important to examine how certain institutions and practices are interpreted by disaffected intellectuals rather than to make the socio-political existence of these institutions and practices the object of study. Georgii Fedorov may have had something like this in mind when he suggested that for much of its history, Russian spiritual consciousness primarily revolved around art and certain ethical outlooks rather than religious institutions as such.[241] Consequently, in instances when there is a massive rift between the ideology of the state and its politics and equally large gap between religious institutions and spirituality, discursive practices that seek to bridge the disparity between thought and action are especially valuable. In Eighteenth-century Russia, mysticism was one such discursive practice which sought to overcome the shortcomings of the Russian *Polizeistaat*.

It may now be evident how the Mystical Enlightenment could be presumed to have emerged in the unique conditions where institutional authority of the

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[240] Yu. M. Lotman, 'K semanticheskoi tipologii russkoi kul'tury XVIII veka' in Lotman, Yu. M. *Istorria i tipologiia russkoi kul'tury* (St. Petersburg: Iskusstvo-SPB, 2002), p. 80.
[241] G.P. Fedotov, Tom 9. *Russkaiia religioznost'*. Chast I. *Hristianstvo Kievskoi Rusi X-XIII vv*. (Moscow: Artis, 2004), p. 9.

official church was much greater than its spiritual one and where political sovereignty sought to usurp transcendent commitments normally ascertained by theology. The lay mystics, some of whom were noblemen and some of whom occupied important government posts, fulfilled the quasi-clerical role of moderators of Enlightened trends and, in the most positive sense of the term, were apologists for a metaphysically-driven understanding of the good as it unfolded in individual and communal settings. As members of a post-Petrine polity, most mystics were intimately integrated into the social structure of the Russian *Polizeistaat*. Yet, as intellectuals keenly aware of the spiritual homeland to which their souls ought to begin their return in the present life and which informed their overall posture towards the mundane, these mystics had the means to interpret the overall meaning and trajectory of temporal existence. Such a correlation of the perceived rights of the creation with the unconditional nature of the creator performed for the benefit of practical reform could not have been enacted by the established Orthodox clerics. Existing level of Orthodox thought was not in a position to broach this issue because of the inherent limits in the critical apparatus available to Eighteenth-century Russian theology which was not geared towards achieving originality and crucially, not intended for the consumption of educated laity. The intellectual output of Orthodox academies and the more numerous seminaries primarily served internal ecclesiastical purposes which had very negligible impact on the status of Orthodoxy amongst Westernised intellectuals. Insofar as Orthodoxy was becoming a closed corporation, its presence in the lives of the elite was often predominantly of social value, resulting in a deep separation between the continuing observance of religious custom and alienation from spirituality underpinning it.

It is the combination of the intellectual and sometimes emotional experience of the rift between external religious authority and its inner truth on the part of the more spiritually sensitive intellectuals which imbued mysticism with a capacity to be neither entirely reducible to institutional practices, nor to subjective states. Within the bounds of 'secular saintliness' Orthodoxy could not independently make a proper theoretical account of itself as a temporal power.

Most pertinently to the subsequent development of Russian thought, Orthodoxy also failed to develop new spiritual practices consonant with its heritage, suitable for a radically new social and personal organisational forms emerging as a consequence of Russia's Westernisation. That is why, mysticism could be argued to have been the first relatively neutral discourse in the history of Russian thought, in which the nature and purposes of religious organisations and of transcendent aspirations could be discussed. In more sophisticated national contexts, this task would normally have been undertaken by theologians trained in philosophy capable of justifying or rethinking established religious norms in new circumstances perceived to have threatened the validity of the former. Indeed, this course of action often transpired in parallel or in response to, a more fundamental reconsideration of the meaning and value of religion by philosophers and freethinkers. In all of these cases, reflective as they were of an Enlightenment driven by religious concerns, the emphasis was on subjecting hitherto indisputable doctrines to the notion of reasonableness as dictated by broader philosophical debates on what constituted real knowledge and how it was acquired.[242] In the absence of all of these complex intellectual traditions to a sufficient degree which would have allowed for the possibility of an Orthodox Enlightenment proper,[243] mysticism emerged as a phenomenon which flourished relatively independently of the state but firmly within a state-sponsored public. Mysticism's utilisation of the language and anxieties of elite laity and its qualified dependence on masonic organisations, was nevertheless presupposed by the belief in the presence of an ineffable truth encountered privately.

Whilst it would be wrong to presume that all followers of mystical ideas were consciously seeking transcendental foundations of reality in which their fragile selves were situated, this was indeed the overarching interest of mystic

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[242] D. Sorkin has shown how religious Enlightenment moderated previously radical ideas it its attempt to seek out a reasonable interpretation of dogma on the basis of how contemporary philosophy defined reason, see D. Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 12-3.

[243] It needs to be noted that some scholars do think Orthodox Enlightenment was in existence and that it was not restricted to the Eighteenth-century, see R. Coates, "Russia's Two Enlightenments: The *Philokalia* and the Accommodation of Reason in Ivan Kireevskii and Pavel Florenskii", *The Slavonic and East European Review* 91, 4 (2013): 675-702.

thinkers and of the overall trajectory of the culture the latter have engendered. Recalling the afore-mentioned meaning of the term 'mystical realism' as sensitivity to the rights of the earthly and of the transcendent, re-emergence of mysticism within the now autonomous temporal context can be seen as a further development of its realism. In their respective ways, all of the thinkers covered in this thesis have reacted strongly to the eclipse of the transcendent and in the same time, to the denigration of the earthly. What made the mystical response to a trope otherwise common to many intellectual traditions was the speculative intensity with which imperfect and finite existence was justified once it was integrated into a metaphysical infrastructure. Paradoxically, the foregrounding of temporality in the wake of Petrine reforms was deemed to have risked its very stability because it was divorced from spiritual processes which enriched it and gave it meaning. In psychological terms, such foregrounding resulted in disorientation and in some cases, mild forms of nihilism because it was impossible for a developed spiritual individuality to be satisfied with a largely bureaucratised reality which supplanted the place of the cosmic and the infinite. In stricter philosophical terms, this angst had the potential to lead towards an objectification of intuition and of becoming a normative aspects of human consciousness in the course of its complex maturation.

The recognition of this complexity and the concomitant distrust of attempts to institutionally control the course of individual *bildung* was symptomatic of a powerful drive to establish an alternative modernity centred on personhood. These speculative concerns may appear to be impractical due to their idealistic projections and therefore, to be incapable of motivating the intellect. Yet, there are non-reductive approaches to the meaning and teleology of modernity which are very sympathetic to metaphysical concerns and which in fact, see the latter as the main driving force of modernity in its many variants. In a nuanced discussion of how modernities arose, B. Wittrock specified that a felt disjunction between finite and transcendent orders catalysed a search for their harmonisation which in turn, led to deep intellectual, political and social transformations:

> Consciousness of the existence of such a chasm were in all cases also linked to consciousness about institutional practices that might serve to transcend them. The discourse about such transcendence might be religious and philosophical, as in the axial age, or ecclesiastically ecumenical, as in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in Europe. In the formation of modernity in Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, philosophical reflection was, however, explicitly political. [244]

For the Russian mystics, a keen awareness of the double loss of the transcendent within the soul and within the creation at large was the main reason to rethink the structure and the function of organisational forms which in their view, have failed in addressing this problem. Indeed, the challenge was not merely to bridge the chasm but to stop it from widening any further, hence the sense of urgency with which many mystical texts promoted an inward spiritual awakening of the person as a precondition for his or her outer flourishing within society. Of course, the meaning of polity when conceived mystically did not depend on a technical exploration of the causality underlying various political processes but rather, a structural appraisal of how religious, personal and ethical domains aided the intellect in approximating and of embodying truths existing beyond temporal experience.

It is therefore, not surprising that when educated Russians had the relative freedom to turn to new spiritualities and to reshape social norms in accordance with the transcendental experiences engendered by the former, they espoused doctrines which have explicitly dealt with the issue of the soul's distance from the divine. The extent of this distance, together with the manner in which it could be utilised to transform material existence, was a practical example of the emphasis on finding a positive interrelationship between the finite and the infinite. Whether the Russian mystics argued for the critical value of masonic lodges or for a concerted re-engagement with Orthodoxy in conjunction with Western spiritual traditions, they did so on the presumption that mediating social structures provided the necessary and insoluble ties to the mundane world. An inquiring

[244] B. Wittrock, ‘Modernity: One, None, or Many?', p. 56.

intellect had to be contextualised into realities existing on either side of the chasm and had to be self-conscious of the fact that its identity was decisively influenced by how it correlated its longing for a spiritual homeland composed of a community of disembodied souls with its worldly responsibilities.

Such a trajectory of Russian thought was obviously quite consonant with some of the pivotal approaches to spirituality interrupted by the Petrine reforms. Because of this interruption, notwithstanding some of the positive features of attempts to modernise Orthodox institutions, the level of spiritual thought lagged far behind the often progressive social and political developments. Thus, the problems in religious matters normally tackled by the forces of the Renaissance have remained unresolved well into the Eighteenth-century. Because of this, seemingly retrograde approaches to personhood as a microcosm enjoying a substantive relationship with the cosmos and indeed with the divine infinity out of which the latter arose, were taken up very seriously. The versions of early-modern Western spirituality which have percolated into Russia were explicitly geared to function quite independently of ecclesiastical institutions and to directly broach the pressing issue of how to integrate the individual into the immensity of creation. The Mystical Enlightenment sought this integration by way of attempting to engender a spiritual culture which would be open to the public and simultaneously, to individual and ultimately, to divine ineffability. More rational contemporary Enlightened thought, whilst very useful in encouraging a generally critical attitude, especially in a moral sense, was incapable of attending to this central concern which shaped much of Eighteenth-century Russian intellectual culture.

Conclusion

This chapter analysed the most important Anglophone interpretations of the relationship between religion and the Enlightenment in Russia. Primary emphasis was placed on the extent to which, various scholars conceived of religion in general and of mysticism in particular, as either retrograde anti-Enlightened trends or as symptoms of a more complex and fragmented Russian modernity in

which recourse to spirituality functioned as an aspect of an evolving Enlightenment. To do so, it was necessary to detail advances in scholarship over a considerable time period in order to better contrast its claims with those of the present study. This chapter noted the limitations of an overly descriptive approach to mystical discourses as well as the limitations stemming from attempts to categorise mysticism according to the socio-cultural contexts in which it occurred. In order to overcome this problem and to synthesise various mystical worldviews without doing injustice to their peculiarities, a suggestion was made to attend in much greater detail to mysticism as distinctive mode of thought, with its own trajectory, sustained by its own teleology and expressed in its own language. This chapter advocated the Mystical Enlightenment as a movement whose unity was premised on the inherently emancipatory capacity of mystical religiosity to which the selected mystical thinkers were attuned and which becomes particularly apparent when seen against the backdrop of the reasons responsible for the diffusion of mystical thought. The following chapter will examine how Grigorii Skovoroda, the first major lay mystic in Eighteenth-century Russia, explored the possibilities of a mystical perception of reality for progressive ends.

CHAPTER THREE: GRIGORII SAVVYCH SKOVORODA

We almost never think of the present, and if we do think of it, it is only to see what light it throws on our plans for the future. The present is never our end. The past and the present are our means, the future alone our end. Thus we never actually live, but hope to live, and since we are always planning to be happy, it is inevitable that we should never be so.
Blaise Pascal

Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss how Gregorii Savvych Skovoroda (1722-1794)[245] reconsidered notions of ecclesia, personhood and ascetic ethics largely

[245] Here, I think it is important to point out how I approach the sensitive question of Skovoroda's national identity given its contested status amongst nationalist intellectuals in Russia and the Ukraine. I take Skovoroda to be a Ukrainian poet and thinker but one who has foreshadowed almost all key themes and methods of Russian philosophy and therefore, as a thinker who holds an eminent place in Russian intellectual history. To think of Skovorda as either exclusively Ukrainian or Russian would mean not only to misread the rather vague Eighteenth-century understanding of nationality

from Platonic, Neoplatonic and in one important respect, Epicurean standpoint. Skovoroda made the most intellectually sophisticated contribution to the Mystical Enlightenment in Russia, primarily in terms of his overriding commitment to self-conscious mind as the locus of identity, action and happiness. Skvoroda was not too interested in the impact of reformed spirituality in the lives of the believers as a collective. Instead, Skovoroda preferred to focus on how introspective praxis could transform the very nature of individuality. In this chapter, I will analyse how Skovoroda utilised his highly ontic vision of the truth to rethink the manner in which human personhood existed and interacted with itself, with others and with its contexts. All of these forms of interaction were of a transcendent character and were very much at odds with established notions of how human beings were meant to derive meaning from various authorities. Skovoroda foregrounded dialogue, undertaken within as well as between individual personhoods as the ultimate example of a spirituality that was synonymous with joyful existence as such.

Ecclesiastical structures

Skovoroda understood religion as a privileged set of mysteries meant for individual internalisation as distinct from and often in uncompromising opposition to, its historical and ceremonial repertoire.[246] In order to make this distinction, Skovoroda had recourse to Platonic foregrounding of the primacy of the intellect in the pursuit of a transcendentally-anchored truth and in that sense, was one of the first Russian thinkers to have consistently argued for the emergence of a philosophical religion. In foregrounding the need for an intellectual spirituality, Skovoroda prioritised the Bible as a self-contained discursive world capable of

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but more crucially, to do great injustice to the tremendous level of interpenetration of Ukrainian and Russian cultures.

[246] I generally agree with the claim of S.P. Scherer that despite his criticism of the historical church, Skovoroda believed in the trinity and the divinity of Christ and, could not be termed a sectarian, see his 'Skovoroda and Society' in R.H. Marshall Jr and T.E. Bird, *Hryhorij Savyč Skovoroda: An Anthology of Critical Articles* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1994), pp. 66-7.

generating a near-infinite series of symbolic meanings within the inquiring intellect. Unlike Kheraskov or Lopukhin, Skovoroda gave particular attention to the production and interpretation of symbols as a consequence of an esoteric engagement with select philosophical and religious texts without deferring to external religious authority.[247] What this meant was that for Skovoroda, the definition of the church as a privileged receptacle of divine grace and correspondingly, a domain wherein humanity sought salvation was problematic. Skovoroda seemed to have viewed Biblical discourse as a kind of a church in which individual intellects could freely participate and undertake a personal becoming towards God. Religion in its civic aspect did not figure prominently in such a scheme because Skovoroda preferred to detail its mystical content rather than its narrower moral function as was often the case in attempts to rethink religion in civic terms.[248]

The most crucial work concerning Skovoroda's understanding of religion as discourse is his *A Symphony Called the Book of Askhan' or, on Knowing One's Self* (1767), a treatise written in dialogue form. There are other, larger works which Skovoroda dedicated to imparting an allegorical reading of the Bible but it was in the former treatise that the totality of symbolic reality was given especial prominence and skilfully set against the deep background of Skovoroda's Platonic and Neoplatonic leanings. This work, like all of Skovoroda's texts, did not circulate widely and was composed as a present to a sympathetic aristocrat. Yet, despite limited exposure, its idiosyncratic manner of exposition and expectation of some familiarity with abstract form of theorising, the treatise was nevertheless reflective of a broader search for a more meaningful form of spirituality in post-Petrine Russia. Disconnected as Skovoroda was from the genteel world of Moscow

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[247] This can be interpreted as a "laicization" of religious sentiment, see D.K. Van Kley, "Christianity as Casualty and Chrysalis of Modernity: The Problem of Dechristianization in the French Revolution", *American Historical Review* 108, 4 (2003), p. 1092.

[248] A.I. Abramov and A.V. Kovalenko have argued that Skovoroda's Platonic and Neoplatonic orientation distanced him from the polemical norms expected of an educated religious thinker in mid to late Eighteenth-century Ukraine and Russia which privileged scholasticism, see their 'Filosofskie vzgliady G.S. Skovorody v krugu ego istoriko-filosofskih interesov' in Abramov, A.I. *Sbornik nauchnyh trudov po istorii russkoi filosofii* (Moscow: Krug, 2005), p. 446.

Rosicrucians, his reliance on mystical intuition to re-sacralise individual encounter with the sacred texts, was in keeping with the Masonic imperative of supplementing traditional forms of devotion with private insight into spiritual literature.

The status and the function of ecclesial structures in Skovoroda's thought was very much dependant on his expectation of how reading could transform the spiritual life of the individual. Skovoroda prioritised personal experience of the *logos* as a creative force, at the expense of collective participation in religious structures. From the perspective of Western European religious history, an emphasis on text-based piety may not appear so original given that debates regarding the efficacy of Scriptural interpretation for the purposes of salvation became almost normative since the Reformation. Moreover, attention to the Bible might not seem to stand out amidst Enlightened efforts to rescue it from sceptical and atheistic critique. As J. Sheehan noted, in the course of the Eighteenth-century, the Bible's authority as a "self-legitimating text" was becoming increasingly less plausible, thus necessitating its external defence, usually through scholarship.[249] Yet, far from reconceptualising the Bible as an object of scrupulous philological analysis and in doing so, reinventing it in cultural terms,[250] Skovoroda's ambition was to foreground reading as a life-long pursuit undertaken so that, an individual could become a transcendentally-rich and a self-conscious personhood. In other words, internal intellectual experience of Biblical imagery, was a way of dealing with the loss of faith in its relevance. Consequently, given that the Bible was not yet a text which was universally read by the Russian laity in early-modern times,[251] Skovoroda's attention to individual contemplation of its narrative was not only radical in the obvious sense of making spiritual progress subject to individual discernment. More crucially, religion itself could be argued to

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[249] J. Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible. Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. xiv.
[250] *Ibid.* p. xii.
[251] Here, it needs to be noted that in the Russian Empire, "private devotional piety" was an early Nineteenth-century phenomenon, in which access to the Bible in modern Slavic languages was a very charged political affair, see S.K. Batalden, *Russian Bible Wars: Modern Scriptural Translation and Cultural Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 8.

have been in need of validation through a highly introspective interpretation of divine *logos*.

Skovoroda gave no direct indications of the sources on the basis of which he was able to propose his new form of spirituality. Whilst the presence of themes derived from Patristic literature are prevalent and references to Plato abound, it is almost impossible to trace Skovoroda's attitudes to religion to a single thinker with absolute certainty. However, this does not mean that it is impossible to detect certain themes and forms of expression which may have been borrowed from an identifiable source. In regards to religious aspects of reading, one possible influence is Philo of Alexandria (25 BC-50 AD). Skovoroda's pupil, friend and first biographer singled out Philo as a philosopher with whose works Skovoroda was particularly well acquainted.[252] Subsequent scholarship has largely accepted the likelihood of Philo's influence although its degree and exact nature remain issues of contention.[253] Notwithstanding lack of evidence regarding direct textual borrowings, it seems that Philo's use of Neoplatonism[254] for religious ends and attendant to that, his use of imagery as a normative aspect of his allegorical interpretation found a powerful echo in Skovoroda's works. Given that Skovoroda intensified the experience of the text in such a way that it became the fulcrum of spirituality as such, Philo's *On the Contemplative Life* is a good vantage point from which to assess some of Skovoroda's intentions. In that work, Philo described the *Therapeutae*, an ascetic community devoted to allegorical exegesis which it hoped, would allow its members to gain insight into a world of entities perceived

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[252] M.I. Kovalinskii, 'Zhizn' Grigoriia Skovorody Napisannaia v 1794 godu v drevnem stile' in G.S. Skovoroda, *Sochinenia* ed. A.N. Gordienko (Minsk: Sovremennyi literator, 1999), p. 661.

[253] P.B. Bilaniuk for instance, thought that "the influence of Philo of Alexandria was considerable" in relation to Skovoroda's Biblical exegesis, 'An Introduction to the Theological Thought of Hryhorij Skovoroda' in R.H. Marshall Jr and T.E. Bird, *Hryhorij Savyč Skovoroda*, p.229. One of the most outstanding Russian historians of Patristic thought, G. Florovskii went so far as to state that the entirety of Skovoroda's "Biblical philology was borrowed from Philo," see his *Puti russkogo bogosloviia*, p. 121.

[254] In referring to Philo as a Neoplatonist, I am aware that there are rival interpretations which suggest that he was a Middle Platonist. Whilst the distinction is substantive in relation to receptions of Plato in antiquity, it is not of direct relevance to how Skovoroda may have appropriated aspects of Philo's thought and method.

by the mind alone.[255] An insight that depended upon mystical explanations of the text:

> And these explanations of the sacred scriptures are delivered by mystic expressions in allegories, for the whole of the law appears to these men to resemble a living animal, and its express commandments seem to be the body, and the invisible meaning concealed under and lying beneath the plain words resembles the soul, in which the rational soul begins most excellently to contemplate what belongs to itself, as in a mirror, beholding in these very words the exceeding beauty of the sentiments, and unfolding and explaining the symbols, and bringing the secret meaning naked to the light to all who are able by the light of a slight intimation to perceive what is unseen by what is visible.[256]

What Philo seemed to have advocated in the above passage was a demarcation between what could and what could not be a fit object of allegorical interpretation. By pointing out a kind of isomorphism between the soul of the reader and the soul of the text, Philo was suggesting that what should be open to mystical insight was not the external world of the senses but an interior "domain of the soul."[257] If the habitué of the human soul is an intellective realm of being, then it could be said to be engaging with what is naturally its own through the medium of the text. The essential but inward features of the soul are mirrored through allegorisation in something akin to it, thus orienting it away from the mundane. Thus, in characterising the text as alive, Philo was not only underscoring the autonomous nature of the *logos*. The key motive may have been to show how, in committing themselves to the life of the mind, the *Therapeutae* were in fact, engaging in the very activity which enabled the mind to live in a way which did not

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[255] A. Kamesar, 'Biblical Interpretation in Philo' in Kamesar, A. ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Philo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 83.
[256] Philo, 'On the Contemplative Life' in Philo, *The Works of Philo* tr. C.D. Yonge (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), p. 705.
[257] J. Mansfeld, "Heraclitus, Empedocles, and Others in a Middle Platonist Cento in Philo of Alexandria," *Vigiliae Christianae* 39, 2 (1985), p. 131. This was said in regards to some of Philo's other writings, but the logic nonetheless also applies to the *Contemplative Life*.

diminish its identity as primarily, an intellective entity.[258]

Distant as Skovoroda was from the institutional concerns of Hellenised Judaism and, notwithstanding his distaste for monasticism, Philo's belief that allegorical interpretation was a "full time pursuit" was an enduring motif in his treatises.[259] Yet, whereas Philo spoke of an identifiable community of ascetics which meant to serve as an example of future spiritual organisational forms, Skovoroda was solely concerned with the individual. That is, what may have held true for the *Therapeutae* as a collective, was decontextualised and internalised into the dynamic of individual personhood. For that reason, Philo's partly rhetorical description of the Biblical text as a living animal was emasculated by Skovoroda into a genuine belief that the Bible possessed a life of its own with which the intellect could cohabitate. As will be seen subsequently, Skovoroda's main challenge permeating almost the entirety of his oeuvre, was to convince his readers that spirituality was not enfolded within ritualised practises but was rather, defined by a relationship between the intellect and the text and the ensuing generation of symbolic meaning. The actual content of Skovoroda's symbolism is not too relevant for this thesis. Of much greater importance is the manner in which Skovoroda spiritualised the process of reading and set the conditions for the possibility of an uninterrupted *visualisation* of the text's transcendent intentions. A.W. Nightingale argued that contemplative praxis, from a Platonic standpoint, involved what she called, "sacralized visuality" as a consequence of which, the intellect gazed upon the world of Forms.[260] Skovoroda's attempt to derive spiritual experience from an esoteric reading was very much premised on his belief that to envision intellectually is akin to knowing. Anglophone scholarship has only relatively recently begun to pay attention to the fact that the "visual played a surprisingly privileged role" in Eighteenth-century

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[258] In *On the Migration of Abraham*, Philo alluded more forcefully than in his other works to the word as the home and destination of a peregrinating mind by suggesting that it "dwells in speech." See his 'On the Migration of Abraham' in Philo, *The Works of Philo*, p. 253.

[259] S.D. Mackie, "Seeing God in Philo of Alexandria: Means, Methods, and Mysticism", *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 43 (2012), p. 137.

[260] A.W. Nightingale, *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 110, 114.

Russian thought and is yet to explore its metaphysical aspects.[261]

Skovoroda did not seek to rationalise the Bible in an empirical sense. That is, not only did Skovoroda accept that from a rationalistic standpoint, the Bible contained absurdities but furthermore, he did not promote himself as an apologist for what he thought could only be vouchsafed allegorically. This circumstance set Skovoroda considerably apart from the vast number of Enlightened attempts to prove that the Bible "was necessarily a fount of reason."[262] Because of this, the scope of Skovoroda's critique of existing religious arrangements, in terms of their relevance for the individual, was greater because he did not feel constrained by the imperative to uphold existing theological accounts of belief. Skovoroda was neither satisfied with subjecting the Bible to a rational interpretation on account of its obvious inconsistencies nor prepared to accept external guidance as to how to access its truths. That is why, Skovoroda was critical of the way external aspects of religion were mistaken for spirituality as such and because of this, often thought of as being sufficient in facilitating an experience of God. When approached as the edificatory means to turn the intellect towards the transcendent, ritual served a useful function. However, at the same time, from the vantage point of mystical experience, ritual appeared trivial and in some cases, even dangerous. There was thus a tension between a guarded acceptance of ritual and an uncompromising rejection of its absolutist claims which made it very difficult for Skovoroda to submit to religious authority when it clashed with his own understanding of spirituality. In his *A Symphony Called the Book of Askhan'*, Skovoroda pointed out to his interlocutors that:

> I love ceremony. It is not offensive to me and can sometimes enlighten a good and reasonable soul. I

[261] M. Levitt, 'The «Obviousness» of the Truth in Eighteenth Century Russian Thought' in Artem'eva, T.V. and Mikeshin, M.I. eds. *Filosofskii vek. Al'manakh 24. Istoria filosofii kak filosofiia. Ch. I* (St. Petersburg: St Petersburg Center For the History of Ideas, 2003), p. 238. Levitt was primarily interested in showing that for scientifically-minded Eighteenth-century Russians, "truth is something physically felt" and eschewing discussion of a more philosophical, Platonic dimension of vision.

[262] B.E. Scwartzbach, "Reason and the Bible in the So-Called Age of Reason", *Huntington Library Quarterly* 74, 3 (2011), p. 437.

> do not contend with this. But know that apart from his mercy, I am most pleased by his judgement or that is to say, by the vision of God. This is the purpose of all of your mysteries and sacrifices! And now when you have lost the point of all ceremonies, tell me why do you or I still need them?[263]

It may seem as though Skovoroda provided a balanced account of the utility of ritual on the one hand and the transcendent vision of God on the other. The former was shown as a worthy object of love and in that sense, possessing intrinsic worth. Yet, love of ritual was essentially a negative one. Only insofar as it was not offensive and capable of exercising a pedagogic function could it be deemed to be worthwhile. Ritual was described in passive terms as merely an indicator rather than a transformative repertoire capable of conforming the believer to the ways of the divine. Thus, Skovoroda's interlocutors were predisposed to think that what was being implied was that ritual was best when it imposed itself least upon the noetic orientation of the intellect and that the entire ecclesiastical infrastructure supporting it was therefore, not as sacrosanct as it was assumed to be.

The difficulty, as evident in the above passage, was in working out whether ritual was still necessary *after* it has succeeded in bringing to the intellect's attention, the reality towards which it ought to become. Skovoroda posed the question as to why, if the purpose of ritual was lost, it should continue to command authority. This was akin to stating that even if, ritual could lead the intellect towards the object of its contemplation, then beyond that, it was no longer essential. If mystical experience was derived from promptings which were initially, conveyed via ritual, then it could be concluded that the latter has fulfilled its function once that experience it prefigured was actualised. There was consequently, a degree of ambivalence as to whether religious institutions were necessary for individuals who did not feel dependent upon them in their spiritual progress. Such an attitude was very much applicable to Skovoroda's personal relationship with religious conventions given that at no point in his treatises,

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[263] G.S. Skovoroda 'A Symphony Called the Book of Askhan' or on Knowing One's Self' Skovoroda G. *Sochineniia* T. 1 ed. V.I. Shinkaruk (Moscow: Mysl', 1973), p. 202.

poems and numerous letters did he indicate a regular need to participate in religious life as an obedient parishioner. N. Stelletskii, a Nineteenth-century biographer of Skovoroda, related how the latter was sometimes quite lax in observing Orthodox rites and in one instance, had to be persuaded to attend church by a bishop.[264] Even if it would be too rash to claim that organised religion was redundant as such, it was certainly the case that its importance was transitory and that it could therefore, outlive its usefulness for some individuals.

There was a further point of criticism of ritual which could be interpreted as the social implications of its lack of genuine transcendence. Anticipating Lopukhin's remarkably similar understanding of how undue concern with the external features of faith can lead to violence, Skovoroda made a rather uncompromising distinction between virtues of universal applicability and the latter's various historical embodiments. Ritual was not only criticised on account of its superstitious side-effects but more importantly, it was seen to have stagnated over time and became largely self-referential:

> For so many centuries you are hair-splitting within ceremonies and what is the result except schisms, superstitions and hypocrisy. The slothful have used them as a fig-leaf to cover their nakedness. The feeble-minded have based their happiness upon its shadow. The impractical have enthusiastically birthed sectarian discord and have attempted to conform all of the inhabitants of the universe as well as my own temple to what I really do not want to have. Namely, to a ceremony of a single measure and form which would be operable in all corners of the earth. For thence comes uncompromising enmity between neighbouring nations and often, bloodshed. What kind of outrage is this? That labyrinth which is meant to lead you towards mercy leads you away

[264] N. Stelletskii, *Stranstvuiuschii ukrainskii filosof Grigorii Savvich Skovoroda* (Kiev: Tipografia Korchak-Povitskago, 1894), p. 45. Whilst in many respects, this short biography is not entirely reliable, what it has to say about Skovoroda's relationship with clerics, his dogged avoidance of being tonsured is broadly consistent with Skovoroda's own writings. Most importantly, Stellitski's attempts to work out Skovoroda's cultural allegiances, albeit in brief, are invaluable towards the ongoing debate as to Skovoroda's national identity.

from it.[265]

Skovoroda did not directly state that all ritual was sourced in the human imagination. This may be due to circumspection or to a belief that perhaps some of the very elemental aspects of the early Christian communities were indeed instituted through divine inspiration. What was clear however was that the multiplication of forms of belief resulted from human agency. It was therefore, not clear whether any church presently existing could confidently claim to be closer to divine truth than any of its numerous competitors. V.F. Ern remarked that the reason why Skovoroda could not entirely submit to the spiritual authority of the Russian Orthodox Church was because he was in principle, incapable of moderating his individualistic tendencies through any experiences other than his own.[266] This was attributed to a one-sided Platonism in Skovoroda's thought which, in pursuit of the transcendent universal, could not see innate value in the earthly.[267]

It is possible to see how Skovoroda set the universal desire for God's mercy against the contradictory and counter-productive ways of attaining it. The artificiality of ritual was particularly evident when it was compared to a single type of a garment which was violently and indiscriminately enforced upon all believers. In effect, what was being suggested was that the history of religion was not a history of divine workings through privileged institutions but rather, of violence. Skvoroda could not bring himself to believe in the infallibility of religious authority because it could not be verified by his personal intuition of what spirituality actually was.[268] Nonetheless, Skovoroda likened religious traditions to a labyrinth. Even if taken as only a mimesis of God's relationship with individuals and creation as a whole, it was still the case that the content of religious institutions had to be creatively overcome through a location of a meaning which

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[265] G.S. Skovoroda 'A Symphony Called the Book of Askhan' or on Knowing One's Self', p. 202. I have simplified this passage somewhat for purposes of clarity, especially the sentence regarding the forced conformation of all to a single ritual, but without loss of meaning.
[266] V.F. Ern, *Grigorii Savvich Skovoroda. Zhizn' i uchenie* (Moscow: Put', 1912), pp. 326-7.
[267] *Ibid.* pp. 3267-8.
[268] L.G. Aleksandrov, "Sacral'nye simvoly v filosofii G.S. Skovorody i obschestvennyie protevorechia epohi Prosveschenia", *Vestnik Chliabiskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta* 18, 21 (2011), p. 21.

was extrinsic to it. Thus, Skovoroda did not completely neglect the flawed but useful domains of human engineering so long as the latter was approached by the intellect as an unavoidable challenge in its own becoming towards God. This is precisely what Skovoroda had in mind when he indicated that the intellect ought to "chew" through the historical shell to reach the heavenly kingdom within the person.[269]

The disparaging tone that Skovoroda applied to his criticism of external religious arrangements can therefore, be interpreted not so much as an attack against externality but rather, as an attack against fanaticism which it could cause. If the negative consequences of ceremonial repertoire could be so damaging to civic peace and to the integrity of individual souls, then perhaps it might be better not to have anything to do with it. Via one of the characters in the dialogue, Skovoroda gestured towards the possibility of grasping directly the object of ceremonies without the latter's assistance:

> And so I am telling you to drop these ceremonies! They are now nothing more than emptiness and vileness before me. Apply yourselves directly towards justice and mercy and the truth. Ask my David and he will tell you what these things are. Better still, ask your own selves. You are not the only ones who are within yourselves but I am within you also. Know and listen to yourselves and you will mysteriously hear my voice. And my word, truth, fate, mercy as well as my name are all the same. Noble-hearted Abraham understood all of this. His fervour was enflamed towards the vision of the divine and his upright soul was from hour to hour, rising towards it.[270]

This exceptionally rich passage, for all of its associative complexity, relied on heterogeneous imagery to emphasise the same point. David sang his psalms to God before the tabernacle without the aid of priests. Christ, whose identity here was daringly taken over by one of the parties to the dialogue, promised to be

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[269] G.S. Skovoroda 'A Symphony Called the Book of Askhan', p. 209.
[270] *Ibid.* pp. 202-3.

present anywhere where individuals gathered to know his truth without stipulating the need for external authority which would mediate his presence. Lastly, Abraham communicated with God directly in the course of his wonderings and was transformed as a result thereof, without relying on any set procedures as to how that communication and transformation was to take place. All of the above examples attested to the paradoxical situation whereby on the one hand, an encounter with God was an absolutely unique moment which could neither be planned nor structured. Yet, the commonality behind all of the above encounters was the preparedness of individual personhoods to be open to the transcendent and to creatively respond to the datum which resulted from such encounters. Especially in regards to Abraham whose soul was described in vaguely Platonic terms as rising towards a vision of the ontological, religious institutions were inapplicable in the literal sense as they have not yet come into existence.

However, whilst the role of organised religion was minimised, this did not mean that human personhood was left alone to reckon with the ineffable and that as a result, it was forced into a quietist posture regarding the divine. Implicit in Skovoroda's foregrounding of a more direct experience of God and associated qualities, was the presence of *logos* and therefore, dialogue. One had to *ask* David or alternatively, one's own self. Christ will make *utterances* to a gathering who will in turn, know that by evoking his name they will also, animate the truth in their midst. Abraham *understood* in the course of his soul's becoming. These descriptions of course, are allegorical of the capacity to grasp symbolic meaning on the presumption that, as A.V. Malinov claimed, for Skovoroda, "knowledge could only be symbolic."[271] So, if there was a possibility of independent gnosis and if external authorities often impeded it, a more autonomous personhood ought to be respectfully distant from them. From this standpoint, Skovoroda's critique of religious norms can be interpreted as going beyond calls for freedom of conscience in matters of faith and seeking to determine what true spirituality

[271] M.A. Malinov, "Grigorii Skovoroda: ot diskursa prirody k diskursu etiki", *Al'manakh diskursy etiki* 3, 8 (2014), p. 20.

actually was.

What Skovoroda was ultimately concerned with, was the freedom for the intellect to generate symbols as consequence of its engagement with itself, the world around it and especially, the Bible. In his preamble to the *Book of Akhan'*, Skovoroda made a rather cryptic indication of reading as an unending quest towards an acquisition of an ever-more refined discourse.[272] As an example of how the intellect was to allegorise and the absence of limits to allegorising, Skovoroda interpreted a Biblical reference to water which in his opinion, was simultaneously, reflective of the reader's cognition and of the reality towards which that reader intended. "What is this water," asked Skovoroda, "if it isn't a river, speech, thought, word, throat, heart, plumage? Any figure, especially the sun, is a thought because it preaches something to us."[273] Skovoroda then went on to exhort an imaginary reader and suggested that the latter should "throw" his or her "throat and plumage towards the East" and follow the sun towards eternity.[274] S.P. Scherer noted that for Skovoroda the consequences of not being able to read the Bible symbolically were severe. Namely, that a personhood risked either becoming superstitious or atheistic.[275] If the common ground to atheism and superstition is a denial of either anything beyond sensory experience or alternatively, any meaningful spiritual experience beyond the ceremonial repertoire, then it is possible to see what was of such a concern to Skovoroda. A personhood which was overly empirical in its truth-claims or alternatively, overly reliant on punctilious observance of rites was incapable of becoming until it overcame its passive acceptance of its immediacy. The point was not so much for personhood to accept certain religious norms but rather, to undertake its own transformation which for Skovoroda, was only possible if the transcendent intentionality of language was freely accepted by that personhood as its guide.

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[272] The preamble was actually written many years after the dialogue itself, but this fact is inconsequential for the present argument.
[273] G.S. Skovoroda 'A Symphony Called the Book of Askhan', p. 172.
[274] *Ibid.* p. 173.
[275] S.P. Scherer, "The Evolution of Hryhorij Skovoroda's Biblical Thinking", *East European Quarterly* 38, 3 (2004), p. 365.

Such an attitude to discourse as a transformative agent could not but set Skovoroda against the demands of traditional religiosity. This comes out most clearly in an instance where Skovoroda broached the definition of prayer. Rather than seeing prayer and its attendant sacrifices as an aspect of exterior worship, Skovoroda conceived of the former in almost erotic terms as an ongoing self-preoccupation. In line with Skovoroda's aforementioned merging of the act of speech-making with that of the person or heart, prayer was reconsidered as a certain intellectual state:

> True happiness is within us. Think ceaselessly so that you would come to know yourself. And to do this, means to pray. That is, to enflame your thoughts towards this. This cry of yours, a cry which is mysterious and the only one which can reach the ears of your lord Tzevaot, is like the fragrant sacrificial smoke from Arabia reaching the divine senses.[276]

This is as close as Skovoroda came to supplanting ecclesiastical structures with internal discourse undertaken by the intellect. What needs to be noted is the uncompromising tone with which Skovoroda advanced his attitude. Two crucial functions of organised religion namely, the institutionalisation of prayer and somewhat indirectly, the re-enactment of sacrifice, have been shown to be valid only if they take place within personhood. In fact, it is even difficult to apply the term religious experience without major qualifications to the kind of intellectual event that Skovoroda has foregrounded given that there was no clearly identifiable content being experienced. At best, the liturgical repertoire merely exemplified the kind of movements personhood was meant to perform inwardly without necessarily being of any intrinsic value.

One of the difficulties in trying to ascertain Skovoroda's attitude to religious institutions is that for Skovoroda, a discussion of spirituality was usually

[276] G.S. Skovoroda 'A Symphony Called the Book of Askhan', p. 195.

framed as a discussion about personhood. Personhood was held to be of overriding importance as a focus of speculative investigation. Like all of the other mystical thinkers covered in this thesis, Skovoroda's was not an exception in presuming that progress was predominantly, not a historical phenomenon and that therefore, social improvement depended almost entirely on the inward moral perfectibility of individual citizens.[277] However, this does not mean that it is impossible to separate the collective from the individual in Skovoroda's thought and on that basis, to gain a tentative insight into Skovoroda's reconsideration of the meaning and the function of ecclesia. Intimate as the above quotation was in regards to how personhood was to approach God, it is nevertheless open to being interpreted as indicative of an alternative understanding of organised religion. Skovoroda aligned prayer with an enflamed desire on the part of personhood to think ceaselessly about itself. Perpetual thinking could not take place without some means which kept it in motion. That is, something had to enflame and maintain thinking towards its object. Arguably, it was the task of discourse to propel personhood towards an inward encounter with God and that sense, take on the function of a religious institution, albeit of a strictly transcendent kind.

In one of the most difficult passages in Skovoroda's oeuvre which is yet to receive attention in Anglophone literature, Skovoroda tried to demarcate the difference between personhood and the *logos* through which the former cognised itself and the divine in dialectical terms. External religious repertoire was tasked with orienting the thoughts of the believers towards their own selves. However, it was often the case that the purely imaginary content of ceremonies was taken for features of personhood itself without resulting in genuine intellectual experience. In lamenting this fact, Skovoroda distinguished between personhood as the ground within which, *logos* derived from the Bible became a *truth-event*. Biblical symbolism was of a humanising import which not only had

[277] N. Pylypiuk, "In Search of Hryhorii Skovoroda: A Review Article", *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 22, 1-2 (1997), p. 131. Pylypiuk thought that Skovoroda's allegorical concerns made him incapable of addressing pressing social evils such as serfdom.

claims on the universality of meaning but also, was described in such a way as to lead the reader to think that it was engagement with inward discourse which occasioned a further disclosure of personhood. In a somewhat mocking tone, Skovoroda asked his audience to consider the limitations of literal interpretation:

> If a human being was called a goat but no-one knew of it, then calling him that would be futile because the thought of the hearer would stop at the mention of a goat without reaching personhood even though, ceremonies from all times and nations as well as the point of all figures and symbols have held it as their end and centre. What is a human being? Whatever it may be: a task, an action or a word – it is all futile emptiness if it does not become an event within personhood. Is not every breath and creature depicted upon the canvas of the sacred Bible: sky and earth and everything which fills them?[278]

Perhaps in the above instance, Skovoroda's penchant for visual imagery and semantic collisions did not serve him as well as it did in other places. Nonetheless, the point of his criticism is clear. If individuals do not know the difference between the sign and the signified, then they are unlikely to arrive at an understanding of the latter. Thus, an allegorical inquiry into personhood could result in some knowledge of the symbolism but not in its meaning. This, for Skovoroda, was particularly tragic because he believed that the meaning of all symbolic forms irrespective of type or origin was ultimately, aimed at facilitating self-knowledge. Skovoroda's belief in *philosophia perennis* underlying all religious traditions can be read as further evidence of his guarded attitude regarding Orthodox exclusivity which in turn, brought to the fore the relationship between personhood and *logos*.

It is necessary at this point, to briefly note the extent to which, Skovoroda's emphasis on self-knowledge, self-transformation and allegorical reading, resembled the Russian Rosicrucian concern with introspective praxis.

[278] G.S. Skovoroda 'A Symphony Called the Book of Askhan', p. 201.

Whilst Skovoroda was not a Freemason, some of his writings were published for the first time, in a Russian masonic journal several years after his death.[279] This interest may have been sustained not only by shared textual sources but also, by a shared belief in the humanising potential of mystical insight.[280] In contradistinction to a rationalistic understanding of the aims of the Enlightenment which prioritised improvement of institutions, personal mores and society in general by emancipating human capacity for critical thinking in order to solve concrete problems, Moscow Rosicrucians were more concerned with a fundamental reorientation of human beinghood. R. Faggionato argued, that the Russian Rosicrucians undertook an eclectic search for wisdom spanning many distinct philosophical and religious traditions in the belief that divine truth was universal and that human beings could be transformed by means of a non-dogmatic morality allegorically derived from texts reflective of original revelation.[281] In the context of the Mystical Enlightenment, it is possible to interpret this universalistic approach to spirituality as symptomatic of a certain strand in Renaissance thought which presumed that "man's glory is derived from his mutability."[282] Skovoroda's synthesis of distinct Christian and pagan notions in order to throw into relief, the peculiarities of individual existence, can be seen to constitute an attempt at locating a universal discourse which would emancipate the human intellect from the constricting effects of tradition.[283]

Returning again to the passage from *The Book of Askhan'*, it is noteworthy that Skovoroda did not seek to directly define personhood and

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[279] M.A. Malinov, "Grigorii Skovoroda: ot diskursa prirody k diskursu etiki," pp. 28-9.

[280] N. Stelletskii attributed this to a shared mystical context and shared disregard for some aspects of religious ritual which was responsible for similar concerns and approaches found in Skovoroda and Freemasons, see his *Stranstvuiuschii ukrainskii filosof*, p. 45.

[281] R. Faggionato, "Religioznyi ecclectizm v Rossii na rubezhe 18-19 VV.", *Study Group on Eighteenth-Century Russia* Newsletter 30, (2002), pp. 49-53.

[282] E. Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 191.

[283] Fedorak, N.L. 'Chelovek epohi Barokko: vvedenie v simvologiu Grigoriia Skovorody' in P.E. Buharkina, E.M. Matveeva, *Literaturnaia kul'tura Rossii XVIII veka* Vypusk 5 (St. Petersburg: Filologicheskii fakul'tet SPbGU, 2014), pp. 13-4. Out of all of the mystics covered in this study, Skovoroda was the most successful writer in regards to synthesising various knowledges into a coherent world view primarily because he was an heir to the immensely rich Ukrainian Baroque literary tradition which prioritised allegorical forms of expression, see *Ibid.* p. 13.

instead, opted to gesture in the direction of the Bible. Skovorda proposed several descriptive terms all of which, hinted at personhood as being either defined by a process or by discourse. Personhood could be a task or an action, implying that it must become towards its own completion. Alternatively, if personhood is thought of as a word, then that would imply that the former ought to search for the right utterance through which it could reveal its own authenticity. These respective ways of being were predicated upon personhood's openness to the symbolic world of the Bible. This does not mean that Skovoroda was a religious fundamentalist in the sense of privileging one textual source as the only source of truth. Firstly, Skovoroda was not too interested in the factual content of the Bible. Secondly, Skovoroda believed that wisdom operated irrespective of creed and was even prepared to see the Greek Sophia, the Roman Minerva and Christ as interchangeable terms thus elevating certain features of classical thought to almost scriptural status.[284] In one of his letters, Skovoroda has even, albeit indirectly, conceded some saintliness to Aristotle and thought that if the latter saw the truth, then that was on account of the indwelling holy spirit.[285] This was meant to be understood to mean that anyone who could envision an intelligible world was virtuous and therefore, a useful guide in autonomous development of spirituality.

When Skovoroda likened the Bible to a symbolic world, what he may have meant was that it was an inexhaustible source of every act of symbolic interpretation that the human intellect was capable of performing. G. Florovskii was quite right in claiming that for Skovoroda, the Bible was a fount of "philosophical parables" and, most crucially, that it functioned as a "hieroglyph of being."[286] If the Bible was not primarily seen as a historically-anchored truth,

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[284] In one of his poems on wisdom, Skovoroda not only aligned wisdom with Christ but has also, suggested that it could exist amongst barbarians. Wisdom was seen to distinguish people on the basis of those who were its followers and those who were not, irrespective of race or implicitly, creed. See G.S. Skovoroda, 'Razgovor o primudrosti' in G.S. Skovoroda, *Sochinenia* ed. A.N. Gordienko, pp. 444-5.

[285] G.S. Skovoroda, 'Har'kov, 1 decabria 1762 g.' in *Ibid*. p. 535. This of course, may not have been as radical as may appear at first sight given the centrality of Aristotle for scholastic tradition which Skovoroda would have imbibed in the Kiev-Mohyla Academy.

[286] G. Florovskii, *Puti russkogo bogosloviia*, p. 121.

then it could not be exclusively relied upon to explain historical reality. Yet, Skovoroda did not reject the historical significance of the Bible outright. As narrated by his pupil and biographer M.I. Kovalinskii, Skovoroda defended himself against charges of being overly liberal with his reading of the Bible by arguing that he merely supplemented its historical exterior with an explication of its spiritual reason.[287] This of course, was a position typical of the Alexandrine church fathers who, under some influence from Philo, have argued for multiple forms of interpretation including literal reading depending on the extent to which, the historical and spiritual intentions of the text could be harmonised.[288] Skovoroda was further reported to have likened his approach to the Bible to his appreciation of a beautiful temple: when he praised the building's symmetry and proportion he did so on account of its inherent rationale which in no way implied that he denied its material make-up. The historical content of the Bible represented the temple's physical exterior whereas the latter's blueprint was indicative of the Bible's spiritual depth.[289] Thus, it was not so much the case that Skovoroda actively argued against the presence of any literal truth but rather, he conceded that beyond a certain point, it was superseded by a purely intuitive form of knowing.

It would therefore, be incorrect to think that for Skovoroda, the Bible was an authority towards which, the intellect passively appealed for guidance. On the contrary, it would make more sense to assume that the Bible *became* an authority only if it were internalised as personhood's discourse. That is, the Bible was not just an object of detached contemplation or analysis. Biblical narrative was meant to become an event within personhood in order to bring out the centrality of individual life. A. Kamenskikh referred to this feature of Skovoroda's hermeneutics as an "ontologization of the Bible" through which, the latter's

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[287] M.I. Kovalinskii, 'Zhizn' Grigoriia Skovorody', p. 690.
[288] I. Ramelli, "The Philosophical Stance of Allegory in Stoicism and its reception in Platonism, Pagan and Christian: Origen in Dialogue with the Stoics and Plato", *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 18, 3 (2011), pp. 355-8.
[289] M.I. Kovalinskii, 'Zhizn' Grigoriia Skovorody', p. 690.

narrative is able to become a set of real events in the mind of the reader.[290] In a rather violent description which deliberately aimed at subverting passive reverence for the sacred text, Skovoroda depicted this process as one whereby, personhood devoured the imagery it encountered in the text and in doing so, experienced itself as the potential ground of all future interpretive acts:

> All of this diverse corporeality and all of this immeasurable infinity of appearance gathers in the person and is devoured in the person like an old and great tree which disappears into its own seed with all of its branches, leaves and fruits as into the minutest of points. Everything which is named there, to the last detail, everything by sheer necessity, must be accomplished within the person.[291]

Insofar as Skovoroda often used the terms 'corporeal' and 'historical' interchangeably, it would be safe to interpret the reference to the concentration of all imagery within personhood as a moment in the course of which, the latter overcame the limitations imposed by literal interpretation. Rather than using the Bible as a source of piety premised on the narrative aspects of divine intervention in human affairs and consequently, deriving some knowledge of God, Skovoroda outlined a reverse process wherein, the content of the Bible led personhood into its own interior and then, towards to God. Whilst, as per earlier discussion, Skovoroda was again not able to isolate his re-justification of the Bible from that of personhood, he did indicate what he expected of the Bible which prevented it from being subsumed by introspective processes. Skovoroda suggested for the need to transform and to assimilate Biblical discourse as an integral part of personhood's self-relation. Skovoroda's sometimes dismissive attitude to religious conventions could very well have been sourced in his belief that divinely-inspired imagery could be assimilated directly from select texts without the need for external intermediaries. This would very much accord with Skovoroda's actual reading of the Bible which he always carried in the course of his wonderings and

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[290] A. Kamenskikh, "Origen in Russian Philosophy: From Grigorii Skovoroda to Nikolai Berdyaev", *Scholae* 9, 2 (2015), p. 448.
[291] G.S. Skovoroda 'A Symphony Called the Book of Askhan', p. 201.

which he read without the assistance of Orthodox authorities.[292]

It might be counter-argued that an emphasis on solitary reading and on sensitivity to symbolism is not necessarily symptomatic of a drive towards philosophical religion because it might not be too concerned with conceptual clarity. However, Skovoroda was not interested in the God of a scientist nor in that of an Enlightened dogmatic theologian. This was so because Skovoroda's method of inquiry did not depend on capturing the divine and its *logos* into a net of precise definitions capable of withstanding the onus of logical proof. Rather, Skovoroda's concern was with replicating the infinite outpouring of *logos* as personhood's normative state of being. In Skovoroda's nomenclature, to chew or to devour meant to overcome the external envelopment of hidden meaning so that the latter would be revealed for contemplation.[293] Therefore, when Skovoroda referred to an accomplishment of the text within personhood, he did so on the presumption that this was an ongoing process. Interpretation could only be deemed to be successful if it maintained personhood's attention upon itself. Personhood had to be conscious not only of itself as the source and the telos of interpretive acts but also, had to think of itself as potential only, devoid of all subjective individuating characteristics. This is evident in Skovoroda's contrast between the composite nature of the tree and the indivisible nature of the seed into which it was returned. Personhood accomplished knowledge when it allowed itself to be open to the *a priori* experiences it derived from itself as a consequence of its engagement with Biblical narrative. On that point, J. Fitzer may have been somewhat hasty in arguing that Skovoroda did not share in the Socratic "inquiry into the *eidos* of one's soul and thereby into the ethical and the metaphysical dimensions of our existence."[294] Despite his vastly differing spiritual commitments, Skovoroda indicated that knowledge was premised on the

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[292] This is premised on the notion that throughout the Eighteenth-century, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church continued to claim an "exclusive prerogative" in interpreting the scriptures, see C. Ellis, "Is there Life on other Planets: A View from Eighteenth-Century Russia", *Study Group on Eighteenth-Century Russia* Newsletter 25 (1997), p. 8.
[293] L.A. Sofronova, *Tri mira Grigoriya Skovorody* (Moscow: Indrik, 2002), pp. 185-9.
[294] J. Fitzer, "Skovoroda's and Socrates' Concepts of Self-Cognition: A Comparative View", *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 22, 1-2 (1997), p. 68.

understanding of what personhood was and in that sense, the Bible can, with important qualifications, be likened to the Socratic "beautiful beloved" which engendered its "spiritual progeny" within the inquiring personhood.[295]

The extent to which, such a speculative approach to the Bible was consonant with Skovoroda's understanding of the essence of philosophy can be gleaned from one of letters. Writing to his friend and former pupil, Skovoroda provided a very interesting definition of his philosophy which informed his hermeneutics. Immersion in the text, moral growth and self-introspection were interwoven into a complex process as evident from Skovoroda's advice on how to attain wisdom:

> Do not follow the empty cleverness of the sophists nor the duplicitous feet of pigs but imbibe from books which deal with the following subject: 'what is philosophy?' Answer: 'it is a way of living with one's own self and of being able to talk to one's own self.' When Crates saw a man talking to himself in seclusion, he said unto him that 'undoubtedly you have not been conversing with an ignorant man.' Precisely through such books the soul prepares towards the reading of the Holy Scriptures which is a paradise of upright and angelic minds, which is always being gazed at and of which no-one can take their fill.[296]

It is of crucial significance that Skovoroda prioritised the Bible not as a source of maxims but as a future habitué of the intellect. Arguably, what Skovoroda was implying was for the possibility of disembodied comingling which can be characterised as self-dialogue. Whilst there is no evidence that Skovoroda influenced the concept of the 'interior church' as detailed by Lopukhin and other Russian Rosicrucians, there is nonetheless a clear push towards demarcating transcendent forms of sociability. If the intellect was to become sufficiently disengaged from the demands of bodily passions, it could participate in the

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[295] R.G. Edmonds III, "Socrates the Beautiful: Role Reversal and Midwifery in Plato's *Symposium*", *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 130 (2000), p. 283.
[296] V.S. Skovoroda, 'Har'kov, vtoraia polovina sentiabria – nachalo okntiabria 1762 g.' in in G.S. Skovoroda, *Sochinenia*, ed. A.N. Gordienko, p. 515.

symbolic domain of the text. Therefore, the reference to the Bible as paradise must be interpreted not in hyperbolic terms suggesting an overwhelming preference for one text over others but as a gesture towards a discursive reality which critically depended on the interpretative verve of the individual. In a passage from a different letter, Skovoroda described the never-ending task of interpretation by pointing out the presence of "a thousand divine words" hidden in a single word.[297]

Skovoroda's definition of philosophy as self-dialogue was indicative of the extent to which, personhood was privy to sociability by virtue of self-introspection. That is, a solitary intellect was not necessarily a lonely one. Taking his que from Seneca's remark that one of the critical aspects of philosophy was the art of being one's own friend, A.S. Gagarin believed that a secluded thinker was a composite being, capable of fostering an interaction between will and self.[298] Thinking was dialogical in nature, even if it occurred strictly within the bounds of individual intellect because it depended on the 'I' willing to engage with itself.[299] Skovoroda's injunction that personhood must be able to be with itself could be interpreted to mean that personhood had to think of itself as being *in the company* of itself. This is what the Sophists failed to understand insofar as their teaching was always aimed at an external audience rather than at that of their own selves. It is even possible to further narrow down this line of interpretation and suggest that the reference to the emptiness of sophistic wisdom was reflective of the absence of a genuine dialogue partner. When seen in the context of Skovoroda's earlier criticism of external religious arrangements, the very notion of communal worship could appear to be deeply problematic because it was not anchored in the inward sociability of the participants. The spectacle of religious life lacked depth because it was neither sourced in the self-dialogue of the clerics nor aimed at fostering one in the believers.

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[297] V.S. Skovoroda, 'V selo Babai iz Gusinki, 6 marta 1787 g.' in *Ibid.* p. 629.
[298] A.S. Gagarin, "Odinochestvo kak ekzistentsial antichnoi filosofii (ot Epicura do Plotina)", *Nauchnyi ezhegodnik Istituta filosofii i prava Ural'skogo otdeleniia Rossiiskoi akademii nauk* 14, 3 (2014), p. 4.
[299] *Ibid.*

A philosophising personhood was therefore, one which kept its own company and directed discourse at its own self through its engagement with the text. Most existing scholarship on Skovoroda's ambivalent attitudes towards Orthodoxy have failed to note his insistence on the possibility of real inward dialogue as one of the key features of his attempt to rethink religion along introspective lines. Perhaps the only exception being N. Pylypiuk's remarks about Skovoroda's substitution of institutionalised liturgy for one which was enacted amongst friends devoted to attaining wisdom and focusing on interpretation as "an ongoing process."[300] Skovoroda's preference for dialogue amongst individuals who sought to discover their own authentic selves was quite rightly called a "Eucharistic symposia".[301] This perceptive assessment goes a long way in establishing Skovoroda as a thinker who worked towards a discursive form of religion. Yet, Pulypiuk used the dialogical nature of Skovoroda's writings as an indication that his spirituality was not as solitary as it appeared to be which of course, is an argument that does not take into consideration the difference between solitariness and outright loneliness. The former can be characterised as mental concentration or a state of non-disturbance brought on by the intellect's emancipation from worldly concerns whilst the latter was a state of privation from society as such and its core norms.[302] Consequently, it was not the case that religion for Skovoroda was founded solely upon a transcendent community of friends but rather upon a pre-existing sociability occasioned by personhood's introspective acts.

The notion of paradise as an intelligible domain has a long history in Christian thought but, it was Philo who provided a particularly rich imagery which equated it with wisdom. Prior to its expulsion, humanity's task was to cultivate virtues and in doing so, to uphold a "contemplative system of life."[303] Skovoroda

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[300] N. Pilypiuk, "Skovoroda's Divine Narcissism", *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 22, 1-2 (1997), p. 31.
[301] *Ibid.* p. 33.
[302] A.S. Gagarin, 'Odinochestvo kak ekzistentsial antichnoi filosofii', pp. 3-6.
[303] Philo, 'Questions and Answers on Genesis I' in Philo, *The Works of Philo*, 6, 56.

has internalised the notion of an intellectual paradise as a state of being which a personhood could reach through its interpretive activity. In this respect, Skovoroda's religious sensibilities were very much in keeping with the broader Eighteenth-century Russian concern with recovering prelapsarian bliss as the ultimate telos of spiritual praxis. Personhood could be said to be in a state of paradise if it was in the process of an un-ending engagement with the text. It is in this sense that for Skovoroda, the Bible, was a repertoire which had to cohere into a world within personhood. Whilst it is unclear to what extent Skovoroda intended for his writings to be taken as divinely inspired continuations of Biblical narrative, it is certain that personhood's inward dialogue with itself was undertaken in imitation of the prophetic character of the Bible.[304] So, if Skovoroda's introspective definition of philosophy is admitted, then it would not be incorrect to think that his philosophy functioned as his religion.[305] Once the latter point is seen in the context of a paradise that was deemed to be wholly intellective, then it might be the case that Skovoroda advocated a *re-creation* of paradise within personhood. In other words, the individual was not only responsible for his or her own discursive capacities through which, spiritual transformation was achieved but also, could not rely on membership of a religious community and the acceptance of its rules as a guarantee of salvation. In fact, the very notion of being saved in the fullness of time was displaced by a personal eschatology sustained by an ongoing creative contemplation of Biblical imagery.

The function of the Bible then, as well as that of other texts pagan and Christian, was to become the substance of the dialogue personhood held with itself. It would, at this point, be quite easy to misconstrue Skovoroda's religious thought as a peculiar version of Pietist spirituality which aimed at fostering the experience of personal rebirth in which, reading and commenting on the vernacular Bible played a massive part. Yet, for all of the personalistic and mystical

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[304] N. Pylypiuk, argued that Skovoroda saw at least some of his dialogues as continuations of the story of Genesis. This may be the case if it is established that a written dialogue is the same as an internal one and not merely its expression, see her 'Skovoroda's Divine Narcissim,' p. 31.

[305] For this particular point, see A.Ia. Efimenko, "Lichnost' Skovorody kak myslitelia", *Voprosy filosofii i psihologii* 25, 5 (1894), p. 438.

implications of Central European Pietism which found a powerful echo in Russian intellectual culture, there is one crucial difference. Broadly speaking, a member of a Pietist community was integrated into a constellation of institutions which exercised considerable degree of emotional and intellectual support as well as acting as sites of authority and surveillance. Thus, even if, real transformation of personhood did occur, this still left the latter's identity open to institutional moulding, preventing it from totally committing itself to its own spiritual goals. Moreover, when Skovoroda spoke of the need to have the Bible at the forefront of the believer's intellectual efforts, he did not mean formal reading sessions in which its meaning was ascertained. Whilst the narrative organisation of some of Skovoroda's dialogues did imply a gentle nudge in the direction of conventicle-like meetings held as a direct counterpoint to church-sanctioned events,[306] the centre of gravity was nonetheless squarely within the transcendent interiority of personhood.

Bearing in mind Skovoroda's suspicious attitude to all forms of sectarianism as well as his incapacity to fully identify with Orthodoxy, it is possible to conclude that his religious thought lacked direct precedent to which he could appeal.[307] This is an important point to consider because it reflected the novelty of Skovoroda's religious ambitions even if, they were in some ways comparable to the spiritual organisational forms proposed by contemporaneous Russian mystics. Such circumspectness may have been aimed at combating the belief that a modification of exterior religious arrangements necessarily resulted in a superior spiritual state of being. This is why, it was imperative for Skovoroda to rethink the Bible as dialogue partner and religion as an ongoing fulfilment of that dialogue in a way which trivialised issues of observance. At no point is Skovoroda's desire to firstly, exclude all intermediaries between the intellect and the *logos* and secondly, to re-emphasise the primacy of mystical engagement with the text is clearer than in his radical suggestion that the Bible is a human being. One of the interlocutors in *The Book of Askhan'* made an implicit connection between self-dialogue and the

[306] N. Pilypiuk, 'Skovoroda's Divine Narcissim,' pp. 30-33.
[307] M.I. Kovalinskii, 'Zhizn' Grigoriia Skovorody, p. 688.

text as an integral feature of that process:

> The Bible is a human being and you are one as well. She is a lamb and so are you. If you come to know her, you will form as single personhood and a single lamb with her. But prior to this, you must know yourself. She is foolish with a fool and is saintly with the blessed. But prior to this, you must know yourself.[308]

What Skovoroda adumbrated here was a highly volatile notion of a text whose meaning mirrored the intellectual maturity of its reader. That is, the content of the Bible intrinsically depended upon what kind of personhood was reading it. Personhood which did not undertake self-introspective praxis would be susceptible to literalism because it would not be in the habit of trying to ascertain the truth as something distinct from its appearance. Skovoroda's recourse to erotic rhetoric can be interpreted as an indication of the right object of unreserved commitment which was neither a religious community nor to a set of doctrines but a process occurring within a solitary personhood. The fool could be a narrow-minded believer who imposed rigid interpretive frameworks upon the mythological dimension of the Bible. Alternatively, the fool could also be someone who pried into the clearly absurd propositions to be found in Bible if taken at face value with the intent of deducing a rationalistic explanation. In both cases, the individual was blind to the fact that for God, it was much more important to "animate" an "aimless soul" than to uphold an illusion of factual coherence.[309] Therefore, the truth or indeed, the falsehood that personhood recognised within the text was to a large measure, a reflection of its own self thus allowing Skovoroda to claim a degree of isomorphism between the intellect and the word.

Earlier in this section, it has been noted that Skovoroda sought a religion which allowed the intellect the freedom to generate a near endless series of symbols. Some commentators suggested that Skovoroda approached spirituality

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[308] G.S. Skovoroda 'A Symphony Called the Book of Askhan', p. 231.

[309] N. Pylypiuk, The Humanistic School and Ukrainian Literature of the Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century, PhD Thesis, Harvard University, 1989, p. 336.

as "a grammarian and master of poetics."[310] This would have been one of the most subtle characteristics of Skovoroda's thought in Anglophone scholarship, if the term grammarian was understood in the wider and non-literary sense as meaning that Skovoroda was a *dialectician* concerned with *logos*. Given that Skovoroda denied the existence of heaven and hell as anything but the inward states of personhood and was unusually silent on the possibility of an afterlife,[311] it is natural that he stressed the creative component of religion which operated in the present life of the individual. Whilst that still left the notion of the future intact as signifying a qualitatively different state of being, there was no longer a major distinction between a certain type of spiritual activity and its result as the belief in a future reward and punishment would presuppose. Therefore, if the outpouring of human discourse is thought of in terms of an uninterrupted disclosure of divine wisdom, then it simply makes no sense to conceive of the future as something external to personhood's activity. T. D. Zakydalsky came close to unreservedly suggesting that, because for Skovoroda, "anything could be a symbol for anything" in the Bible and because there were no rules determining how symbols are to be interwoven, interpretation was essentially, a joyous game of the intellect.[312] When set against Skovoroda's belief in the possibility of a "sustained speech"[313] erupting from the depths of human personhood, discourse as joy can be approached as the ultimate expression of a philosophic religion which no longer needed antiquated notions of the future.

By avoiding a content-analysis of Skovoroda's symbolic worldview, it was possible to throw into relief, the nature of the interpretive activity itself as distinct from its results. In order to show that Skovoroda advocated a philosophical religion, it was necessary to concentrate squarely on the primacy of the human intellect in developing its own spirituality. It would not be incorrect to suggest that for Skovoroda, the emergence of a religious sentiment could be founded on *any*

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[310] *Ibid.* p. 309.
[311] T.D. Zakydalsky, "Skovoroda as *Philosophus Ludens*", *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 22, 1-2 (1997), p. 10.
[312] *Ibid.* p. 7.
[313] N. Pylypiuk, The Humanistic School and Ukrainian Literature, p. 351.

act of reading on the condition that the chosen text had sufficient depth to sustain mystical insight. In fact, in one of his letters, Skovoroda was open to the possibility of all worthwhile literature being read religiously. This conclusion is not only based on Skovoroda's love of classical and especially Stoic thought but also on his injunction to read works apart from the Bible and to turn their content into a "salvific sap and to sacrifice it like an animal to God."[314] At no other point in his oeuvre was Skovoroda so clear in terms of denying the text a static, latent meaning which the intellect had to decipher and instead, posited a point of intersection between the letter and the intellect as a consequence of which, *logos* was born.

This type of reading which effectively turned the play of the intellect into a liturgy was almost identical in terms of its rationale with what Skovoroda thought of the structure of personhood. Whilst engagement with Biblical imagery transcendentally was an inward activity undertaken by the intellect, it was nonetheless external to its ultimate telos, which was the emergence of a completely self-conscious personhood. This overlap need not be surprising. C. Coleman has drawn attention to "Enlightenment-era efforts to resacralize the self as an object of a totalizing force" which crucially depended on alternative approaches to the Scriptures.[315] Whilst this observation was made in regards to Western European and Jewish trends which defied a secularised approach to Enlightened discourses, it was quite applicable to some of the key features of the Mystical Enlightenment as evident in Skovoroda's thought. As the next section will endeavour to show, the structure of personhood was seen by Skovoroda in terms which gestured towards its inherently theoretical nature. Personhood could unfold to its ultimate extent if it was prepared to see itself as its own partner in dialogue in the same way that related to the text as a living being in whose life it

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314 G.S. Skovoroda, 'Har'kov, 1 decabria 1762 g.' in Skovoroda, G.S. *Sochinenia*, ed. N.A. Gordienko p. 537. In fact, much of Skovoroda's thought on the self and on friendship can be interpreted along Stoic lines, not least his concern with self-dialogue. The Stoic emphasis on *alter ego* or, one's own self with which one converses in the absence of a real interlocutor is particularly relevant, see A.A. Long, 'Seneca on the Self: Why Now' in Long, A.A. *From Epicurus to Epictetus: Studies in Hellenistic and Roman Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 369.

315 C. Coleman, "Resacralizing the Word: The Fare of Secularization in Enlightenment Historiography", *The Journal of Modern History* 82, 2 (2010), p. 395.

could participate.

Structures of personhood

Skovoroda understood personhood as a little world which self-consciously evolved towards its own authenticity. In choosing to interpret the epicentre of the self as authentic rather than as innate, Skovoroda was significantly ahead of his time in approaching personhood as a complex of processes and not as a hierarchy of static qualities which defined the character of its being once and for all. The likening of personhood to a world played a crucial role in this shift of perspective because in doing so, Skovoroda underscored the systemic and the non-subjective aspects of human interiority. Unlike Lopukhin and Kheraskov, Skovoroda was predominantly interested in the metaphysical dimension of personal becoming and much less so in the social settings in which that becoming occurred. For that reason, the historicity of personhood was de-emphasised as was the pedagogical value of its immersion into the institutional life of society. However, precisely because of this one-sided preoccupation with the theoretical disclosure of self-consciousness, Skovoroda was able to provide a much more philosophically astute analysis of the role of symbolism than any other thinker covered in this thesis. In choosing to present his views in the form of dialogues between intimate friends, Skovoroda raised the possibility of an alternative form of sociability existing outside of society in which personhood could develop in the company of other transcendentally-oriented selves. Skovoroda sought to resolve the tension between the totality of personhood on the one hand and its subjective predispositions on the other, by appealing to noetic experiences which situated it into a larger discourse of truth.

The most crucial work regarding personhood in Skovoroda's repertoire was a dialogue called *Narcissus* (1760s) which focused on the becoming nature of

human individuality and sought to awaken the readers to the hidden processes constituting their true selves. However, it would be difficult to argue that at least directly, in composing this work, Skovoroda was responding to a clearly identifiable demand for such literature amongst the literate public. It would be more appropriate to presume that Skovoroda responded to the spiritual crisis afflicting the Russian Eighteenth-century as well the more specific social upheavals in the Ukraine as he himself experienced them, without necessarily deferring to the intellectual and literary sensitivities of his potential audience. This may explain the contrast between the sheer originality of Skovoroda's thought in comparison to other Russian mystics covered in the present thesis and the surprisingly consistent engagement with the same themes and concerns as the latter. Yet the freedom to write in a way which was most reflective of Skovoroda's deeply antithetical approach to knowledge, far from obscuring his thought, resulted in the development of an exceptionally sophisticated language of ideas which always aimed at violently jolting the reader out of passive acceptance of fixed meaning. A fluid language which kept meaning in constant motion by relaying it from one opposition to another, aided in the formation of a dynamic personhood which never ceased in becoming itself.[316]

The theme of movement as a transcendental strategy in the development of a more adequate self-relation permeated Russian Mystical Enlightenment. The very fact that the pursuit of self-knowledge was held to be of overriding significance by many Russian literati for the improvement of society and its individual members, necessarily implied a more dynamic personhood capable of such activity for the duration of its life. However, only Skovoroda attended to movement as a defining feature of human identity and attempted not only to reveal its mode but also the means by which it could be facilitated. That is, for Skovoroda, the existence of personhood was its movement. If the centre of gravity of personhood is relocated from its external activity in the world to an internal

[316] L.A. Sofronova analysed the dynamic nature of Skovoroda's language in great detail, albeit without connecting it with Skovoroda's anthropology as I have, see *Tri mira Grigoriya Skovorody*, pp. 108-12.

one, then it would be appropriate to construe this move as a way of making personhood metaphysically self-sufficient and therefore, independent. A personhood which did not need external validation was precisely what Skovoroda wanted to promote. To that end, it was imperative to transfer some of the attributes of a self-subsisting being of God found in mystical literature to human personhood. This of course, was a very delicate enterprise because Skovoroda did not seek to trivialise the authority of God. By gesturing towards the possibility of God and the human person as both sharing a similar kind of inward relationship to their own respective selves, Skovoroda avoided the danger of an overly empowered personhood unaccountable to any reality other than its own.

It would be very difficult to determine with exactitude the sources which Skovoroda relied upon in his thought regarding personhood given that the notion of movement was a relatively common feature of Greek philosophical and Patristic thought. However, out of all of the influences that Skovoroda admitted, the works of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite attend to aspects of movement which seem to come closest to Skovoroda's understanding of the concept. Possibly then, Pseuodo-Dionysius' discussion of the manner of God's being in *The Divine Names* can be approached as a potential influence.[317] In trying to explain why God was referred to in so many different and sometimes contradictory terms, Pseudo-Dionysius sought to explain God as a type of yearning and in doing so, provided a powerful description of perpetual motion inhering within God. Behind the ever-varying descriptions of God, Pseudo-Dionysius saw an infinitely mobile power of the creator:

> He is yearning on the move, simple, self-moved, self-acting, pre-existent in the Good, flowing out of the Good onto all that is and returning once again to the Good. In this divine yearning shows especially its unbeginning and unending nature travelling in an endless circle through the Good, from the Good, in the Good and to the Good, unerringly turning, ever on the same centre,

[317] L.G. Aleksandrov, underscoring the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius upon Skovoroda, called the latter a "Ukrainian Areopagite." See his, 'Sacral'nye simvoly v filosofii G.S. Skovorody', p. 20.

> ever in the same direction, always proceeding, always remaining, always being restored to itself.[318]

Pseudo-Dionysius drew attention to two things in the above passage which were of significance for Skovoroda. Firstly, even though some of the descriptive terms applied to God were fitting, they were nevertheless exceeded by the radical transcendence of the signified. Thus, whilst God could be named yearning, the very fact that yearning was explained as such an unstable and self-emptying state of affairs, implied that God could not be neatly contained within the bounds of this name. The name rightly referred to God but at the same time, the referral was primarily to the *relationship* of the world to God and not to the latter's *essence* as such.[319] Secondly, Pseudo-Dionysius has shown that if all of the names are taken together in all of their contrariness in relation to each other as God's emanation, then it would be possible to catch a glimpse of the totality of the creation as it proceeded from its source.[320] Yearning was not one distinct characteristic amongst others but a totalising mode through which, God outpoured himself onto the creation. By focusing on the activity of yearning, Pseudo-Dionysius was able to harmonise the relative truth-status of the name with its immense cosmological significance. The description of God's unrest was so enrapturing that it made divine activity almost incomprehensible and consequently, casting God in an even more ineffable light. This is why some postmodern commentators have suggested that the ultimate task of Pseudo-Dionysius' negative theology was to arrive at the point where "we cannot even comprehend God's incomprehensibility."[321]

For Pseudo-Dionysius, if personhood was to follow up the names of God to their source without shying away from the seemingly logical inconsistency of how terms could designate and yet at the same time fall short of their referents,

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[318] Pseudo-Dionysius, 'The Divine Names' in Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works* tr. C. Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 712D-713A.
[319] N. Janowitz, "Theories of Divine Names in Origen and Pseudo-Dionysius", *History of Religions* 30, 4 (1991), p. 367.
[320] *Ibid.*
[321] J. Fisher, "The Theology of Dis/similarity: Negation in Pseudo-Dionysius", *The Journal of Religion* 81, 4 (2001), p. 542.

then in doing so it was pursuing a deified life.[322] The point was not only in the typically mystical privileging of proximity to the ultimate source of all goodness. More importantly, the intellect had to experience the power as well as the insufficiency of all of the names of God in all of their richness and diversity. Therefore, the intellect was not deified merely by virtue of getting closer to the ineffable source of all emanations but also, through participation in the content of individual names.[323] For example, whilst a focus on yearning could not provide direct insight into the essence of God, it could however, disclose the transcendent nature of what it means to lovingly desire something. Such use of language towards experiencing an elusive but at the same time, all-pervading God was very much evident in Skovoroda's thought. Indeed, more so than Pseudo-Dionysius, Skovoroda made a point of dazzling the reader with an almost unrestrained signification of God via seemingly inappropriate and often mutually exclusive terms which kept the intellect perpetually on the move along an infinite series of meanings. Skovoroda sought to reorient personhood away from accepting the truth as already established towards the recognition that it was up to the individual to birth what was deemed to be true. Rather than applying negative theology towards a re-justification of existing ecclesial arrangements as Pseudo-Dionysius has done, Skovoroda was much more interested in destabilising personhood in order to heighten its awareness of itself.

Arguably, it was the kind of activity which Pseudo-Dionysius ascribed to God which Skovoroda reinterpreted as a normative human introspective praxis. This of course, carried immense erotic implications regarding the capacity to yearn and to bear gifts. Pseudo-Dionysius presumed that in principle, God acted erotically toward the creation by virtue of having a superabundance of goodness which was always spilling out.[324] Pseudo-Dionysius did not think it blasphemous to think of God as beauty which "bestirs the world and holds all things in existence

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[322] N. Russell very briefly mentioned the role of the *Divine Names* for the attainment of the "highest realization of the self," see his *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, p.255.
[323] N. Janowitz, 'Theories of Divine Names in Origen and Pseudo-Dionysius,' pp. 366-7.
[324] J.M. Rist, "A Note on Eros and Agape in Pseudo-Dionysius", *Vigiliae Christianae* 20, 4 (1966), pp. 241-242.

by the longing inside of them to have beauty".[325] As will be seen subsequently, Skovoroda made much use of eros in his understanding of personhood, especially in terms of explaining how the latter could undertake an inward search for its own source without becoming infatuated with its own subjectivity. If the inexhaustibility of personhood was in some way likened to the perceived inexhaustibility of God, then it was not irrational to assume that the former could be an object of a very intense and prolonged inquiry. This does not mean that in purely logical terms, the manner of Skovoroda's investigation of the self depended entirely upon a belief in the existence of God. What it does mean however is that the results of introspective praxis could be broadly comparable to certain attitudes which may have influenced how personhood was experienced.

The most poignant example of Skovoroda's use of eros to instigate instability in personhood was his recourse to the myth of Narcissus to illustrate how individuals should relate to their own selves. This was a rather unusual interpretation of the myth from the one which was commonly held it to be an example of self-destructive vanity. The very fact that a treatise on how to achieve self-knowledge bore the title *Narcissus* showed the extent to which, Skovoroda was concerned with causing surprise in order to jolt personhood out of its own immobility. Yet, the point was not merely to cast established tropes in an unusual light. For Skovoroda, Narcissus was paradigmatic of how human beings should learn to love themselves and how they should endeavour to locate the source of their own being. Imperatives of self-love and the search for the source were almost indistinguishable from each other as Narcissus was shown to lovingly disappear into his own source:

> My Narcissus is getting fired up with the embers of love. He is jealous as he darts about in anguish and in tenderness, he cares and pleads with all his might not about many and worthless things but about himself, to himself and within himself. He cares only about his own self. He only needs the one. And at last, having melted

[325] Pseudo-Dionysius, 'The Divine Names', 704A.

> like ice from the flame of his own self-love, he is transfiguring into the source. Truly, truly! One will be transfigured into what one loves.[326]

Skovoroda took liberties with the very same aspects of the Narcissus myth which are usually used to cast it in a negative light. Far from trivialising self-love, Skovoroda described its ultimate result if it were pursued vigorously. The point then, was not that personhood disadvantaged itself by being too obsessed with itself. It was rather the fact that the obsession was too worldly and not sufficiently introspective. Whilst personhood could be unduly self-preoccupied, the preoccupation was more to do with how it acted and was perceived by others in the world. In that case, personhood was not so much self-preoccupied as it was concerned with the multiplicity of postures and actions it felt it had to undertake in order to be perceived in a certain way by others. In contradistinction to this, Skovoroda offered his ideal image of self-love whereby, personhood loved itself to the exclusion of all of its worldly manifestations and solely within the bounds of itself. Consequently, for personhood to exercise real self-love implied its capacity to descend into its own depths and experience nothing other than itself. Skovoroda's Narcissus cared only for himself not out of callousness for everything else but because at a certain point, there was only his own self.

It may now be somewhat clearer as to why eros played such a large role in the development of personhood. Narcissus was shown to be in a very agitated state without at the same time, losing sight of the object of his agitation. Thus, in a preliminary sense, Skovoroda gestured towards the paradox of how personhood could never remain still whilst being oriented towards one thing only. This was an inherently erotic predicament whereby desire kept personhood in motion but one which was nonetheless, fixated by a singleness of purpose. Yet, personhood which was in the grip of desire was not the same as personhood which was transformed by that desire. That was precisely what Skovoroda suggested via Narcissus' seeming self-effacement in the proximity to his source. Self-love stopped being

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[326] G.S. Skovoroda, 'Narkiss. Razglogol o tom: Uznai sebia' in Skovoroda G. *Sochineniia*, ed. V.I. Shinkaruk p. 123.

self-love in a pejorative sense when personhood discovered something new and distinct within itself which could become an object of ongoing and loving contemplation. V.F. Ern interpreted this difficult dialectic as a process wherein, personhood fell in love with its own otherness, with its own eternal idea which appeared to that personhood as a great novelty.[327] What this meant was that when Narcissus' self-love reached its apogee, it was no longer directed at his own self as such but rather at one of the main conditions which was responsible for his identity. This condition and the source of Narcissus' personhood was of course, his beauty towards which, he became through self-love. Perhaps in homage to a Platonic understanding of eros, Skovoroda underscored the decisive importance of beauty as the very condition of love.[328] Beauty was not something which personhood possessed. Instead, beauty possessed personhood and in that possession, made it into what it was.

The crucial question then is whether Narcissus loved himself because he was beautiful or whether he became who he was because he fell in love with the beauty which he saw in himself. The first option would imply selfishness insofar as self-love was enacted by one's self for the sake of one's self. It would also justify the fate of Narcissus as narrated in various mythological narratives involving either drowning or suicide as foreseeable conclusions to extreme displays of hubris. The second option on the other hand, is much more consonant with Skovoroda's aims because it opens up the speculative nature of self-knowledge as a condition of being one's true self. Indeed, the very proliferation of the Narcissus myth in its philosophical guise from late antiquity and beyond can be interpreted as signifying a turn towards an internalisation of speculative

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[327]V.F. Ern, *Grigorii Savvich Skovoroda. Zhizn' i uchenie*, p. 250.

[328] G.S. Skovoroda, 'Narkiss. Razglogol o tom: Uznai sebia', p. 122. V.F. Ern thought that Skovoroda has made recourse to a specifically Platonic understanding of eros with the important difference that unlike Plato, Skovoroda has relocated beauty from the height of its objectivity as a Form into the depths of individual personhood, see his *Grigorii Savvich Skovoroda. Zhizn' i uchenie*, p. 253. I would generally agree with this assessment insofar as it explicitly implies the process of becoming was no longer a veridical event as much as an inward one. However, a focus on the undeniable influence of Plato on Skovoroda at the expense of Neoplatonic sources obscures the inherently dynamic understanding of personhood which Skovoroda promoted.

thinking which was largely absent from Plato's approach to knowledge.[329] Consequently, when Skovoroda's Narcissus reflected upon his own beauty, he was in the process of becoming more beautiful and therefore, himself. Skovoroda was at some pains to make sure that Narcissus' fascination with beauty would not be construed to exemplify hubris. In order to avoid this suspicion, Skovoroda emphasised that Narcissus did not fall in love with his own externality but rather with his "very point".[330] That is, Narcissus' insight into himself went far beyond his reflection in the water which was only an initial stimulus towards his descent into himself. To that end, Skovoroda noted that unlike other characterisations of Narcissus, his one did not depend on worldly reflections of his own self and a result, did not get carried away with his own appearance from the perspective of others.[331]

If, as has been argued, Narcissus' experience of beauty made him into who he was, then his drowning requires an explanation because it could be deemed to militate against the virtue of self-introspection. Obviously if drowning is understood as death which in its turn, is judged as punishment then Skovoroda would have to seriously rework the myth of Narcissus to suit his particular ends. This is precisely what Skovoroda did not do and instead, sought to reinterpret the myth in such a way as to completely change the meaning of drowning. Skovoroda understood drowning in terms of Narcissus' immersion into his own interiority after which, he enjoyed an almost completely transcendent self-relation. Thus, whilst hubristic self-preoccupation was destructive and distanced personhood from itself, genuine self-reflection was enlivening and conducive to personal flourishing. Skovoroda had Narcissus proclaim the futility of drowning in the putrid waters of the world in comparison to the immense joy of disappearing into the object of his love:

This is what I love! I love the source and the head, the

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[329] C. Shepherdson, "Telling Tales of Love: Philosophy, Literature and Psychoanalysis", *Diacritics* 30, 1 (2000), pp. 89-90.
[330] G.S. Skovoroda, 'Narkiss. Razglogol o tom: Uznai sebia', p. 122.
[331] *Ibid.*

> spring and the beginning, eternal streams emerging from the vapours of their heart. The sea is but pus. The rivers end. Torrents dry up. Creeks disappear. The source alone eternally breathes an enlivening and cooling vapour. I only love this single source and I vanish. Everything else for me is but dust. O heart of the sea! Pure Abyss! Sacred source! I love you alone! I disappear and am being transfigured into you.[332]

In almost postmodern terms focusing on the provisional nature of personhood, Skovoroda made an indirect recourse to the discourse of death as a way of testing personhood's resiliency. It is true that Narcissus' disappearance into the abyss of the source was akin to death. However, Skovoroda made the point of describing the source as enlivening and therefore, as lacking the kind of finality which is normally associated with death. The intensely naturalistic language employed by Skovoroda in his accounts of the various types of waters was allegorical of the various types of movements in which personhood could participate but which were not necessarily worthwhile. Specifically, all types of waters were not worthy of being immersed in, because none of them were sufficiently agitated or self-replenishing to either maintain their course or to enliven personhood. Whilst the sea was vast it was static. Similarly, rivers, torrents and creeks, for all of their apparent dynamism, possessed movements which were of too short a duration to satisfy the needs of a personhood awakened to its infinite needs. Thus, personhood could be deluded into thinking that it has placed itself into a medium appropriate to its metaphysical depth whereas in actual fact, it has only waded into worldly contexts wherein, its being was stifled.[333]

It may be somewhat confusing as to why Skovoroda allegorised the sea as simultaneously, reflective of worldly movement to be avoided and at the same time, as reflective of the transcendent depths which personhood should attempt to fathom. However, given Skovoroda's intensely metaphorical approach to

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[332] *Ibid.* p. 123.

[333] G.L. Kline rightly read this in Pauline terms as Skovoroda's allegory of a chaotic elemental world, see his 'Skovoroda's Metaphysics' in R.H. Marshall Jr and T.E. Bird, *Hryhorij Savyč Skovoroda,* pp. 232-5.

language and cognition, the seeming contradiction makes sense if it is approached as signifying a distinction between not just two types of movements but also, between two types of depths. L.A. Sophronova has observed a connection between Skovoroda's identification of the world as the sea which possessed a particular kind of dynamic.[334] This dynamic was characterised by anxiousness and falseness which kept it constantly agitated but without producing anything new.[335] The world was inherently dangerous for human personhood and very few were able to cross it without getting entangled in its enticements. Therefore, the allegory of the world as the sea was expressive of a movement which was neither founded on genuine depth nor capable of enlivening personhood. In contrast to the illusory depth of the world, Skovoroda proposed the human heart as an opening into the inexhaustible abyss of the source. Of course, the meaning of the term heart was quite different to its Romantic significance as the seat of sentiment and was rather, understood by Skovoroda as an interior ground of personhood and used interchangeably with the more traditional terms such as soul and intellect.[336] Consequently, one of the possible conclusions which could be drawn from Skovoroda's deliberate contradiction of himself was that the world often mimicked the truth without being able to replicate its profundity. It was therefore, up to a discerning personhood not to get caught up in the parodied reflections of itself made in the shallow affairs of the world.

Thus far, Skovoroda established that Narcissus became a more authentic personhood because he immersed himself into beauty and that such an immersion was not of a worldly character. Skovoroda also established the primacy of the source which transfigured personhood. However, what has not been properly established yet, was the nature of the source and how it could be reached. In terms somewhat reminiscent of Plato's allegory of the cave, Skovoroda

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[334] L.A. Sofronova, *Tri mira Grigoriya Skovorody*, pp. 317-18.
[335] *Ibid.* p. 317.
[336] *Ibid*. pp. 252-54. See also Iu.Ia. Barabash for possible influence of Augustine on Skovoroda's understanding of the heart as depth, *Znau cheloveka… Grigorii Skovoroda: Poeziia, Filosofiia, Zhizn'* (Moscow: Khudozh. Lit. 1989), p. 209.

likened the process of transfiguration to Narcissus' turning into the sun.[337] It is at this point that Skovoroda's preceding reliance on the imagery of the water signifying types of movements gained metaphysical anchorage and was no longer solely concerned with orienting personhood towards the importance of self-introspection. Once personhood attended to itself without the distraction of external pursuits, it could reach the objective ground of its own existence and identify itself with it. The sun was a useful metaphor in this regard because it was outgoing and enlivening without ceasing to be itself:

> The sun is the source. How is a Godly human being not the sun? The sun is the source not due to its external appearance but due to the strength of its diffusing nature. In like a manner, a Godly person who exudes the enlivening rays of the divinity is the sun not in accordance with appearance but in accordance with his heart. Everyone is what he is on the basis of what kind of a heart he has.[338]

It may be observed that in returning again to the heart as a sign for human inwardness, Skovoroda did not imply a location in a literal sense. Rather, in a very speculative fashion, it was assumed that identity depended upon the prior process of identification as a conscious action on the part of the personhood. Skovoroda's earlier reference to the depth of the heart must be understood as an invocation to conform that depth with the inexhaustible goodness of the source. It was not incidental that Narcissus' becoming has now been expressed in the more traditional terms of a gradual movement from appearance to a reality which was capable of transforming the knowing subject.[339]

The crucial point was that in locating within personhood something which was its other and indeed its source, Skovoroda was directly implying that the ultimate task of personhood was to become its own source. It may not seem

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[337] G.S. Skovoroda, 'Narkiss. Razglogol o tom: Uznai sebia', p. 124.
[338] *Ibid.*
[339] A.A. Lebedenko, "Grigorii Skovoroda: filosofia serdtsa proshlogo dlia buduschego", *Uchenye zapiski Tavricheskogo universiteta im. V.I. Vernadskogo* 24, 65 (2012), p. 45.

as though such a conception of personhood could result in anything except a crudely nihilistic self-referentialism given how independent it appeared to be from all external authorities. Whilst it is true that Skovoroda's thought in general implied a considerable distancing from existing organisational forms, this did not mean that personhood became uncompromisingly sovereign in the particular way that the Cartesian *ego* was often held to be. Moreover, Skovoroda's Narcissus was not completely self-referential because there was no evidence that he was utilising the power of his own imagination to make sense of his own self and that of others. In fact, it could be argued that far from becoming a particular type of self, Narcissus grasped his own personhood as though devoid of all of its individual characteristics. This absence of the imagination was most evident in the fact that Narcissus was not described as being in a trance by means of which, certain knowledge could be received and, he was certainly not scrying as an explicitly magical interpretation of the Narcissus myth might suggest.[340] Instead, Skovoroda gestured towards the possibility of personhood encountering the forces which shape reality once that personhood has done the work of pursuing its own being to its absolute limits. It was with that thought in mind that Skovoroda has optimistically suggested that if personhood was to realise that it was a world unto itself, it would then necessarily be able to peer behind the coarse veil of nature and ascertain its truth.[341]

Consequently, rather than seeing the totality of all existence as somehow, directly reflected within the mirror of his own subjectivity, Skovoroda's Narcissus gazed upon the never-ending movement of his own reconstitution as personhood. Like the sun which was always streaming out of itself, Narcissus became towards the point at which he was conscious of all of the movements which formed his being. A.I. Abramov and A.V. Kovalenko have drawn attention to the importance of the sun in Skovoroda's thought from the perspective of the Neoplatonic metaphysics of light and their conclusions are quite pertinent to the present

[340] For an interpretation of Ovid's Narcissus from the standpoint of scrying, see M. Nelson, "Narcissus: Myth and Magic", *The Classical Journal* 95, 4 (2000), p. 365.
[341] G.S. Skovoroda, 'Narkiss. Razglogol o tom: Uznai sebia', p. 143.

discussion as to why intense self-preoccupation does not necessarily result in subjectivism. From an anthropological standpoint, the phenomenon of light blurred the distinction between the object and the subject and allowed personhood to be "given to itself as cosmos" at the same time as it allowed "cosmos to be given to itself as personhood".[342] This was so because whilst the light of reason reached out towards the light of objective truth, the latter found its reflection within the cognitive capacity of the very same reason. In the case of Narcissus, this kind of reflection did not proceed by way of imagery, nor was it entirely conceptual either, instead it relied upon replicating the movements of God within human personhood.

It may now be somewhat clearer as to why Skovoroda was so concerned with the right kind of depth and the right kind of movement for personhood to engage in. It may be recalled that a popular reading of the Narcissus myth construed the latter's death as punishment for misunderstanding the origin of the reflection and of placing inappropriate value upon it.[343] What this implied was that if personhood focused too much upon itself without at the same time, sounding out its own transcendent depth, it was at risk of dissolution. That is, when an inherently metaphysical entity such as personhood was too readily equated with its psychological states or with its worldly postures, its perpetual inward movement could be stifled. Thus, Skovoroda raised the challenge as to what aspects of personhood could withstand a discerning inward gaze without withering away as dangerous illusions. The radicality of Skovoroda's position was precisely in the fact that ultimately, all aspects of personhood dissolved as a result of self-introspection properly undertaken, except the process of personhood's coming into being. Personhood was therefore, simultaneously, an object of intimate familiarity and considerable otherness to itself. On the one hand, insofar as personhood was self-conscious of itself in increasingly refined ways, it could be said to know itself. On the other hand however, insofar as personhood was

[342] A.I. Abramov and A.V. Kovalenko, 'Filosofskie vzgliady G.S. Skovorody v krugu ego istoriko-filosofskih interesov', pp. 448-9.
[343] M. Nelson, 'Narcissus: Myth and Magic', p. 382.

engaged in an un-ending dynamic of becoming what it was, it could said to be always new to itself. The combination of these seemingly irreconcilable polarities within the structure of personhood ensued that the latter could work towards a type of self-relation which was absorbing without being naively solipsistic.

Skovoroda's reappraisal of the Narcissus myth along the lines advanced thus far, represented an authorial prologue to *The Narcissus*.[344] Subsequent to that prologue was the actual dialogue part of the treatise wherein, the content of the myth was discussed in terms of its application to individual personhoods. Arguably, in order to further intrigue his audience, Skovoroda posed a rhetorical question to Narcissus regarding what it is that he might have seen reflected in his own waters.[345] Narcissus' response would have unsettled adherents of traditional Russian Orthodox theology an account of its attempt to conform the truth of the Bible to introspective praxis. Firstly, Skovoroda hinted at a vision of a new earth which in turn, implied that Narcissus related to not only himself but also to the entirety of the creation in an eschatological manner. That is, a transfigured creation was at least tacitly, relocated from a historical future to an existential present. Secondly, Skovoroda made a point of merging the identities of Biblical characters with that of Narcissus and at one point exclaiming, "how is David not a true Narcissus?"[346] Even Saint Paul's internalisation of Christ was also interpreted by Skovoroda in a way which indicated that the former was another Narcissus.[347] Such unusual uses of the Narcissus myth should not be read as symptomatic of attempts to inflate personhood at the expense of all other organising principles governing reality. It was rather the case that Skovoroda genuinely thought that an intellectual progress towards the limits of personhood somehow, necessarily meant a contemporaneous progress towards God. Perhaps more crucially, it was this very introspective becoming which enabled personhood to give birth to symbolic discourse with which it could narrate its own experiences to itself and

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[344] Skovoroda wrote the prologue to Narcissus – probably his first major work – at the very end of his life, see Iu.Ia. Barabash, *Znau cheloveka*, p. 175.
[345] G.S. Skovoroda, 'Narkiss. Razglogol o tom: Uznai sebia', p. 125.
[346] *Ibid.*
[347] *Ibid.*

others. This may be why, in terms alluding to Plato's concept of mental pregnancy, the opening line to *The Narcissus* was that the treatise was Skovoroda's "first-born son".[348] The issue now was to locate the means through which, other personhoods could not only locate their source but to also birth discourse which would situate them in objective reality.

The initial move towards personhood's transcendent self-relation was conscious recognition of a lack of personhood. This may sound rather odd, but Skovoroda did seem to think that apprehension of personhood was almost synonymous with the latter's coming into being considering the immense emphasis he placed on experiencing the source of personhood. The reasons which led to the obscuring of personhood were very much to do with the overly enthusiastic pursuit of superficial knowledge. In order to clarify this point, it is necessary to momentarily turn to another of Skovoroda's dialogues, *A Discussion of Five Travellers on True Happiness in Life* (1770s). The fundamental reason as to why individuals neglected their own selves was due to over-preoccupation with pursuing external features of the Enlightenment. In this rare reference to the Age of Reason, Skovoroda did recognise advances in all of the major disciplines including experimental science. However, in humanistic terms, the cost of unreflective progress in technical knowledge was that personhood expanded its range of desires without actually satisfying any of its innate needs.[349] For Skovoroda, the prominence given to the sciences necessarily resulted in an almost complete marginalisation of that "highest science" without which, "it is impossible to speak about any other science".[350] The highest science of course, was the 'science of man' which was perennial and not intrinsically depending on any religious tradition:

> Mathematics has not even been heard of yet, but our ancestors have already had for a long time, temples

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[348] *Ibid*.
[349] G.S. Skovoroda, 'Razgovor piati putnikov ob istinnon schiastii v zhizni' in Skovoroda. G.S. *Sochineniia* V.I. Shinkaruk, p. 327.
[350] *Ibid.*

> devoted to the school of Christ. Within them, the entire human race was learning how to reach happiness which was peculiar to it alone. And this is a catholic, that is to say a universal science. Pagan sanctuaries and sacrificial altars in their essence, are but the very same temples of Christ's teaching. Within them was inscribed 'know thyself' which is the wisest and the best of sayings.[351]

It may seem as though Skovoroda has reduced all past and present spiritual organisational forms to acts of self-introspection. However, this would be an incorrect conclusion because Skovoroda has also deliberately heightened the tension between imperative of introspective becoming whilst and a rather lukewarm validation of external institutions which served as an ever-present reminder of the need for introspection. It was precisely because Pagan and Christian cultures have turned away from a truth which could only be reached inwardly that a space was opened up for worldly pursuits which in Skovoroda's opinion, was one of the defining features of the Eighteenth-century.[352]

If, as has been argued earlier in this section, personhood as conceived by Skovoroda was primarily a process-based entity and not an innate set of properties, then it makes sense to think that inattention to personhood was almost synonymous with the latter's non-existence. When Skovoroda lamented the loss of the injunction to know thyself, his reasoning was that what was actually being lost was the pedagogy by means of which, individuals could find themselves and "to be restored to themselves".[353] Narcissus would not be who he was, without being conscious of how he was always coming into being. Not being able to trace personhood to its source was akin to not having it because human individuality resulted from the intellect's capacity to cognise its ongoing reconstitution. For that reason, Skovoroda was quite unequivocal in thinking that for personhood to be happy and to be able to find itself was one and the same thing.[354] Skovoroda's criticism of an overly pragmatic understanding of

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[351] *Ibid.* p. 329.
[352] *Ibid.*
[353] *Ibid.*
[354] *Ibid.*

Enlightenment then, did not proceed from a distaste for rational thought. Rather, the problem was that there was a complete lack of a humanistic impulse informing the rise of the sciences. That is, Skovoroda was anxious about the extent to which, personhood could be carried away with products of its own reason away from itself.

Returning again to *Narcissus*, it is now possible to ascertain what course of action Skovoroda wanted individuals to actualise their personhoods. Skovoroda's privileging of self-love over worldly reflections of the self was very much founded upon the risk of too closely identifying personhood with symptoms of historical progress. When, through application of reason, personhood improved its external circumstances, there was temptation to presume that it has intrinsically improved also. Whilst Skovoroda did not seem to deny completely the correlation between the well-being of personhood and the growth in knowledge, he did think that self-introspection and application of rational discourse towards practical ends were two very different activities. Introspective praxis was an unending task which sustained personhood in its identity. Whereas, practical improvement was always limited by the narrow scope of set tasks which found their completion. Personhood's freedom to remain itself was always constricted by the pressure to stifle its inward dynamic in favour of external activity. Thus, from this standpoint, Skovoroda aforementioned comparison of the world to a putrid sea gains additional weight because it can be seen as expressing the illusory nature of progress if the latter was not founded on personal becoming.

Existing scholarship has not yet properly taken stock of the mystical anchorage of Skovoroda's critique of the kind of Enlightenment which was encouraged by the Russian state. The Russian *Polizeistaat* depended on the promotion of the very same disciplines and activities which Skovoroda singled out as being responsible for the eclipse of personhood. Out of all of the Mystical thinkers covered in this thesis, Skovoroda was most uncompromising in seeking to disaggregate the transcendent identity of human beings from their duties as citizens. Consequently, rather than focusing on the development of personhood

as a result of its actions undertaken in the temporal sphere, Skovoroda gave prominence to the cognitive operations personhood performed towards itself independently of social norms. It is even possible to make the wider claim that apart from reacting against the constricting effects of the Russian polity, Skovoroda was also, and perhaps indirectly, reacting against the secular Western European Enlightened notion of character as "a construct existing in an intersubjective space of the demands of others, and within which a person's identity was of necessity devised."[355] Skovoroda did not devote any attention to character. Rather, he concentrated aspects of personhood as the latter existed prior to any individual characteristics. Nonetheless, the basic premise remains in force because Skovoroda had not only curtailed the formational role that conformity to socio-political norms played in the development of the self but has also indicated the harm of unreflective conformity to external social pressures.

In order to reveal the extent to which human beings were lost to themselves as a consequence of being overly committed to achieving practical tasks, Skovoroda deliberately perplexed his interlocutors in *The Narcissus* by suggesting that they did not really know themselves.[356] Human beings only saw isolated fragments of themselves which reflected the fragmentary and finite tasks they performed in the mundane world. Such fragmentation prevented personhood from becoming conscious of itself as a totality sustained by its inward activity. One of the characters in the dialogue who voiced Skovoroda's views, argued that ignorance and absence of the self are synonymous:

> Know that we see persons in the same way as if someone was to show you only a leg or a heel whilst covering up the rest of the body and the head without which, it is impossible to know that person. You may even see yourself but you do not cognise yourself. However, not to cognise yourself is the same thing as to lose one's own self. If in your house there is a buried treasure but you do not know of it, then it is akin to not

[355] E.J. Hundert, 'The European Enlightenment and the History of the Self' in Porter, R. ed. *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 81.
[356] G.S. Skovoroda, 'Narkiss. Razglogol o tom: Uznai sebia', p. 126.

> being there. Thus, to know yourself and to find yourself mean the same thing. But you do not know yourself and do not have yourself…[357]

Skovoroda did not necessarily call for a return to an ascetic distancing from temporal affairs. What was called for however, was for individuals to be capable of distancing the identity of their selves from the latter's temporal manifestations. It is noteworthy that Skovoroda followed up his reference to the practical sciences with the comparison of personhood to various body-parts. This may have been done in order to accentuate the danger of aligning personal identity with function too closely. A function, at least in its Aristotelian sense, is always limited by its teleology and as such, always distinct from other functions possessing purposes of their own. A particular discipline could not stand for the totality of knowledge in the same way that a limb could not be representative of the entire body. What Skovoroda was looking for was for ways of identifying the *totality of personhood with the totality of its being* in a somewhat similar way to the manner in which Plato identified the circular movement of the human soul with the perpetual movements of the universe.[358]

By way of offering a remedy to the increasing fragmentation of personhood, Skovoroda demarcated a need for a rather dramatic realisation on the part of individuals that they lack humanity understood as the totality of personhood. Individuals had to intuitively experience the loss of their own wholeness and to experience that loss as an absence of their own authentic selves. In one of the most climactic parts of *Narcissus*, Skovoroda declared, "know that we lack the whole of man and should exclaim, Lord, we do not have a man."[359] Given the erotic nature of Narcissus' longing for the source of his personhood, the longing for totality must also be seen in an erotic light. In simple rationalistic terms, the above quotation is nonsensical because, if personhood was absent then no-one would be able to know and act upon that absence.

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[357] *Ibid.* pp. 126-7.
[358] H.D. Rankin, *Plato and the Individual* (London: Methuen, 1964), p. 65
[359] G.S. Skovoroda, 'Narkiss. Razglogol o tom: Uznai sebia', p. 126.

However, it makes sense from a more nuanced perspective offered by Plato's *Symposium* where Socrates problematized the distinction between presence and absence. It was possible, held Socrates, for individuals to have certain qualities without ceasing to want them.[360] This happened because the desire for something which individuals already possessed was necessitated by a desire for that possession to continue in the future. At issue was the individuals' anxiety as to their ability to access in the future, what they thought they already possessed in the present.[361] Because of this, as Diotima would subsequently teach Socrates, individuals found themselves in a middling state between having and not having the telos of their aspirations.

If personhood was primarily understood in terms of its practical activities which normally found their conclusion, it would be plausible to think of the former as lacking a future. That is, aforementioned Platonic reasoning can be seen to operate in Skovoroda's reluctance to either unreservedly grant or deny personhood to human beings. For individuals to recognise that they lacked personhood could therefore be seen as a realisation that their personhood was not guaranteed to proceed beyond their actions and experiences in the mundane world. In more speculative terms, it could be said that the problem was that individuals' self-consciousness could not canvass the self in its entirety because it was too habituated to perceive the latter on the basis of its external manifestations. It was only after having laid to rest the belief that personhood was circumscribed by its worldly activity and that it was ever-present to consciousness in its entirety, that Skovoroda felt confident in providing a definition of personhood. Skovoroda waited until, out of desperation, one of his interlocutors demanded that he share his thoughts on what personhood actually was after being told that he did not have one. The resulting definition was intrinsically unstable and highly reflective of the interlocutor's agitation:

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[360] Plato, *Symposium* tr. R. Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 200c. Here, I use the term 'possession' not in a literal sense implying ownership but rather suggesting whether something is present or not.
[361] *Ibid.*

> Listen my soul! I admit that I don't exactly know. But if you will like my thoughts, then let us talk sincerely. You no doubt know that we call an eye, ear, tongue, hands and feet and all of our external body, cannot act by themselves. They are enslaved by our thoughts. Thought is their queen and is in constant agitation night and day. She discourses, advises, judges and motivates. Whereas our materiality is like a beast of burden or a tail which follows it without a will of its own. You can therefore see that thought is our innermost point and centre and that is why, it is often called heart. And so, not our external body but our thought is considered to be our main *person*. We are contained in her. She is us.[362]

Skovoroda was quite deliberate in trying to relate the agitated state of mind of one of his interlocutors with the agitated nature of thought. One way of interpreting this juxtaposition is to think of agitation itself as a gateway into a more authentic self. If thought was always characterised by movement, then an agitated person, by virtue of being agitated in a substantive existential sense, was to some degree replicating the state of being of his or her personhood. Thus, anxiety as to whether personhood could perpetuate itself into the future was lessened because agitation, albeit of the right kind and directed at the most essential of things, was personhood's normative state.

With some qualification, it would not be wrong to interpret Skovoroda's definition of personhood as discursive. What is meant by this however, is not a postmodern relativisation of personhood as a protean entity lacking in autonomy, occasioned by discursive practises which in turn, could never quite actualise it as anything other than a kaleidoscopic image of its own impossibility.[363] For Skvoroda, personhood was discursive only in the sense that discourse meant self-consciousness and the symbolic narrative strategies it deployed to illuminate its object of inquiry. Thus, whereas it could be said that a postmodern self was composed of mutually-exclusive postures formulated in response to pressures to

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[362] G.S. Skovoroda, 'Narkiss. Razglogol o tom: Uznai sebia', p. 128.
[363] K.J. Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), pp. 41-3.

conform or to be seen as a certain type, Skovoroda's emphasis on a transcendent self, aimed squarely at achieving an ongoing state of self-consciousness. Any posture which personhood could take, be it for its own sake or for that of an external audience was a hindrance because in so doing, it preoccupied itself with how it projected itself and not with itself as such. Skovoroda's identification of personhood as thought served to accentuate the importance of not confusing personhood with the latter's possible fragmentation into types in the same way that the capacity to think was different from the content of any thought.

The extent to which, Skovoroda conflated discourse and personhood was exemplified in his theological explanation as to where personhood ultimately came from. In light of the earlier discussion of the Narcissus myth, it might be thought that if God was the source of personhood, then any discussion about the possibility of experiencing personhood was really, a discussion about the possibility of experiencing the divine. However, it was more the case that Skovoroda inverted the traditional understanding of God as the source in a way which even by speculative mystical standards, appeared to concede to personhood authority which was usually accorded to God. Skovoroda gave prominence to the 'interior man' concept and suggested that the latter was birthed by divine logos within individuals and that it was necessary to distinguish it from the purely historical *creation* of identity.[364] This was important insofar as, personhood was construed as something which had to come into being in the course of individual human lifetime. Yet, Skovoroda had also, deified personhood in a way which problematized the very notion of God as an external cause of things. In the course of the dialogue, one of the interlocutors, echoing Skovoroda's views, sang an encomium to his newly discovered personhood (which he called his heart) with the aim of elucidating what that discovery entailed in terms of his internal structure:

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[364] G.S. Skovoroda, "Narkiss. Razglogol o tom: Uznai sebia', pp. 150-1. See also, S.P. Scherer, The Life and Thought of Russia's First Lay Theologian Grigorij Savvič Skovoroda (1722-1794), PhD Thesis, Ohio State University, 1969, p. 70.

> I have found the person. I have found a messiah. Not an earthly idol but a true and divine person in my flesh. I have struggled to find him in my shadow at the close of my days. The salvation of my being! Until now, I have been in the darkness and in the dirt. That is, my heart, I was consuming earth. But now I am free of earth's chains because you have killed its kernel within me which once observed the futility of my heel. You have enthroned yourself in its place and revealed to me a new heaven and a new earth and your own self, sitting in the place of the heavenly father's right hand. May your strength be my world and tranquillity! May you be my blessed Sabbath! May dove wings carry me from the depths of the earth to blessed rest. Why are you still suffering, my soul? Why are you still disturbing me? You have come to know the person within you and his infinite strength. Have hope in him, now that you know him. He is your head and husband under the guise of your flesh and blood. He is your God and salvation.[365]

Skovoroda did not imply that God was in actual fact, the individual's personhood. However, at the same time, there were unmistakable signs that Skovoroda thought of personhood in explicitly Christological terms. This could be interpreted on several levels. In a more straightforward sense, personhood could be considered to be its own messiah if its salvation was hinged on it becoming authentically itself. Moreover, if the birthing of personhood replicated the birthing of Christ as a discursive embodiment of God, then the only conclusion which could be drawn was that a cognizance of divinity could only be occasioned by the disclosure of a transformed personhood. Indeed, far from implicating his audience into a discussion about personhood in order to then expound upon theological matters, it was rather that theology was merely used as the means to prioritise personhood as a sovereign entity.

Once the above passage is compared with Skovoroda's earlier reference to how Narcissus transformed into the sun, then it becomes relatively clear as to how personhood could be considered divine without at the same time, standing in for God. It may be recalled that a sun-like personhood was described as firstly,

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[365] *Ibid.* pp. 152-3.

godly and secondly, as sending out divine rays from within itself. It may also be recalled that Narcissus intended to immerse himself into such state of affairs. One important conclusion can be drawn from this. Personhood by the manner of its being, expressed its own divinity associated with infinite movement. In doing so, personhood also allowed God to disclose himself as discursive potency which drove personhood's self-conscious movement. Such an interpretation is premised on the considerable emphasis that Skovoroda placed on describing God as logos, strength and growth.[366] Consequently, it was not that personhood actualised itself in the course of a becoming towards God. Rather, it was that personhood and God appeared simultaneously in the act of self-consciousness in the same way that Narcissus' own self and its source manifested themselves through the act of immersion.

Narcissus reached a point of climax precisely when personhood not only became identical with the movement characterising it but also when it approximated most closely, the kind of self-outpouring that Pseudo-Dionysius attributed to God. However, whilst in the *Divine Names*, God moved out of himself through an erotic longing for and via the Good abstractly understood, Skovoroda gestured towards a personhood which desired and then shared its own discourse about its own perpetual movement. To that end, Skovoroda described personhood's final and ultimate immersion into an erotic wonder at its own transformation. This closely mirrored how Narcissus was transformed into a beautiful self in the context of beauty. Skovoroda explained to his interlocutors that personhood consumed everything which was not its true self in a fiery discourse:

> If your heart is warming up within you, then through your discourse you will fan the spark of resurrection at the same time as the sacred flame of your rightful anger will consume your inner rot. A blazing divine river will enlarge and drown those who are impure. A warm heart is the holy spirit's fiery tongue which sings, upon heaven and earth, a

[366] *Ibid.* p. 152.

> new miracle of resurrection. Do you not see that everyone has an old heart and an earthly tongue? Everyone is afraid, melancholy, unfulfilled and desperate when deprived of heavenly Heraclitus' consolation.[367]

Upon a perfunctory reading it might seem that Skovoroda was careless in conflating the fate of individual personhood and that of humanity in general as well as conflating the discourse of the individual with that of the holy spirit. Yet, it must be noted that the above description was founded upon an observation undertaken inwardly. That is, whilst all personhoods ought to undergo this process, the latter could only take place on an individual basis. The event that personhood was observing was only happening to itself even though, it was intrinsically not different from the one which could have been experienced by another personhood. If Skovoroda endeavoured to foreground personhood as coming into being and as separate from its subjectivity, then it is possible to see why he would resort to the image of a fiery river which was simultaneously, collective and intimately individual. The discourse of personhood was not only its very movement but also and for that very reason, indistinguishable from God. By way of an analogy, when Diotima introduced Socrates to the blazing sea of beauty which subsumed all particular instances thereof, she did so on the presumption that what the intellect encountered was beyond the bounds of its own individuality.

Skovoroda's reference to the Heracletian flux was not intended to be taken as a serious gesture towards pre-Socratic philosophy. The intention rather, was to locate the strongest terms in which to present a particular structure of personhood as well as to bring out the connotations of a never-ceasing renewal. Thus, a resurrected personhood was one which burst forth into an endless discursive praxis about itself, to itself and most importantly, within itself. This does not mean that personhood remained silent from the perspective of a worldly observer. To the contrary, Skovoroda's very recourse to dialogue-form of exposition containing constantly evolving layers of symbols reflected a practical

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[367] *Ibid*. p. 160.

result of personhood's preoccupation with its own metaphysical anchorage. Throughout his dialogues, Skovoroda always returned to the same basic themes of his thought but often relying on different imagery and argumentation.[368] Such dynamism in turn, implied the extent to which Skovoroda was committed to a personhood conceived in process terms. Skovoroda's myth of Narcissus disappearing into his source has been, in the above quotation re-expressed as personhood's final escape from the strictures of mundane temporality into a reality characterised by transcendent wonder. This is why, Skovoroda may have thought that such state of affairs was inherently consoling to a personhood which was otherwise, doomed to contexts which could neither contain its depth nor support its naturally agile mode of being. This is also why, Skovoroda called a personhood which succeeded to immerse itself into itself, an "authentic person" potentially present in all individuals.[369]

Ascetic ethic

Skovoroda's ethical thought revolved around the central issue of self-cultivation undertaken via dialogue in the course of which, personhood became its own ethical subject. In keeping with a generative approach to religion as a birthing of meaning and with a concept of personhood which stressed an ongoing intellectual experience of the very genesis of its own being, it is not surprising that Skovoroda postulated an ethic which foregrounded activity rather than discrete actions. This of course, can be explained as an instance of a humanistic desire to verbalise experiences, including the dictates of ethical imagination and therefore, distinct from various Enlightenment approaches to ethical thought and action.[370] Yet, at the same time, it would be futile to cleanly separate humanistic

[368] Bagalei
[369] G.S. Skovoroda, 'Narkiss,' p. 162.
[370] N. Pylypiuk made a point of separating Skovoroda's humanism "from the perspective of the Enlightenment." See her remarkably erudite "The Primary Door: At the Threshold of Skovoroda's Theology and Poetics", *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 14, 3-4 (1990), p. 551.

intentions from the Enlightened concern to emancipate and to create new forms of being notwithstanding considerable differences in their respective stylistic expressions. Skovoroda singled out joy as the prime ethical activity undertaken by personhood. Whilst such an approach underscored the underlying self-sufficiency of the self, it did so at a cost of some of the traditional beliefs regarding the latter's teleology, especially in relation to the afterlife. This in turn, meant that Skovoroda had to prioritise personhood's present in the kind of eschatological terms which were normally applied towards descriptions of its future state without at the same time, compromising his Christian commitments.

It may be somewhat odd to think that asceticism has anything to do with an intensely joyful experience of life. Certainly, there are many descriptions of ecstatic experiences of God's grace or even of a transfigured nature to be found in the writings of the Desert Fathers and subsequent monastic literature. Moreover, the enduring belief that melancholia was one of the temptations by means of which, a monk could be made to deviate from his spiritual concerns[371] further underscored that at the very least, a serene mindset was not incompatible with strict asceticism. Skovoroda however, made a point of firstly, adumbrating certain ascetic themes and secondly, of explicitly orienting them towards an almost carnivalesque understanding of life. In different terms to Kheraskov's attempt to set the conditions for the emergence of ascetic ethics out of an understanding of nature as a bountiful entity prone to sharing her largesse amongst those who knew her, Skovoroda aimed at a similar result. Namely, to demonstrate that genuine happiness could be found as a consequence of personhood's inward concentration upon its own self. This concentration had a practical social aspect of friendly discourse which nonetheless, did not appear to just have truth as its object but was as much concerned with the transformational effects of participating in an extended dialogue without necessarily reaching a final conclusion.

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[371] A. Feld, *Melancholy and the Otherness of God: A Study of the Hermeneutics of Depression* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), pp. 15-17.

Skovoroda could not exclusively rely on Platonic and Neoplatonic sources to promote his very particular understanding of the good life. This is why, in his *Grateful Erodius* (1787), Skovoroda embraced some aspects of Epicureanism in order to underscore the seriousness with which he approached the idea of pleasure as joy. Whilst Skovoroda did not directly cite Epicurus, he did nonetheless make recourse to some of his doctrines and terminology. In the broadest sense, Skovoroda inherited from Epicurus the imperative to alleviate anxiety and the concomitant constancy of pleasure. Indeed, for Epicurus, there was a direct link between a lessening of mental disturbance and an emerging capacity for an ongoing contemplation of truth. In his *Letter to Herodotus*, Epicurus urged the latter to set aside irrational fears so that the ensuing peace of mind will allow for constant attention on what was deemed to be of primary importance:

> Human beings are put in this state not by correct judgement but by some irrational impulse. Therefore, since they cannot define or set a limit to the marvellous and the strange, they suffer an equally or even more intense disturbance than if they had applied a rational judgement to these matters. But peace of mind means being released from all this and retaining in memory the general and the most important principles.[372]

The ascetic implications of such thinking are quite prominent. The point was not merely to overcome various forms of mental disturbance but to also, to utilise the resulting state of *ataraxia* towards knowledge. This in turn, had a bearing on the self-sufficiency of the person, especially in regards to pleasure in at least two ways. Firstly, an autonomous self was intrinsically free.[373] Secondly, for an autonomous self, consciousness of being alive was pleasurable in itself.[374] Of course for

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[372] Epicurus, *The Essential Epicurus. Letters, Principal Doctrines, Vatican Sayings, and Fragments* tr. E. O'Connor (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1993), 81. The phrase "retaining in memory" must be understood in an active and an ongoing sense. Alternative translation which brings this particular meaning out is a "constant recollection of general and most important truths", see Epicurus in J. Warren, 'Removing Fear' in Warren, J. ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 234-5.
[373] T. O'Keefe, 'Action and Responsibility' in *Ibid*, p. 148.
[374] C. Gill, 'Psychology' in *Ibid.* pp. 139-40.

Epicurus, these states of affairs were primarily reflective of a life devoted to critical discrimination as to which pleasures are to be pursued and which are to be avoided. Yet, at the same time, it cannot be denied that the connection between freedom and pleasure had an existential component which exceeded its epistemic importance. That is, Epicurus did hope for a "god-like" existence which could be achieved within the finite life of an individual.[375] In fact, if the good life was achieved, then the concern with eternal existence would naturally fade away.[376]

As many other Eighteenth-century thinkers, Skovoroda accepted some features of Epicureanism without being an Epicurean in the proper sense of the term. In fact, given that Enlightenment reception of Epicurus was often via "third-party attributions", the manner of appropriation of his thought was very selective.[377] Consequently, Skovoroda's qualified acceptance of hedonism need not be overly dependent on Epicurus' methods and intentions. Moreover, contemporary scholarship on Epicurus and the Enlightenment suggested that all too often, Epicureanism in the Eighteenth-century was approached monolithically as anti-religious and generally aggressive in ways which was at odds with the notion of *ataraxia.*[378] This is a crucial admission because not only was Skovoroda's approach to Epicurus very different to ones taken Western European contexts on account of his mystical orientation but more importantly, because emphasis on peace of mind (peace implying a mind that has found a movement appropriate to itself) was one of the cornerstones of Skovoroda's thought. Anglophone scholarship continues to analyse Russian reception of Epicurus by foregrounding the philosopher's materialistic explanation of reality and his presumed conflation of religion with superstitious fears.[379] Thus, Skovoroda's originality, was in avoiding the materialistic side to Epicureanism and at the same time, in maximising the

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[375] J. Warren, 'Removing Fear' in *Ibid*. p. 247.
[376] *Ibid.*
[377] N. Leddy and A.S. Lifschitz, 'Epicurus in the Enlightenment: An Introduction' in Leddy, N. and Lifschitz, A.S. eds. *Epicurus in the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2009), p. 4.
[378] *Ibid.* p. 2.
[379] A. Kahn 'Epicureanism in the Russian Enlightenment: Dmitrii Anichkov and Atomic Theory' in *Ibid.* 119-22. Kahn's is nonetheless at outstanding study of the influence of Epicureanism upon natural philosophy discourse in Russia.

latter's potential as spiritual praxis. That is, Skovvoroda was primarily interested in developing certain mental postures which would allow personhood to take maximum pleasure from its own self and from that of others with as little interruption as was humanly possible.

In *Grateful Erodius*, Skovoroda focused on showing the difference between a personhood in the grip of melancholy, usually as a result of disappointment in the fleeting nature of social conventions and beliefs and a personhood conscious of enjoying the only thing which can never be enjoyed sufficiently. This treatise has often been seen by scholars as largely devoted to the problem of pedagogy and as such, was usually favourably assessed for its progressive views on the matter.[380] What has sometimes gone unnoticed was that apart from discussing the merits of certain types of educational practices, Skovoroda also undertook a defence of dialogue as a joyful activity. Drawing on Epicurean concern with achieving freedom from anxiety, and with a Christian concern with salvation, Skovoroda envisaged an ascetic prioritisation of what is to be the substance of the dialogue which would in turn, replace melancholy with joy:

> Is there anything more salvific than a dialogue about God? Everyone seems to avoid it. Is there anything more melancholy than to worry about the paroxysms of worldly vanities? Everyone seems to imbibe in them. How does this come about? From the fact that these people have a headache. They are ill and will die and there is no Elysius to resurrect them. For what is the head but the heart. As root is to a tree, the sun is to the world and the tsar is to the people, so is the heart the root, the sun, the tsar and the head to man.[381]

Of course, as per earlier discussion in this chapter, dialogue for Skovoroda was

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[380] For a discussion of Skovoroda's pedagogical thought, in the context of the Enlightenment, see J.L. Black, 'H.S. Skovoroda as Teacher: The Image as Model,' in R.H. Marshall Jr and T.E. Bird, *Hryhorij Savyč Skovoroda, pp. 79-87.*

[381] G.S. Skovoroda, 'Blagodarnyi Erodii,' in Skovoroda, G.S. *Sochineniia* T II, ed. V.I. Shinkaruk p. 123.

primarily an inward activity. Individuals caught up in vain pursuits end up unable to attend to their own selves. Yet, at the same time, this was said in a dialogue between a God-loving stork, Erodius and a worldly and initially sceptical monkey, Pishek. Yet, *Grateful Erodius* is somewhat unlike Skovoroda's other dialogues in that it presents a real contest between two mutually exclusive outlooks on how to live and because of this, is indicative of the possibility of a discourse between as well as within, individuals.

It is evident that Skovoroda wanted to prioritise the process of dialogue as an aspect of ontic reality which formed it's subject without losing sight of the psychological, if not to say materialistic justification of joyful discourse. This complication is best approached if it is remembered that notwithstanding the heterogeneity of his sources and rather playful language, Skovoroda always remained a Platonically-minded thinker. Thus, the above passage suggests an inter-connected but nonetheless a two-tiered proposition. At the first and most important level, Erodius implied the need for the intellect to fix its attention upon the transcendent. This fixation was not only synonymous with personhood's becoming as attested by reference to its salvific effect but also, synonymous with the very act of dialogue. At the second and more immediate level, Erodius resorted to mildly hedonic rhetoric focusing on absence of anxiety and pain over things which are inconsequential in comparison to the divine substance of the dialogue the intellect could potentially engage in. Of particular note is Skovoroda's sense of the finality of things and ambivalence regarding the afterlife. Arguably, the only kind of salvation which was possible was one which involved personhood narrating its own exposure to the divine and in doing so, becoming towards it.

At a superficial glance, it may seem as though Skovoroda was repeating the same Narcissistic argument he performed in his other dialogues. However, whilst this is up to a point true, it must be stressed that presently, Skovoroda's concern was not so much with unmasking being as it was with delineating a certain quality of life resulting from being's appearance in the world of

personhood. In his preamble to *Grateful Erodius*, Skovoroda restated the now familiar notion of the heart as an abyss which "cannot be satisfied with anything other than its own self."[382] Yet, Skovoroda did not follow up this statement with a suggestion of a coincidence or an intersection of an inward depth present in all individuals and the ineffable divine. Instead, Skovoroda indicated that upon being oriented towards itself, the heart could experience an "eternal spring of joy."[383] Thus, whilst the intention towards authenticity remained, it was coloured by a language which was more emotive than a straightforward pursuit of metaphysical certainty might necessitate. Especially when seen in the context of a problematic resurrection, Skovoroda's point may have been that individual well-being cannot be delegated to any authority and that any improvement must be evident in the life-time of that individual. That is, experience of eternity, whilst predominantly intellectual, must incorporate an ecstatic liberation from the world of anxiety.

Before Skovoroda felt confident of implicating himself further into Epicurean nomenclature, he seemed to have been under the onus of having to repeat his commitment to a vision of eternity in line with his Platonic thinking. Erodius' interlocutor reached a state of bewilderment upon hearing about the inexhaustible nature of the heart. As a result, Pishek was sufficiently alienated from her attachment to popular mores to be receptive to wisdom. Such a reliance on arousing the audience in order to prepare its insight into transcendent otherness is of course, one of Plato's favoured moves which was explored at length in *Theaetetus*.[384] Completely inverting the well-worn moralistic claim that the world is but a stage for competing vanities, Skovoroda conceived of eternity as the ultimate spectacle for a curious intellect and deliberately belittled it as a pastime. Only a few individuals were able to immerse themselves into such a vision of eternity and avoid the boredom of the mundane:

> Initially, only Israel entertained itself thus and has been named a sacred language whilst all the other ones which

[382] *Ibid*. p. 108.
[383] *Ibid*. pp. 108-9.
[384] Plato, *Theaetetus* tr. R. Waterfield (London: Penguin, 2004), 177a.

> have become commonplace and safeguard vanity, are but animals. This royal theatre is a wondrous spectacle and has always been favoured by all wise, virtuous and saintly people. All spectacles result in boredom and disgust except this one. In other words, the more it is seen the more one's desire is enflamed. The sweetest of wonders are exposed once one's interiority is revealed. Is this not the most saccharine and the most inexhaustible honeycomb of eternity? The world is inexhaustible because it fails to completely satisfy. *Eternity* is inexhaustible because it does not embitter.[385]

Remarkably, Skovoroda seemed to have described an intellect devoted to experiencing eternity in the same vein as a Patristically-grounded theologian might have described the afterlife. It is as though, the world of the senses has been displaced by the world of the mind without personhood having to undergo death and resurrection. This was an important aspect of Skovoroda's larger argument regarding joy. Namely, that it could not be found in any ordinary experiences and that therefore, what is normally taken for a life of bliss, is in fact an illusion. So, what Skovoroda wanted was to surprise his readers by telling them that if they desired absolute joy, then they would have to orient their intellects towards its own absolute foundations. By bringing out the hedonistic aspect to a life of intellectual labour, Skovoroda was able to surmount the initial resistance of his readers who may have had a significantly different understanding of pleasure and of ways of attaining it. Skovoroda's description of eternity reflected his Platonic orientation but was presented in a way which pleasure-seeking individuals would find amiable.

At this point, it may become quite evident just how unusual Skovoroda's understanding of asceticism actually was. Asceticism was not only a strategy towards discovering and then living in conformity with the truth. Nor even, was asceticism restricted to separating core aspects of the good life from their defunct imitations. In terms reflective of an Epicurean garden, Skovoroda's advice was to minimise participation in one set of activities in order to derive maximum pleasure

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[385] G.S. Skovoroda, 'Blagodarnyi Erodii,' p. 124.

from another. So, it was not merely that the majority of people forsook the truth for a life of pleasure but rather, that they have not been able to be absorbed into an activity which admitted of no dissatisfaction. Skovoroda's way of testing this was by determining whether a certain pleasurable activity occasioned pain. Any undertaking intended to cause pleasure necessarily resulted either in the latter's dissipation resulting in boredom or in its frustration resulting in disgust. In both cases, desire was abridged together with its object, forcing personhood to search for ever-new ways of satisfying itself. Pleasure's duration was simply too short to allow personhood to exist in its grip for any protracted period of time. Consequently, the test of real inexhaustibility was the persistence with which an experience remained within the purview of the intellect without negating its own identity. For Skovoroda, eternity's boundlessness was very much characterised by its ongoing presence as a joyful event. So, Skovoroda was not only consistently reiterating pleasure as a dominant ethical principle but was also, postulating it as integral to the existence of personhood.

In less abstract terms, the key problem that Skovoroda was trying to address was the economy of desire. The highly erotic language through which, the operation of desire was articulated suggested that Skovoroda did want desire to cease. That is, the extended process of satisfaction was not meant to result in the cessation of desire. On the contrary, greater exposure to what was desired should stimulate the intellect further towards an increasingly intimate engagement with the former. In light of the earlier analysis of Skovoroda's conception of personhood as the intellect's perpetual movement towards its own source, it is possible to explain Skovoroda's rationale for thinking about desire in this way. The safeguarding of desire may not have been an end in itself but rather, a way of avoiding the emergence of a static personhood, secure in the illusory belief that it has attained all of its goals and that as a consequence, it has become an authentic being. The somewhat poetical reference to eternity as something which did not embitter can be seen as an attempt to describe a paradoxical situation whereby, absolute satisfaction was responsible for an intensification of eros. Obviously, Skovoroda could not accept Epicurus' condemnation of desire as a form of pain

but nonetheless, he attended to the more congenial theme of duration of pleasure by removing the interval between a painful want and a future satisfaction.[386] It is this co-presence of desire and its consummation which was not only symptomatic of an original rethinking of hedonism but also, of a search for a personhood which was always alert and dynamic in regards to the central object of its orientation. Without underscoring the possibility of a pain-free co-presence of pleasure and desire, Skovoroda would find it very difficult to guarantee personhood that was at the same time dynamic *and* immersed in perpetual joy.

Having secured his metaphysical credentials, Skovoroda turned to an Epicurean understanding of self-sufficiency in order to distance personhood from the spurious ends that popular mores set before it. At this stage of the dialogue, Pishek was making strides towards Erodius' way of thinking and exclaimed that a life devoted to the "entrapment" of eternity was the sweetest one.[387] It is important to note here that Skovoroda was not interested so much in the formal, decision-making aspect of ethics and had only superficially touched on the topic of virtues. Of far greater concern was the texture of individual life as a whole and the direction towards which it was lived. This is evident in how, Pishek's loss of faith in vain pursuits did not lead towards a fundamental reconsideration of what her duties should actually be, aside from the imperative of gratitude. Rather, Erodius was at pains to impress upon his interlocutor that the real scene of action was not in the mundane world and that as a consequence, decisive alteration in personhood's very existence could not possibly depend upon it. To that end, it was incumbent upon Skovoroda to connect acts of self-consciousness with the emergence of joy in order to make it clear that personhood did not stand in need of anything else for its own transformation. When the human heart, held Erodius, gazed into its own depths, it "birthed" a rainbow which was seen to stand for a

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[386] Exactly how Epicurus related duration to pleasure is difficult to determine given his contradictory statements as to whether a longer good life is better than a shorter one, see J. Warren, *Fear of Death: Epicurus and His Critics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2004), pp. 122-35.

[387] G.S. Skovoroda, 'Blagodarnyi Erodii,' p. 126.

blissful covenant with God.[388] Again however, the emphasis was not on ascertaining the presence of the divine but in deriving a sense of the ecstatic from self-inquiry.

Skovoroda has called this form of self-sufficiency *autarkeia*. Of course, this term appeared in several distinct philosophical traditions and did not necessarily imply Epicurean leanings.[389] Yet, given that Skovoroda's emphasis was on rethinking the sources of human happiness rather than solely on developing a personhood impervious to the ebb and flow of fate as the Stoics would have it, he was closer to the Epicurean understanding of an autarchic sage. On the basis of what he has said earlier about eternity as the inexhaustible fount of joy, Erodius went on to internalise the dynamic of the good life:

> This is a true and saintly self-regard – to have at home within oneself all of one's wealth, not to depend on empty covering and the external bounds of one's flesh but rather, to depend upon one's heart in the same way that the shadow depends on the oak which casts it, or the branches upon the roots or clothing upon its wearer. And it is at this point that out of a sense of gratitude is born as of a mother, her daughter, *autarkeia*, otherwise known as self-satisfaction, or being one's own self and being pleased within it…[390]

It was relatively rare for Skovoroda to use technical philosophical vocabulary which is why, examples thereof are of particular importance. Long before Skovoroda, Patristic commentators have sympathised with Epicurus' ascetic orientation and have noted with approval, his belief in self-sufficiency.[391] Skovoroda can be seen as an original continuator of this very selective reading of Epicurus. Personhood was seen to have derived an ongoing pleasure not from any of its external activities but from being its own authentic self. It is possible to see how such thinking operated in

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[388] *Ibid.*

[389] "Epicureanism stresses self-sufficiency (autarkeia) as strongly as Stoics: the Epicurean wise person is invulnerable," see D.P. Fowler, 'Epicurean Anger' in Brand, S.M. and Gill, C. eds. *The Passions in Roman Thought and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 30.

[390] G.S. Skovoroda, 'Blagodarnyi Erodii,' p. 127.

[391] R.P. Jungkuntz, "Christian Approval of Epicureanism", *Church History* 31, 3 (1962), p. 282.

terms of Skovoroda's anthropology. It may be recalled that a Narcissistic personhood desired itself. This self-oriented eros only served to further disclose the beauty of personhood thus accelerating the desire which initiated the introspective process. As a result, desire necessarily led to satisfaction obtained from contemplating an object that was in turn, transformed by that desire. Stated somewhat differently, Skovoroda was in effect suggesting that a self-conscious existence was its own reward.

It may be odd to think of self-sufficiency as emerging from gratitude given that the latter sentiment has connotations of dependence. In stressing for the need to pay homage to the transcendent interiority of personhood, Skovoroda sought to orient the intellect towards what was of enduring value and rather than to disempower it. P. Hadot noted that for Epicurus, through a "profound gratitude towards nature and life," "unceasing pleasure and joy" were possible.[392] One of the main things that Erodius was trying to explain to Pishek was that gratitude was the chief virtue. The very fact that gratitude was shown to be teachable underscored pleasure as something which must be exercised[393] in order to bring about a personhood that could find increasingly refined ways of experiencing it. Because of this, an autarchic personhood remained happy insofar as it remained independent of the things which did not form an integral part of its identity. This was the very point that Pishek was trying to understand as she struggled to differentiate between her appearance in the eyes of society and her actual self. Thus, if *autarkeia* is self-sufficiency, it is one which is not anchored in essential properties of personhood but in the latter's transformation into an independent entity.[394] To be grateful, in the sense that Skovoroda intended, meant to know that everything personhood needed, it already had.

At its most elemental level then, Skovoroda's ascetic ethic can be

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[392] P. Hadot in A.I. Davidson, "Spiritual Exercises and Ancient Philosophy: An Introduction to Pierre Hadot", *Critical Inquiry* 16, 3 (1990), p.478.
[393] *Ibid.*
[394] *Ibid*.

formulated as an imperative for personhood to derive absolute joy out of knowing that it exists. With some important qualifications, this position is very close to that of an Epicurean sage who conceived of existence, in cosmic terms, as a "wonderful celebration".[395] The capacity to partake of this celebration reflected the extent to which, personhood was prepared to conceive of itself as its own ethical subject. In conventional terms, to enjoy does not necessarily mean to undertake a set of externally-oriented actions provided that enjoyment is an inward state of affairs governing the life of the individual. That is, the thrust of Skovoroda's argument was that personhood must alter its own disposition in order to lead a better life rather than to focus on the external conditions of that life. This did not rule-out concrete reform, but it put a break on the optimistic notion that spiritual well-being could be attained solely through good and worthwhile deeds. In a very perceptive remark regarding Skovoroda's ethical thought, A.V. Malinov suggested that for the former, personhood was an open-ended *natura naturata*.[396] That is, the fact that personhood was created, implied that it was malleable and potentially, self-directed. Consequently, if this assessment is correct, then an action enacted outside of personhood in relation to someone or something else is merely an echo or a result of an ongoing work that personhood perpetrated upon itself. Indeed, when framed in these terms, the very essence of enjoyment is not a glib contentment with the status quo but an intellectual delight in the creative reshaping of individual beinghood. In this case, personhood's knowledge of its own existence is identical with self-transformative labour.

The role of dialogue in such an extended process of ethical *bildung* is as much indispensable as it is ambivalent. As has already been mentioned, *Grateful Erodius* is a dialogue between the wise and God-loving Erodius and a superficial socialite, Pishek. In the course of her interaction with someone who was completely at odds with her understanding of the telos of human existence, Pishek became aroused at the prospect of genuine knowledge. This would indicate the efficacy of

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[395] P. Hadot, 'Reflections on the Idea of the Cultivation of the Self' in Hadot, P. *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* tr. M. Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 209.
[396] M.A. Malinov, 'Grigorii Skovoroda: ot diskursa prirody k diskursu etiki', p. 21.

discourse, whether it was directed by a personhood towards its own self or towards the selves of others. Yet, Skovoroda structured his treatise in such a way that it was clear that Erodius did not really want to engage with Pishek and only did so upon her request which had to be reiterated throughout their interaction. Such disinclination seems to throw into doubt the very possibility of a sincere meeting of minds and therefore, of wisdom as such. What deterred Erodius from carrying on his discussion with Pishek was his desire to go and provide sustenance for his elderly parents. This was explained as a duty dictated by his sense of gratitude.[397] In other words, a dialogue about the primacy of gratitude appeared to have been prematurely terminated by the need to undertake a charitable action by one of the parties involved. Moreover, the treatise concluded with Pishek dying of heart-break over the misdemeanours of her libertine children. Such a tragic conclusion to a dialogue seeking to reveal the joy of existence seems to undercut the possibility of experiencing the latter as a consequence of intellectual interaction.

The choice of such a plot was not symptomatic of an oversight on Skovoroda's part but rather, an attempt to show that an unreflective engagement in dialogue could not bring about an improvement in the life of the interlocutor. What needed to be kept distinct was the superficial notion of dialogue as mere conversation from its significance as intercourse with truth. Thus, Erodius' refusal to carry on conversing may not necessarily have been a refusal to participate in a dialogue. Specifically, if the substance of dialogue is measured by its transformative effects, then Pishek's erotic reorientation would have to be seen an objective instance of mutual participation. This is why, at no point leading up to the inflammation of Pishek's desire or immediately after it, was there even a hint of Eordius leaving his interlocutor. A real interruption of the dialogue occurred with Pishek being unable to joyfully accept Eorodius' intention to fulfil the duty he owed to his parents. It is this failure to reciprocate Erodius' celebratory *logos* with one of her own which signified a natural limit to her moral progress and therefore, of the dialogue. Instead of responding to Erodius' intentions in light of her newly-

[397] G.S. Skovoroda, 'Blagodarnyi Erodii,' p. 125.

unearthed desire for wisdom, she sought to impede his course by attempting to implicate him into superficial worldly pleasantries. In a complete reversal to her earlier interest in transcendent matters, Pishek tried to delay Erodius by saying that he is yet to be introduced to her fashionable daughters who led successful lives in the court of a local ruler.[398] This development signalled a devolution of the dialogue to the level of polite intercourse foreclosed to the overpowering sense of erotic wonder.

Specifically, Pishek was unable to reconsider her own self in autarchic terms in light of what she has learnt from Erodius. Skovoroda seemed to think that what made personhood a self-sustaining entity was its ability to direct eros upon itself in a continuous act of self-inquiry. To the contrary of that position, Pishek was primarily aroused either by genuine truths but ones which have not yet been internalised, or by spurious facts of the world. This may explain Skovoroda's ambivalence regarding the efficacy of dialogue. Namely, that an individual might rely on someone else to initiate a self-directed praxis but once the force of eros was revealed, it was primarily up to the inquirer to learn to enjoy his or her self without relying on external support. This would be very much in keeping with the notion of *autarkeia* because an individual cannot claim to be self-sufficient and at the same time, allow for that self-sufficiency to be dependent on someone else. This does not mean that a sophisticated personhood was lonely. On the contrary, at its most potent, dialogue was an event which transpired between sovereign personhoods without any attempts to lay claim upon each other. Paradoxically, only personhoods which were primarily concerned with their own well-being and with their respective duties, had the means to contribute towards each other's progress. This was quite evident in the behaviour of Erodius who, as part of his ethic of self-care, was unswerving in his concern for his parents and whilst also, being sympathetic to Pishek's moral queries.

Indeed, even when it became clear that Pishek could not make appropriate

[398] *Ibid.* p. 127.

use of her eros, Erodius was sufficiently sensitive to her needs to promise her that he would return to her with a parchment with an account of "divine birth" after he completed his errands.[399] In the interval between Erodius' departure and his return that Pishek has died from melancholy. For Skovoroda, melancholia was a condition afflicting the majority of people. So, Pishek's incapacity to find joy could be interpreted not just as her personal tragedy but as a normative failure of humanity as such. Skovoroda made a point of underscoring the uniqueness of personhood which was not subject to the ebb and flow of external circumstances by describing "self-satisfied gratefulness" as something which was above and beyond "earth and heaven."[400] One way to interpret this cryptic phrase would be to think of it as an indication of the extent to which, Skovoroda thought of personhood as being undetermined by its context. That is why, precisely on account of such freedom, Pishek could neither be forced into a dialogue nor could she force others into her particular version of one. It is even possible to think of joy as an experience which elevated personhood above heavenly beings as a rather veiled hint at deification. Personhood stood somewhat apart from the creation not because the latter was unworthy of its attention but because it reached a point whereby, it was able to take delight in its own creativity directed at its own self. This, at least at the level of analogy, set personhood in a God-like position of firstly, having goodness as its primary mode of self-expression and secondly, of requiring that any relationship it may have with another, be premised on mutual autonomy. Thus, it was not that Erodius callously let Pishek die but rather, it was the latter who chose to rest her hopes upon a "deceptive worldly sea" despite being presented with a superior horizon.

An examination of the content of Erodius' parchment which he left nearby Pishek's home suggests that deification was possible as result of a cultivation of a specifically Epicurean understanding of *ataraxia*. This was a climactic point of *Grateful Erodius* in the course of which, Skovoroda wanted to describe a life lived as an intellectual feast with other personhoods but one which was also characterised by an absence

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[399] *Ibid.* p. 128
[400] *Ibid.*

of distressing passions such as those which have caused the death of Pishek:

> This is the one who, in the first quarter moon,
> Has come from the sacred feasts and conversations.
> This is not the one to witness a corpse or a terrifying scene.
> Nor is it the one to conceive above measure or to be drunk.
> The pregnant one carries in the thoughts and spectacles of the saints,
> And in the dialogues thereof, avoiding stormy desires,
> In a quiet dispassion under the gaze of the holy.[401]

It might seem as though Skovoroda was merely reiterating what has been covered in the first section of this chapter namely, the discursive nature of religious forms. However, whilst it is certainly true that in the above passage, is to be found one of the strongest statements regarding the intermingling of a self-conscious personhood with other transcendent beings, the focus was nonetheless on moral exhortation. When seen in the context of Pishek's failure, what Skovoroda was suggesting was that a crucial aspect of ascetic praxis was personhood's will to remain engaged with the object of its erotic fascination. In succumbing to the *raison d'être* of the world as she understood it, Pishek has, metaphorically speaking, lost her place at the festive table even though it was offered to her. Moreover, if the willingness to participate was there, Pishek would have realised that whilst Erodius absented himself from her company this did not mean that he was absent from the dialogue if the latter were to continue. The communal aspect of discourse, would guarantee that in contemplating what was most profound at the expense of anything else, personhood was necessarily in the midst of its peers who were engaged in exactly the same activity.

Skovoroda's reference as to the *location* of the offspring of a pregnant personhood made it almost impossible to distinguish between the respective individualities of the inquiring minds and the substance of their dialogue. This dialectic can be interpreted as Skovoroda's belief that it was only through an intellectual communion with other minds that personhood could become its own authentic self. So, there is a hidden correlation between Skovoroda's Narcissus who became himself by encountering his own ever-renewed otherness and an ongoing

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[401] *Ibid.*

assimilation of hitherto unknown material into the substance of dialogue. It must be stressed that this did not necessarily imply a real-time interaction undertaken within physical proximity. Rather, what Skovoroda may have been hinting at was that personhood, in order to begin its process of becoming, needed to respond to a desire which has been set in motion by the wisdom of someone else, be it a text or a person. Thus, in a typically Platonic fashion, a pregnant soul birthed into the skilful hands of a midwife. Skovoroda radicalised this notion further by having the offspring as already existing in the mind of the very person who was meant to deliver it. This is very consistent with Skovoroda's approach to the truth of the text as an event which takes place within the reader. There was thus no contradiction in claiming that certain spiritual content was at the same time, within the mind of the inquirer and within the object of inquiry. The very fact that one personhood could evoke a sense of erotic wonder in another, implied a kind of co-mingling which defied any straightforward notions of a discrete, and insulated identity. So, whilst Pishek was sufficiently open to reality beyond her immediate sense-perceptions, she failed to birth the content of Erodius' wisdom within herself.

Such openness to content as indicated by eros, depended on personhood reaching a dispassionate state. In its Epicurean sense, *ataraxia* meant a displacement of mental disturbance by mental pleasure.[402] It was therefore, not incidental that Skovoroda relied on rather lurid scenes as a way of underscoring the fact that a truly moral personhood was not in the grip of fear and because of this, had the ability to experience ongoing pleasure. Arguably, it is even possible to read Skovoroda's reference to terror brought on by a vision of a corpse as a rather veiled critique of a specifically monastic form of asceticism and its veneration of saintly relics. Fear of death or alternatively, a desire for immortality were both equally anxious states which contributed towards the Orthodox obsession with displaying the incorruptible remains of its saints. Instead of this completely de-intellectualised and often enthusiastic belief, Skovoroda proposed intellectual pleasure as the cornerstone of a transformed personhood. Epicurus, it must be recalled, saw a direct correlation

[402] J. Warren, 'Removing Fear', 234.

between peace of mind and the capacity for that mind for "constant recollection of general and most important truths".[403] Asceticism then, as Skovoroda understood it, was a strategy by means of which, personhood fixated its attention upon the source of its erotic wonder without the interruptions of the passions. The fact that Erodius' account arrived after the death of Pishek only served to underscore the urgency with which the well-being of the self should be approached. Personhood's failure to birth discourse was symptomatic of a failure to not only experience pleasure, but to actually approximate a truly disembodied form of existence.

In light of Skovoroda's silence regarding the possibility of the afterlife and belief in heaven and hell as internal individual states of being, it is difficult interpret what Skovoroda had to say on the continuity of pleasure as anything other than an attempt to rethink personal immortality. In one of his poems, Skovoroda equated melancholy and anxiety with death in a way which indicated that only non-momentary joyful existence could be equated with life. "The one who is downcast and is always in hardship" will be the one who, whilst already not being quite alive, will be "smothered by death."[404] A grim ethic preparing the soul for a future salvation was just as damaging as a headlong flight into outright hedonism because in both cases, it was left worried as to whether it would satisfy its respective desires. For that reason, Skovoroda may have found aspects of Epicureanism particularly helpful insofar as the latter sought to subvert ethical norms founded on expectation of future reward or punishment. It would not be an exaggeration to construe Skovoroda's foregrounding of joy as a firm commitment to substantive improvement in the human condition occurring within the temporal life-time of the individual. This may further explain the primacy of dialogue in Skovoroda's writings. Unlike a desired state of being, a dialogue cannot be put off indefinitely. It cannot, as it were, be an object of all of personhood's future-oriented aspirations because it is an activity of potentially infinite duration.

Skovoroda's readers might naturally enquire as to what is to be made of

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[403] Epicurus in *Ibid*, p. 235.
[404] G.S. Skovoroda, 'Melodia' in Skovoroda, G.S. *Sochinenia* ed. I.E. Voinich, p. 448.

Christ and his teachings regarding his future kingdom if eschatology is no longer thought of as a culmination of historical processes and is instead, an inward principle peculiar to personhood alone. Skovoroda's elusive response to this legitimate query was one of exceptional daring and symptomatic of his specifically mystical form of freethinking. In a different poem, Skovoroda addressed the now familiar conflation of sadness with non-living. Yet, in answering the question as to achievement of the good life, Skovoroda responded by way of merging the figures of Epicurus and of Christ into a single *attitude*:

> Do you want to live in sweetness? Do not be envious.
> Be satisfied with little and do not be afraid.
> Spit upon the remnants in the coffin and upon childish fears;
> Rest – death cannot harm.
> This is how lived the Athenian and the Jewish
> Epicurus – Christ.[405]

In the most straightforward of terms, Skovoroda thought that a proper enjoyment of the present is indistinguishable from the kind of existence the soul hoped for after death. Exactly how this was so, Skovoroda did not explain directly. Removal of anxiety could result in a completely different experience of reality necessitating recourse to a language normally reserved for paradisiacal existence. A person under the weight of worry was in no position to clearly comprehend what life would be like without that burden in the same way that Pishek could not ultimately, comprehend what it meant to participate in a dialogue. The violence of Skovoroda's imagery is suggestive of the near-impossibility of grasping an anxiety-free existence. To no longer think in futuristic terms, to set aside seemingly legitimate fears, was as difficult to undertake as it would be for a person firmly rooted in conventional morality, to completely disregard the sanctity of a grave. Skovoroda was calling for a rupture with all forms of knowledge which could not be given an adequate verification in the immediate intellectual experience of a developed personhood. To underscore this, it was necessary to use a particular kind of language to provide a powerful contrast between attitudes which are to be overcome and those which are to be embraced.

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[405] G.S. Skovoroda, 'Pesnia 30-ia' in *Ibid.* p. 439.

Yet, the above explanation only goes so far in clarifying how it was possible not to be anxious about inconsequential worldly things, without directly broaching the issue of the afterlife. Beyond the provocative aspect of Skovoroda's collapse of the figures of Christ and Epicurus, is a serious belief that cultivating personhood to enjoy a good life was equivalent to actually enjoying it. An individual such as Skovoroda himself, might still be prone to identifying with or experiencing the tragic, but nonetheless, this did not diminish the overall state of satisfaction with personhood's capacity to make moral progress. Moreover, if, personhood's transcendent experiences were indeed as rich as Skovoroda claimed them to be, then the desire for immortality might not actually arise. A self-absorbed personhood reflecting upon the discourses which constituted it, was no longer aspiring towards future gratification and in that sense, could not envisage any other horizon other than the one made evident by its own creative activity. Thus, Skovoroda forced his readers to consider whether they could let go of their ultimate anxiety as to whether they will be saved. It is more than possible to discount the shortness of life in the presence of belief that a superior form of existence will succeed. However, to do so, would beg the question as whether such a life is joyful or not.

It would be difficult not to miss the political implications of Skovoroda's recourse to Epicureanism. Whilst Skovoroda was firmly of the view that an individual ought to be law-abiding and mindful of the dictates of authority, this did not mean that the individual should shape his or her self in conformity with the ends that were externally set before it. Skovoroda partly avoided the problem of a fractured personhood whose inner life was diametrically opposed to its manner of being in society by embracing the freedom of at itinerant existence. This was a personal example of how a particular form of life could be chosen so as to suit the imperative of self-cultivation. Whatever form that life took, it had to somehow, reckon with and incorporate within itself, the seemingly irreconcilable polarity of hedonism and heavenly Jerusalem. Any attempt to think whether the Athenian garden had anything in common with the Sermon on the Mount would run counter to the teaching of any past or present institutional authority. That is, the mere contemplation of how such

a similarity was possible, would in itself, imply a critical distancing from expected norms. So, Skovoroda was interested in a situation whereby, it was up to individuals to configure their lives in such a way that some truths from the Gospel coincided with the pursuit of intellectual pleasure. How that coincidence took place is as impossible to predict or to structure in advance as it would be impossible to predict how creative human beings will make use of their freedom.

Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the level of self-reflexivity in Skovoroda's thought and of its privileging of an ongoing state of dialogue and its decisive importance for religious, personal and ethical organisational forms. Irrespective of whether Skovoroda discussed personhood, or the church or ethics, he did so under the onus of having to demonstrate that human beings are subject to open-ended processes which could not be delegated to anyone else. The problem posed by external institutions was that there was, even in religious matters, an inclination to impose finality, be it through ritual or legally enforced expectations, which curtailed personhood's discovery of itself. The spiritually monotonous life associated with socio-political obligations might lead to valuable discoveries in science or statecraft, but its very monotony meant that it was not illuminated by the eschatological novelty of life itself. Thus, Skovoroda's mysticism is reducible to a very intense experience of the constantly rejuvenating forces inhering in human personhood which, in most individuals, were dormant. This may explain the consistency and the forcefulness with which Skovoroda defended human autonomy from external constraints and self-sufficiency in regards to achieving the good life. The following chapter will analyse how Kheraskov sought to combine the sovereignty of personhood with obligations owed to political and natural contexts.

CHAPTER FOUR: MIKHAIL MATVEYEVICH KHERASKOV

Given man the awareness of what he is and he will soon learn to be what he ought to be. Give him the theoretical self-respect and the practical will soon follow. One would hope in vain for any great progress of mankind as a result of the mere goodwill of man, because in order to become better, he would have to be good already.
F.W.J. Schelling

Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss how Mikhail Matveyevich Kheraskov (1733-1815) rethought the notions of ecclesia, personhood and ascetic ethics, largely from a utopian standpoint. Kheraskov exemplified the most radical wing of the

Mystical Enlightenment in Russia primarily in terms of the range of alternatives he envisaged in various published works which were in open circulation throughout his long writing career. Kheraskov was particularly concerned about the role of politics and specifically, of an Enlightened monarch in the spiritual improvement of the citizenry.[406] In this chapter I will analyse how Kheraskov has on the one hand, proposed a political dimension to mysticism but on the other, held on to a deeply metaphorical understanding of a wise monarch as a symbol of a sovereign personhood to which all should aspire. In doing so, Kheraskov was able to provide an idealistically-anchored critique of the ends of political authority and to also show the importance of the need to work towards a spiritually free personhood capable of acting upon nature.

Ecclesiastical structures

Kheraskov's mystical worldview envisaged a utopian understanding of ecclesiastical structures as domains open to Enlightened reform which in their cleansed state, could become the cornerstone of civic progress.[407] In contrast to Skovoroda's overwhelming emphasis on participation in symbolic forms necessitating a marginalisation of historical faith, and Lopukhin's qualified acceptance of the confessional status quo, Kheraskov explicitly considered the possibility of a construction of new religious norms for the purposes of improving the moral state of society. This crucial difference raised particularly difficult questions regarding the role and significance of the Russian Orthodox Church because the latter was forced to confront a complex justification for the

[406] For Kheraskov, the term 'wise' meant 'Enlightened', especially in regards to attainment of publicly useful virtues.

[407] A.V. Zapadov noted Kheraskov's criticism of the church and of the monastic way of life as an integral aspect of a broader socio-political critique, see his *Poety XVIII veka* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo moskovskogo universiteta, 1984), 210. See also D.D. Blagoi, *Istoria russkoi literatury XVIII veka* (Moscow: Uchpedgiz, 1945), pp. 284-5. Blagoi noted the politically didactic character of Kheraskov's *Numa Pompilius* in terms of the limitations of classicism, see his 'Zakonomernosti stanovleniia novoi russkoi literatury' in Blagoi, D.D. *Literatura i deistvitel'nost'. Voprosy teorii i istorii literatury*, p. 80.

emergence of alternative religious attitudes within the public sphere deemed to be better adapted to stimulate inner spiritual praxis. Kheraskov was able to soften the radical implications of his thought by expressing it in novels and epic poems which seemingly, did not aspire beyond their own fictional character. Yet, far from being a writer in a conventional literary sense, Kheraskov was foremost, a writer of ideas and sought for their resolution in fictional contexts, especially in the format of a *Staatsromane*.[408] In light of Kheraskov's voluminous literary output which always engaged similar themes but often from different perspectives, a distinction needs to be made between his novels which deal more with politics and institutions and his later epic poetry which detailed the course of mystical transformation of the person. Ideas from both genres will be considered in the present chapter with the purpose of evincing a single thread of mystical perception underpinning them, with due consideration of the evolving character of Kheraskov's thought. This is why, attention has been given either to works wherein politics was anchored in a mystical worldview or, where mystical transformation of the person was the central theme.

In this respect, one of the most important works by Kheraskov is his *Numa Pompilius, or Flourishing Rome* (1768), a political novel detailing the progress in morals and in social organisational forms stemming from the wise leadership of an absolute monarch.[409] Kheraskov wrote *Numa Pompilius* at a time when Catherine the Great presented herself to the public as a monarch who sought advice from her subjects and as someone genuinely intent on liberalising

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408 N.K. Piksanov, 'Masonskaia literatura' in *Istoriia russkoi literatury v 10 t. T. IV: Literatura XVIII veka Ch. 2* (Moscow: Izd-vo AN CCCR, 1947), p. 79. Kheraskov was not the only one who has turned his attention to the political novel genre. However, unlike his fellow-writers, Kheraskov was of the view that reading – when coupled with appropriate social engineering – could lead to fundamental transformation of fallen human nature. For a discussion of this peculiarly Russian mystical reverence for the written word in relation to Kherskov and other freemasons, see E.E. Prikazschikova, 'Biblioficheskaia utopia masonov v XVIII veke' in Prikazschikova, E.E. *Russkaiia literatura: natsional'noe razvitie i regional'nye osobennosti. Problema zhanrovyh nominatsii* Materiialy IX Mezhdunar. Nauch. konf. (Ekatirinburg: Izdatel'stvo ural'skogo universiteta, 2009), pp. 51-54.

409 Anglophone scholarship, whilst very brief on Kheraskov's religious ideas, has nevertheless commended his *Numa Pompilius* as Russia's "first philosophical novel" according to M. Green, see his 'Kheraskov and the Christian Tragedy,' *California Slavic Studies* 9 (1976), p. 25.

the state.[410] The fact that the Empress may not have been interested in serious advice and that does not deflate the importance of Kheraskov's novel on account of its consistent discussion of topical religious issues.[411] By making the political aspects of religion a subject of public debate, Kheraskov at least in some way, reflected Catherine's self-image as a monarch that appeared to take a consensual approach to law and liberty. Indeed, whilst this text was written some years before the flowering of masonic culture in Russia as a serious intellectual pursuit, it already contained some basic themes which developed further in later Russian mystical literature. That is, Kheraskov responded to the generally optimistic climate of Catherine's early reign by postulating the possibility of resolving pressing spiritual concerns of the citizens through direct political action.[412] It needs to be noted that Kheraskov's desire to Enlighten through dissemination of ideas was already evident in his attempt to organise a publication of a translated collection of articles from the *Encyclopédie,* a project which was sadly curtailed after the competition of the first instalment.[413] To what extent the author and his audience presupposed a straightforward translation of the utopian civil religion discussed in the novel into the concrete realities of the Russian state is not quite certain. What could not be disputed however, was the intensity with which Kheraskov promoted the Enlightenment and his belief in its inherently religious meaning which needed to be recovered. Whether the reformist agenda proceeded from an astute sovereign or from private citizens, it could only succeed if it operated as part of a larger religious enterprise which in turn, depended on a systematic revision of the purposes of religious institutions and practices.

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[410] I. de Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* (London: Phoenix Press, 2003), p. 162.

[411] E.E. Prikazschikova suggested that the only way for Catherine the Great to tolerate a discussion with a 'philosopher' was for latter to treat his own discourse as childish play, much as Diderot has done, see her 'Diderot i iskushenie russkogo prosveschenia', p. 196.

[412] C.H. Whittaker rightly saw *Numa Pompilius* as an instance of advice literature as the genre was understood in Enlightened terms, albeit without detailing its content, see her outstanding *Russian Monarchy: Eighteenth-Century Rulers and Writers in Political Dialogue* (DeKalb, Northern Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), p. 144.

[413] M.M. Shtrange, *Demokraticheskaia intelligentsia Rossii v XVIII veke* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Nauka,1965), pp. 188-9. Whilst the bulk of the articles were of innocent geographical nature, the collection did include articles dealing with literature and most crucially an article on ethics and prejudice.

Civil religion was not a well-explored theme in Eighteenth-century Russian thought, in part due to the still powerful influence of Orthodoxy but primarily due to the lack of consistent engagement with classical literature and early-modern juridical sources.[414] This does not mean that there was no notion of religion which derived its strength from its civic significance. On the contrary, the unprecedented religious reforms ushered in by the Petrine revolution have shown that it was impossible to think of religion and its truth-claims without also subjecting them to the test of public utility. Kheraskov's contribution to this theme was quite important because he has firstly, drawn attention to its ancient Roman genealogy and secondly, attempted to combine the notion of common good with individual spiritual rebirth, thus overcoming the threat that an overly temporal understanding of religion posed to transcendence. To achieve the first aim with which *Numa Pompilius* was primarily concerned, Kheraskov has drawn on Roman history whilst the second, which formed the basis of his epic poetry, was informed by theosophic works. Livy's account (and to a lesser extent that of Plutarch) of the positive effects of king Numa's creation of religious rites and reliance on the noble lie of providence in his *History of Rome* was alluded to repeatedly by Kheraskov because it summarised what was meant by civil religion and why notwithstanding its literal falseness, it could nevertheless lead to moral truths:

> By these means the whole of the population of Rome was given a great many new things to think about and attend to, with the result that everybody was diverted from military preoccupations. They now had serious matters to consider; and believing as they now did, that the heavenly powers took part in human affairs, they became so much absorbed in the cultivation of religion and so deeply imbued with the sense of their religious

[414] This does not mean that there were no outstanding individuals in Russia, such as Feofan Prokopovich (1681-1736) who were intimately familiar with theories of natural law and statecraft and were prepared to use their knowledge for polemical ends, including in matters of religion, see V.M. Nichik, *Feofan Prokopovich* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Mysl, 1977), pp. 148-9. However, the problem was that due to the scarcity of expertise in Western legal and political disputes, only certain aspects of religion could be evaluated from a civic perspective. Thus, important as Prokopovich's *Spiritual Regulation* (1720) was in justifying the integration of the Orthodox Church into the Russian *polizeistaat*, it was not in any way, a comprehensive reinterpretation of religion along civic lines.

> duties, that the sanctity of an oath had more power to control their lives than the fear of punishment for law-breaking. Men of all classes took Numa as their unique example and modelled themselves upon him, until the effect of this change of heart was felt even beyond the borders of Roman territory.[415]

With important differences, Kheraskov accepted the transformative implications of an imposed religion encouraging an outward rehearsal of its tenets, albeit in an increasingly Christian guise, especially in his later writings. Specifically, the notion that a well-engineered religious domain can posses rich content with which the intellect and emotions can engage and through which they can mature and contribute to the emergence of a moral commonwealth carried critical weight in Kheraskov's adaptation of the ancient Roman narrative. A crucial part of this narrative was the rather paradoxical approach to the harmful and anti-social influence of superstition which was ameliorated not so much with a Promethean re-projection of undiluted insights drawn from the very nature of the divine, but with a vigorous promotion of alternative organisation of religious life.[416]

Such an approach to religion did not mean that it was seen merely as a form of social control. Religion's ties to the development of personal and public virtues imbued it with a uniqueness not enjoyed by other man-made domains, evident in its privileged pedagogical role. Arguably, religious forms which were legislated into being can still be construed to be sacred if the notion of sacredness is divorced from its archaic fear of the elements and reconcieved as a sentiment that the human intellect can engender and cultivate towards a rationally discernible good. This did not necessarily contradict the belief in the potency of the divine, especially if it was grounded in philosophical terms. In fact, the stimulus behind state intervention into religious affairs was an enduring subscription to

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[415] Livy, *The Early History of Rome.* Books I-V of *The History of Rome from its Foundation* tr. A. De Selincourt (London: Penguin, 1971), 1.19.

[416] Such reception of Livy's rather fanciful account of Numa's reign is nevertheless consistent with scholarly understanding of the progressive aspects of Numa's religious policy because it sought to replace "undesirable elements" of an archaic magic-based worldview inimical to the emergence of a strong polity with emphasis on observance, see E.M. Hooker, "The Significance of Numa's Religious Reforms", *Numen* 10, 2 (1963), p. 129.

theism. If in Livy's estimation, Numa possessed superior wisdom which was entirely his own and resulted from “austere discipline,” it was not difficult for Kheraskov to reformulate this to mean that wisdom, which was by its nature other-worldly, emerged from the depths of personhood committed to introspective praxis.[417] Eighteenth-century Russia already had a history of a concerted attempt to transform its titular confession into an institution somewhat resembling civil religion. Yet, Petrine reforms were liable to accusations of being overly heavy-handed and too expressive of secular power, leading to a fundamental loss of respect for clerical authority.[418] Consequently, Kheraskov's recourse to pagan precedents conveyed the possibility of a renewed contract between the sovereign, the individual and religious structures which would foreground the polity as a predominately spiritual domain and not only a juridical one.

It was therefore, on the strength of certainty regarding the metaphysical basis to reality serving as its prototype that civic religion was established without necessarily signifying political expediency. Kheraskov underscored the relationship between faith and artifice in Numa's legislative activity without relativising either. In the very beginning of Kheraskov’s novel, Numa was introduced as a philosopher and by implication as someone capable of exercising insight into subjects normally left to the attention of the gods.[419] This is an important characterisation because it distinguished between the establishment of religion as a result of prophetic inspiration and its establishment as a result of rational activity not denoting a state of possession by a higher power. However, both of these stimuli could be mystical, provided that they were preceded by a recognition of a mysterious divinity encountered inwardly:

> His spare hours Numa dedicated towards an inquiry into the sacred mysteries of the Divine, gaining knowledge of the true pathways of virtue, the eradication of vain thoughts which secretly infect the heart with flattering

[417] Livy, 1.18.
[418] G. Florovskii, *Puti russkogo bogosloviia*, p.92.
[419] M.M. Kheraskov, *Numa Pompilii, ili protsvetauschii Rim.* Izdanie chetvertoe (Moscow: Vol'naya Tipografiia M. Ponomareva, 1809), p. 2.

> flaws; disregard for the enticements of false happiness and the beguiling attractiveness of wealth. Without doing this, Numa would not be wise.[420]

As may be evident, if legislation in religious matters stemmed from a posture oriented towards experiencing a metaphysical otherness, it had to be accountable to these experiences and not to contradict them in any way. Even when divorced from its external embodiment, the sense of mystery was integrated with the attainment of virtue. Thus, Kheraskov pointed out the degree of continuity between a God independent of human actions and the autonomy individuals enjoyed in their possession of virtue. From this perspective, man-made religious institutions were symptomatic of the autonomy human beings could attain as moral agents.

Kheraskov moderated Livy's outright recognition of deceit in Numa's activity by implying that Numa did indeed commune with the nymph Egeria, a minor deity of wisdom and prophecy who directed his activities. Nonetheless, what was striking was that this was presented in a way which was firstly, open to being interpreted as a personification of Numa's own wisdom in dialogue with itself and secondly, there was a requirement for Numa to analyse what the goddess told him to do, until such a time that he agreed with her advice.[421] Since the advice that Numa received was always presupposed by common sense and never depended on superstitious effects, it may be that Kheraskov was merely providing some fictional safe-guards to allay charges of undue freethinking. Only once was Numa approximated to a Biblical prophet. At one point, Egeria revealed herself to Numa as transcendent yet personal in order not to exact blind obedience but only to demonstrate the inherently immaterial and transformative power of wisdom. Consequently, the problem was not so much with the grasp of disembodied transmitters of truth, but with the method by which temporal reality could be reformed in its image. Within this rubric, Numa's campaign against idolatrous beliefs and practises must be seen as an attempt to replace an established and not Enlightened religion catering to a warlike society permeated

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[420] *Ibid.* pp. 2-3.
421 *Ibid.* p. 51.

by fear its members felt towards one another and the world at large. The promotion of the supernatural played only a limited role in this enterprise and was overshadowed by the positive effects of religious reforms individuals have witnessed apart from their faith in providence.

In terms reminiscent of future descriptions of masonic lodges as privileged islands of virtue in a sea of irrational beliefs, the Romans were deemed to possess a type of spiritual form which prefigured some aspects of the religion Numa wanted to institute. Using rather ambivalent language, Kheraskov underscored the soundness of the cult of Vesta, but in such a way that it was not entirely clear whether he was allegorically discussing an inward temple of virtue embedded in all individuals or an external representation of one. In either case, the temple to Vesta and its associated rites were construed to function without the aid of the imagination and aiming to promote civic virtue. Specifically, the cult was described as a locale where advice could be sought and which was highly inimical to the satisfaction of idolatrous urges:

> Its custodians did not dishonour the goddess' altar with collections of people's wealth. Moderation, which is wondrous in these individuals who have positioned themselves as intermediaries between God and the people. Virtuous living, useful advice, care of the ill and of the poor, are their primary concerns and because of this, their temple has become a refuge for virtuous people. To that end, this temple lacks proud ostentatiousness and does not sparkle with gold and expensive stones which vanity and despicable weakness usually devote to divinity and which covetousness and false humility seek to gather. Yet, virtue, being always immaculate and moderate, must not offer anything else to God except a pure heart and a spirit inflamed by love.[422]

Of note here was the tacit gesture towards the existence of natural religion. Prior to Numa's institution of new and reform of existing religious forms, there already

[422] *Ibid.* p. 10.

was in place a set of practices which came into being without the aid of an Enlightened monarch. That is, eschewal of external display of authority and a concomitant engagement with the moral needs of citizens was not shown to have occurred either as a result of direct revelatory intervention or of a gradual realisation of the falsity of outward spirituality. Kheraskov noted the purely relational aspect of religion which did not exceed the bounds of sympathetic human interaction. Here, it needs to be noted that Kheraskov's brief reference to the possibility of natural religion needs to be differentiated from the more conventional Humean sense as scepticism regarding the possibility of knowing God's "powers and attributes."[423] Kheraskov seemed to have been only interested in indicating the presence of natural good-will amongst select individuals. The fact that there was no mention of any theology underscored a straightforward mediation of the divine through action, with minimal concern for symbolic commitments. It might even be presumed that, transcendence failed to properly occur within the temple because exposure to the divine was almost completely conflated with either undertaking or receiving a good deed, not requiring an ongoing devotion to contemplative praxis. Thus, the naturalness of the cult of Vesta was evident insofar as it primarily attended to readily perceivable and predominantly temporal needs of the individuals.

Yet, the reasonableness of a socially-oriented religion enfolded within itself the possibility of an emergence of transcendent belief and a much more ambitious reform of society. Whilst on the one hand, the chief priestess of the temple owed her position to her good works, on the other hand, she was the very same nymph Egeria who hid her face from the uninitiated.[424] Numa consulted the goddess in her guise as a virtuous priestess and subsequently, has become initiated into her true identity, as other-worldly. This was a crucial distinction because by firstly drawing attention to Numa's reverence for sacred mysteries and secondly, by delaying his initiation, Kheraskov questioned the sufficiency of natural religion in encompassing the entire range of human spiritual capacities. Egeria was merely

[423] D. Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (London, Penguin, 1990), p. 69.
[424] *Ibid.* p. 11.

accommodating herself to simple human desires for a philanthropic religion, undergirded by distaste for violence and opulence with which religion was normally associated and only gradually encouraged a more positive grasp of divine potency. Therefore, the Vesta cult needs to be seen as a preparatory domain towards greater wisdom which would in turn, allow it to become the basic regulative standard against which, a future civil religion was to be measured. Paradoxically then, Kheraskov secured the enlargement of a naturally rational religion into society as a whole by postulating the need for transcendence which exceeded the benign imperatives of temporal spirituality.

Numa's ascension to the throne and subsequent sovereignty was informed by the need to turn aspects found in the Vesta cult into a new religion of the state but with an awareness of the ultimately ontological source of goodness. Kheraskov's appreciation of the intellect depended on a search for this source existing independently of human rational capacity. This may explain the ease with which the novel's narrative could combine genuinely freethinking positions in conjunction with an espousal of a logos-centred universe.[425] Awareness of the inherent insufficiency of established norms of apprehending the truth was a precondition for reform because it guaranteed an ongoing intellectual movement towards increasingly ineffable experience of God which formed the ultimate bulwark against credulity. Within this rubric, even certain transcendent notions of what constituted divinity were shown to have been false. Specifically, Numa was reprimanded by Egeria for failing to realise that no matter how divine she appeared to be, she did not represent divinity as such. If to Numa, Egeria appeared as a blinding celestial being whom he could not directly behold, his limit of comprehension was not synonymous with the actual distance separating him from transcendent reality:

> Do not combine divinity with the creature, the priestess replied. I am not a goddess, but my essence is superior

[425] G.V. Vernadskii, *Russkoe Masonstvo v tsarstvovanie Ekateriny II* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo imeni N.I. Novikova), p. 147.

> to that of humanity. Virtuous Numa, know me now as the nymph Egeria. I talked to you in the guise of a priestess, I have guarded your heart from the passions afflicting it and protected your soul from temptations. The gods have desired to reward your virtues and have chosen you to rule over the Roman kingdom.[426]

If it is presumed that Egeria functioned as a signifier of wisdom, then Kheraskov's search for a definitive limit to his reason can be understood as emancipatory. As is the case with some of the more difficult notions voiced by mystics covered in this thesis, a counter-intuitive reading is necessary in order to clarify their intent. The invocation not to merge the identity of the creature with that of the divine can be seen as an assertion of the presence of a qualitative distance which, in light of the reference to essence, can be interpreted ontologically. The difference between reason and things independent from it towards which it becomes, is still expressed in the conventional Christian separation of entities that have been created from those which have not. However, Eegeria's warning regarding the inadmissibility of conflating these categories suggested that Numa's intellect has prematurely imposed a limit upon itself by failing to recognise the middling status of wisdom as divine-like, but not intrinsically separate from the world. Because of this, the intellect has shown itself to be neither ready to embody wisdom by overestimating its distance, nor capable of properly relating to the divine because it did not perceive anything beyond wisdom. Thus, in this very specific sense, it is possible to speak of a mildly mystical emancipation of the intellect if it is taken to mean a process whereby, the latter gradually extended its experiential horizon beyond the limits it has prematurely imposed upon itself.

At this stage, it may be natural to inquire how such a predisposition towards religious forms was meant to be harmonised with Christianity and in particular, with Orthodoxy. Obviously, the lack of ostentatiousness and ethic of care described in the Vesta cult can be rightly seen as a veiled critique of the complex, rich and not always practical ceremonial repertoire evident in Russia's

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[426] M.M. Kheraskov, *Numa Pompilii,* p. 13.

state church. Yet, it must be remembered that one of the reasons prompting Numa to intervene in religious affairs, was a desire to provide external religious rites with which his subjects could engage at length and be diverted from harmful activities.[427] If this is so, then the engineered repertoire must be not only practical in the sense of leading towards virtue, but also sufficiently mysterious in order to command the attention of the citizens. Orthodoxy could not therefore, be readily dismissed precisely because it was reflective of how a set of rites could exact considerable loyalty and at least implicitly, promote collective well-being even if, there was dissatisfaction with its capacity to engender substantive change. This tension was considerably lessened in Kheraskov's epic poem *Vladimir Reborn* (1785) wherein, the birth of a reformed personhood occurred almost simultaneously with the emergence of Russian Orthodoxy forming the ecclesiastical context of the new self.[428] However, Kheraskov taken care to guarantee the crucial Christian distinction between the created and the divine and secondly, affirmed the role of revelation albeit, as it descended via wisdom and not directly from God. Moreover, it must be remembered that Eighteenth-century Russian preoccupation with classical heritage possessed very strong religious connotations thus limiting secular implications of the turn to 'paganism'.[429]

It is now possible to begin to analyse more concretely, the purpose and the structure of pagan religious institutions on the presumption that the latter have been construed by Kheraskov to contain some truths which are applicable to a future Christian setting wherein they could develop more fully. As T.V. Artem'eva

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[427] Livy, *The Early History of Rome*, 1. 19.

[428] What has been missing in scholarly discussions of Kheraskov's religious sensibilities, which have sometimes been interpreted to have undergone qualitative change (as was the case in the work of Piksanov), is the fact that from a utopian perspective there is unity in Kheraskov's varied output. Specifically, the pagan religion in *Numa Pompilus* and Orthodoxy in *Vladimir Reborn*, are not traditions which have been conventionally 'recovered' but which have emerged as absolutely new phenomena, at least in their contexts. I draw on this utopian distinction between recovery of old and a movement towards the new on E. Luz, "Utopia and Return: On the Structure of Utopian Thinking and Its Relation to Jewish-Christian Tradition", *The Journal of Religion* 73, 3 (1993): 357-377.

[429] E.E. Prikazschikova, "Antichnost' v literaturnom i bytovom soznanii XVIII – 1-oi treti XIX v. Cherez prizmu miforitoricheskoi kul'tury", *Izvestia ural'skogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta* 1/2, 63 (2009), p. 102.

perceptively noted in her discussion of Enlightened aspects of Numa's portrayal as a philosopher-king, notwithstanding the strongly utopian orientation of his work, Kheraskov characterised him as the archetypal natural man.[430] Distinct from the self-serving religion of the majority and the virtuous religion derived from the Vesta cult Numa was about to deploy, was a natural human capacity to acquire some wisdom without entirely depending on external institutions for guidance as evident in Numa's largely solitary pursuit of mystery.[431] Arguably, this was a decisive point in the mystical reappraisal of the status of Orthodoxy as a privileged receptacle of grace. A certain religious framework could become more or less important by virtue of its capacity to reflect and to promote transcendent truths which the intellect could begin to grasp on its own. From this perspective, not only was it not in principle problematic that religious institutions could be the result of conscious reform but that the latter could be quite congenial to natural spiritual needs of the individual. It would therefore, be fair to suggest that, existence of various religious institutions within the same polity was excused if the former could be shown to have been geared to satisfy the needs of individuals who could not achieve the same degree of spiritual development. That is why, the distinction between inner religion of the few and the outer of the many, not only underscored the functionality of ecclesiastical structures but has also determined their identity as Enlightened institutions.

The Enlightened aspect of such categorisation of religion, which in Kheraskov's later works was to find an increasingly mystical interpretation, was expressed quite bluntly in the discussion between Numa and Egeria on the efficacy of religious institutions. The prevalence of superstitious beliefs, predisposed Numa to raise the obvious question of whether in order to defeat the former, religious institutions should be abolished.[432] If so, Numa continued, ignorant individuals would find themselves confused in the absence of guidance.[433] Egeria's reply to

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[430] T.V. Artem'eva, *Ot slavnogo proshlogo k svetlomu buduschemu: Filosofiia istorii i utopiia v Rossii epohi Prosvescheniia* (St. Petersburg: Aleteiia, 2005), p. 380.
[431] M.M. Kheraskov, *Numa Pompilii,* pp. 2-3.
[432] *Ibid.* p. 79.
[433] *Ibid.*

these concerns is of immense significance for the history of Eighteenth-century Russian thought because it contained the clearest and hitherto under-explored definition of what civil religion meant in the Russian intellectual context. Most crucially, the value of pedagogy vested in ritual, was seen to be more important functionally than the actual truth it reflected:

> I am not advising you to demolish the sacred temples said the Nymph. Such an alteration will startle feelings which have not been put into order. These establishments are necessary until such a time as when the truth guarded within these precincts will emerge and shine brighter than the sun to all quarters of the universe. Leave, for the time being, idolatrous priests and their rites however, in order to maintain this kind of faith, do not lessen the glory of the gods who constantly gaze upon your deeds. In order to attract your people to prayers and to divine service, you can invent different rites which are more harmonious with divinity and with nature. Neither stones nor perishable things constitute the law. Rather, it is composed of good deeds, humility and love of humankind. Think about this Numa, and return to your abode.[434]

The above passage can be misread to be indicative of a Renaissance-like apologia of some aspects of paganism on the presumption that any positive content of the latter was actualised in Christian revelation. Probably in order to uphold this kind of interpretation, Kheraskov's anxious editor inserted a footnote in regards to this passage, stating that a future disclosure of the truth referred to the "law of Orthodox Christianity."[435] However, such reading is difficult to sustain not only because Kheraskov himself did not directly gesture towards a future Orthodox faith even though it was not difficult for him to do so given the flexibility of the fictional genre. More importantly, the understanding of religion as a repertoire promoting mores rather than dogma as evident in Egeria's description, has undercut its purely confessional justification thus lessening the need for religion to be in principle, identified along confessional lines.

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[434] *Ibid.* pp. 79-80
[435] *Ibid.* p. 79.

Kheraskov seemed to think that deliberate human artistry could provide a much more adequate reflection of divinity. Reference to invention of rites needs to be stressed here because Egeria did not see an inherent conflict between something resembling natural religion and the artificial means of attaining it. Consequently, it might be fair to argue that ecclesiastical structures were in principle of provisional nature including Orthodox ones, and did not necessarily possess the transcendent authority they claimed to have. The ambiguity regarding what kind of truth was meant to "shine brighter than the sun" translated into an ambiguous status of outward religion in general. It is precisely due to uncertainty as to whether God actually acted directly through institutions that civil religion could be justified as a political project seeking to redefine the manner in which the divine was mediated. What Kheraskov may have been implying was that if it was not clear to what extent existing religious arrangements provided a conduit for God, then purposeful invention of religion could not be condemned so long as it was based on revelation experienced inwardly. This of course meant that it was impossible for anyone to test the validity of someone's else's interior experience other than through examples of virtuous living.

In fact, revelation itself was up to a point, qualified because the kind of inward sentiment that Egeria referred to, was primarily that of love of humankind. It was sufficient for a few select individuals to have encountered divine wisdom directly for the majority to be satisfied with enacting their religious duty in the form of agape. The distinction between the few and the many was strengthened in *Vladimir Reborn* wherein, Kheraskov referred to those privileged to sense the presence of God as a "small herd" standing apart from the world.[436] It is probably for this reason that Kheraskov underscored the impossibility of deriving law from religious establishments and instead, localised it firmly within the scope of charitable action. It would therefore be wrong to think of civil religion as merely a form of social control necessary for the practical needs of the state. The latter

[436] M.M. Kheraskov, 'Vladimir Vozrozhdennyi' in Kheraskov, M.M. *Tvoreniia M. Kheraskova, vnov' ispravlennyia i dopolnennyia. Chast' II* (Moscow: V Universitetskoi Tipografii, 1797), p. 133.

certainly needed the former to become a cohesive polity of virtuous citizens. However, it was the citizens themselves who needed this kind of religion the most in order to have the possibility of unearthing divine law from the mutually-binding sentiment they felt for one another. Paradoxically then, the authority of invented religion was only an external manifestation of the real authority of love which was yet to be actualised.

What Kheraskov was therefore suggesting was that if revelation was possible apart from its occurrence in the soul, it disclosed itself via human creativity in the religious sphere. Egeria did not state what kind of religion had to be created in any detail. It was therefore, up to Numa to compromise between the credulity of the common people, the potentially self-serving idolatrous practices of the priests and the content of the revealed truth imparted to him by the nymph. Thus, the institution of civil religion, as conceived in Russian mystical tradition, was defined as a human partnership with God wherein the onus was largely upon the former's rational activity in externalising the revelation of the latter. This was not only a very powerful restatement of the humanist ethos inherent in Russian masonic culture but more importantly, an understanding that neutrality in religious matters, especially on the part of the absolute ruler, was impossible. So, if in a general Enlightened sense, religion had to be 'managed' or at least contained by temporal powers, Kheraskov can be said to have expressed this aspect by integrating the roles of the monarch, law-giver and to some extent, of the prophet. In this way, Kheraskov avoided the postulation of civil religion as a form of Machiavellian expediency and instead, understood that in principle, revelation depended on, and not merely reflected through, finite human embodiment in institutions established without direct divine assistance and in which the divine did not necessarily inhere.

This may explain the absolutely unprecedented lack of attention to the institutional side of Orthodoxy in Kheraskov's account of the Christianisation of Russia in his *Vladimir Reborn*. It is necessary now to turn to this poem in order to ascertain at a deeper level, the tremendous distance separating outward religious

arrangements from the inward ground where human and divine orders intersected. Kheraskov offered a radically new reading of the introduction of Christianity to Russia by firstly, almost completely avoiding the discussion of institutional Orthodoxy and secondly, by interpreting the conversion to a new faith as a spiritual rebirth of a single individual. Thus far, existing scholarship has not explored Kheraskov's substitution of history in which Orthodoxy as the true Christianity held precedence for an account of a transcendent process taking place beyond confessional confines occurring in the soul. Such modification of hitherto accepted narrative in an epic which explicitly positioned itself as moral rather than historical in nature, was consonant with the aforementioned mystical distinction between inner and outer religious experiences. This substitution however, did not mean disregard for objective history in favour of poetic license. Rather, it was a conscious move on the part of Kheraskov intending to demonstrate that the developmental trajectory of personhood had an internal history of its own which, in order to be expressed, required a symbolic framework at the expense of historical facticity.[437]

In this light, lack of attention to the novelty of Orthodoxy as an institution which supplanted Russian paganism and only slight references to the former's Byzantine source suggested that the real motivation for any substantive change in society and politics was always rooted in a powerful drive for personal transformation. An individual was not necessarily transformed by sound institutions. Instead, individual transformation could in some cases, be prior to the deployment of hitherto non-existent social norms. Just as Numa was urged to rule and to invent appropriate forms of worship as a visible aspect of his personal communion with wisdom, so was Vladimir tasked with introducing new religion as an expression of his inner progress towards God. This was not merely symptomatic of an Enlightened privatisation of faith evident in the latter part of Eighteenth-century Russian culture. More importantly, this was based on a shift of the centre of gravity to personhood, away from institutions as an object to be reshaped and

[437] *Ibid.* p. VIII.

in the same time, as the key agent of change in society. Even if originally inspired by the divine, religious institutions were feeble almost to the point of irrelevance in the absence of the driving force of personhood conscious of its own dependence on divine authority.

Kheraskov has shown how ecclesiastical structures depended upon personhood whilst the latter in turn, directly depending upon God through the former's prioritisation of virtuous individuals who have been instrumental in assisting Vladimir in establishing Orthodoxy in Russia. At no point throughout *Vladimir Reborn* was there a sense that Orthodoxy had temporal or even spiritual authority which was in any way distinct from the personal authority of its ascetically-tempered adherents. Kheraskov's description of the aged Cyrus, one of the Greek monks who guided Vladimir in becoming self-conscious, is crucial in this regard because it presented a personal, almost heroic Christianity as something to which its Byzantine origin was secondary:

> I am Cyrus, a sinful elder who comes before the Tsar
> Not by my own authority but by that of God!
> Guided by providence from the Byzantine hovels,
> I have with difficulty, reached the Russian lands.
> But is it for me, with my grey hair
> To complain of sadness and hardship?
> I am happy, o my Sovereign, to lose my life,
> So long as my feat will be accomplished.[438]

Had Kheraskov shown that certain types of personhoods could only be formed in an Orthodox context thus justifying the selection of this particular faith then this would imply ascendency of institutions over that of the individual. Instead, Kheraskov presented Cyrus as possessive of merits which were almost entirely his own and not directly reducible to the church which he represented. That is why, it would be natural for the more perceptive readers to question the overriding significance of the formational role of institutions for personhoods which were already well-developed. Whilst Cyrus' Byzantine origin was noted, it was his

[438] *Ibid.* p. 121.

asceticism as indicated by the reference to his life in the hovel which stood out as one of his defining characteristics.

In fact, attention to asceticism as one of the overriding postures towards the world has in principle problematized the conventional status of ecclesiastical structures. It was not accidental that from the middle of the Eighteenth-century, increasing attention to personal spiritual life, sometimes based on overlapping sources, was promoted independently by the Orthodox Church in the form of its return to the Hesychast monastic elders' tradition and by Freemasonry. In both of these cases, aspects of ascetic praxis were applied to remedy the sense of insufficiency in an unreflective association of belief with outward ritual. That is why, asceticism was up to a point, always a de-institutionalising force insofar as it dealt with experiences which could only result from conscious spiritual labour. Russian masons have taken this process much further into the realm of lay culture and enabled it to function privately in the absence of ongoing institutional support. Away from his Byzantine hovel, Cyrus was located deeper in the Russian wilderness as a domain where the personhood was most exposed to temptation and where in order to succeed, it had to rely primarily on its own self-regulation in the face of the divine. By privileging an ascetic elder as one of the key contributors to Russia's Christianisation, Kheraskov has given importance to a worldview which was least reflective of institutional ossification and in the same time, sympathetic to the masonic imperative of remaining apart from the world.

Thus, it would be fair to assume that a degree of subversion of the sanctity of religious institutions was taking place on account of Kheraskov's foregrounding of personhood as the key recipient of grace and agent of innovation. Consequently, in line with the Pietist-like conversion narrative percolating into Russia via native and translated masonic literature, Christianisation was perceived as an ongoing transcendent process proceeding beyond its purely historical facticity. In complete reversal of the introduction of the new faith as a historical fact located in the temporal past and presently visible in the organisation of the church, Kheraskov supposed that the acquisition of spiritual truth was a personal task which all

individuals had to undertake in the present. Obviously, after the spread of Orthodoxy in Russia, there was a much greater degree of external support for the development of inner life. Yet, insofar as Orthodoxy's overall decisiveness was questioned, personhood remained directly juxtaposed to God with little temporal mediation. In key respects then, personhood remained almost just as much in the wilderness, apart from its own inward projection towards the divine, necessitating recourse to a fundamentally new kind of ecclesiastical structure reflective of the irresolvable tension between spiritual experience and its temporal embodiment.

Kheraskov did not detail the content of this new ecclesiastic structure. However that he saw it in structural terms is clear insofar as *Vladimir Reborn* concluded with Vladimir's mystical vision of the interior church.[439] This is of crucial significance because the notion of such a church implicitly presupposed an attempt to avoid simplistic reduction of faith to a subjective sentiment and instead, to see it in terms of a noetic domain where God was encountered and made evident through introspective praxis. Kheraskov's re-justification of the continuing relevance of external religion, apart from its civic value, was vested in the view that it prefigured the undiluted transcendence of the interior church. This way of thinking has subordinated what was largely considered to be the historical nature of religion to its ever-present experiential potential which was always new and incapable of direct institutional representation. In fact, Kheraskov did not have to directly contrast historicity with interiority because even when the Christian church was abstracted from all of its earthly occlusions and elevated to the level of revelation of the beautiful which Vladimir witnessed, it nonetheless remained of secondary value:

> But he sees the church in all its Eastern beauty,
> In all its flowering apostolic purity,
> As it rehearsed the supercelestial sacred sacraments
> And portrayed the interior church
> Which burned like a clear candle before the Lord,
> And God tenderly gazing upon its face.[440]

[439] *Ibid.* p. 159.
[440] *Ibid.*

Thus, it was not the case that personhood was left alone in the proximity of God. Rather, the implication was that there was something larger than personhood wherein transfigured existence was possible but which was discovered when personhood focused into its own inner motivations. This difficult paradox formed the basis to mystical Russian concern with emancipating personhood in terms of the latter's self-reflexion and subsequent integration into an ontologically-anchored domain.[441] In his own writings, Lopukhin, who was a close friend of Kheraskov and an influence on the content of *Vladimir Reborn*, would wrestle with a similar problem but without relying on the experience of the sublime to the same extent.[442]

It is not altogether clear how it was possible to ascend from the social and moral function of religion and recover its ontological significance. Indeed, Kheraskov did not indicate whether, in light of his earlier concern with civil religion in *Numa Pompilius,* Russian Orthodoxy could be viewed as a modified Christian version of that concept. Obviously the doctrinal and ceremonial content of Orthodoxy was not the creation of a single person or sovereign yet, there are grounds to think of it as civil insofar as it formed the exterior infrastructure to the interior church. This interpretation is of course quite masonic in a sense that it reflects the idea of a lodge as an institutional embodiment of an esoteric community of souls not reducible to the legalistic structure of the former. This vagueness on Kheraskov's part, which may have been intentional in order to avoid the charge of belittling Russia's titular confession, can be best approached from Kheraskov's reference to the beauty of the church as "Eastern". Orthodoxy was

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[441] This is why, psychoanalytic interpretation of mysticism as an immersion of the conscious 'I' into the unconscious 'It', whilst very fruitful in bringing mysticism under a spotlight of contemporary non-theological discussion, nevertheless often conflates mysticism's concern with refining personhood to the point where it discovers something objectively apart than itself within itself, with the search for Otherness. See the otherwise outstanding, Iu. Kristeva, "Ob affecte, ili intensivnaia glubina slov", tr. A. Markov *Logos* 1, 80 (2011), p. 7.

[442] E.E. Prikazschikova discussed parallels between Lopukhin's *Some Characteristics of the Interior Church* and *Vladimir Reborn*, see her 'Nravstvenno-religioznaiia kontseptsiia cheloveka v poeme M. Kheraskova *Vladimir Vozrozhdennyi*,' in Prikazschikova, E.E. ed. *Klassicheskaiia slovesnost' i religionznyi diskurs (problem aksiologii i poetiki)* Evolutsiia form hudozhestvennogo soznaniia v russkoi literature. Vyp 2 (Ekatirinburg: Izdatel'stvo ural'skogo universiteta, 2007), p. 53.

commonly referred to by Russians as one possessing an Eastern or Greek rite which would imply that in its sublimated form, it oriented Vladimir towards the presence of the interior church. The East however, was also a loaded term in masonic mythology signifying the source of illumination and the point of orientation for the various activities constituting the functioning of the lodges. Consequently, there was neither a straightforward acceptance nor outright repudiation of certain religious forms but rather, their relocation in accordance with their usefulness.

Such lack of differentiation between various religious norms can be explained by the fact that for Kheraskov, all external differences are not necessarily of any major consequence in their own right. In a very bold move, Kheraskov contrasted the totalised nature of Vladimir's vision of the church triumphant emanating from the East, with a fragmented and ritual-oriented religiosity found in the West. This was done in a way which could have been easily construed to be also directed at reactionary Russian concern with the exclusivity of Russian religious traditions primarily on the grounds of their perceived Russianness. Specifically, the rift between East and West did not pit Russia against the West as much as it alluded to two conflicting approaches to truth which battled for supremacy *in* Russia. Immediately preceding Vladimir's initiation into the knowledge of the interior church, was Vladimir's recognition of the sheer distance and defectiveness of all overly temporalized embodiments of the divine which Kheraskov saw as an expression of the sectarianism of reason:

> Over there is the opinionated West which has seceded from the East,
> It flows like a muddy creek from a pristine river,
> Approaching the blackness of the night from the morning sun.
> It consented to faith with its mind rather than its heart,
> In denominations and rites it sees the difference,
> Produced by credulity and idleness.[443]

Observed distinctions between various religious organisational forms belied their common point of origin which was presently subsumed by fervent attachment to

[443] M.M. Kheraskov, 'Vladimir Vozrozhdennyi', p. 159.

difference. This attachment, far from reflecting genuine spiritual activity was in fact symptomatic of a fundamental lack of inquiry into the ultimate source of religion. In the context of the manner of Vladimir's apprehension of the source, inquiry was in principle, a form of self-inquiry. It may be on that ground that Kheraskov could claim in all seriousness that activity not oriented towards the intersection of personhood with the divine was representative of an idleness which gave rise to an overriding concern with fragmented truth as a surrogate for real transcendent action.

It may be thought that in opposing reason to the heart in religious matters, Kheraskov departed from the Enlightened emphasis on rational participation in socio-political institutions, including religious ones and instead, promoted a more sentimental approach. Yet, bearing in mind the overall trajectory of Russian mysticism's exposure of aspects of religion as imposture, Kheraskov was in fact continuing the critique by showing that reason could easily attach itself to outward forms if personhood closed itself off from spiritual becoming. The reference to the heart did not mean a subordination of certainty to a particular emotional state but rather, functioned as a pre-Romantic symbol of interior authenticity open to the divine and distinct from all outward projections.[444] The implication was that reason could delude itself into believing that products of its own creation were not only true in a substantive sense, but were also sourced in the divine thus commanding absolute authority. In this respect, it would therefore be more correct to think of the distinction between heart and reason as an attempt to emancipate reason from subservience to its own products, allowing the heart to authenticate inward experience. There was thus, on Kheraskov's part, considerable optimism in the capacity of human beings to see through the layers of religious imposture if personhood was to experience the divine as revelation

[444] Apart from the Greek ascetic, especially Hesychast understanding of the heart as locus wherein all of the person's intentions towards God were gathered with which Kheraskov would have been vaguely familiar in light of the Rosicrucian publications of such works, it is the thought of Jacob Böhme which is crucial here. The latter's understanding of the heart as autonomous domain closest to grace rather than its more modern definition as the seat of emotions comes out in his discussion of the marriage of the soul with Sophia, see J. Böhme, *The Way to Christ* tr. P. Erb (Paulist Press: New York: 1978), pp. 57-62.

rather than as imagistic rehearsal.

In this light, returning again to the functionality of the interior church, Kheraskov sought to present it as an entity which was diametrically opposed to all external difference yet in the same time, inclusive of all personhoods. Consequently, in pushing for the revelatory nature of the interior church as one which emerged after an extended process of self-modification, Kheraskov underscored an alternative understanding of how personhood related to religious context. Specifically, the point at which the trajectory of a reformed personhood intersected with that of the interior church, was a point at which there was absolute inter-dependence of the one upon the other. The former was not an empirically-grounded and pre-existing domain to which individuals could come. Instead, the interior church emerged in the conscious life of the individual as an other-worldly event. That is why, the interior church could not be thought of as institutional authority in any conventional regulatory sense. Unlike the virtue-intending civil religion and unlike Orthodoxy which was normally accepted as the historical embodiment of truth and therefore, an authority in dogmatic matters, the interior church was not prescriptive. Its ultimate and only reason for being was to provide the ground to encounter God in the same time as it was itself encountered by an increasingly self-conscious personhood.

At a certain level, Kheraskov's espousal of civil religion, his vagueness regarding the continuing efficacy of Orthodoxy and acceptance of the interior church as the highest form of ecclesia can be seen as symptomatic of an overall disorientation experienced by many educated Russians regarding religion. Indeed, the very fact that Kheraskov foregrounded several distinct types of religious associations which from the perspective of received opinion were not easily compatible, suggests an intense search for certainty brought on by dissatisfaction with established norms. Nonetheless, it would be wrong not to see underlying unity, at least in intention, behind the evolving nature of Kheraskov's religious thematic. If, in line with the narrative structure of *Vladimir Reborn*, the emergence of the interior formed the culmination of spiritual progress and if the latter

necessarily traversed through the more corporeal aspects of faith as set out in *Numa Pompilius*, then all stages of personhood's becoming were justified. It is therefore possible to think of the foundation of civil religion as not only the first act in reforming barbaric religious sentiments in order to engender a workable civil society but also, an ongoing control and utilisation of human imaginative capacity. The cultivation of religious sentiment was not however, intended solely as an agent of civilization. The resulting civic peace, together with a heightened orientation towards the role of the transcendent in individual lives could subsequently, set the conditions for a further ascent towards the interior church for the select few willing to undertake it.

It was therefore, not surprising that Kheraskov tied Vladimir's discovery of the interior church with the overall political maturation of the Russian state. Recalling that civil religion was a largely political project, attention to the almost ineffable nature of inner spirituality did not mean the abandonment of the political Rather than leaving the reader on the threshold of the ultimate point of Vladimir's spiritual ascent, Kheraskov unexpectedly turned the narrative towards a sweeping account of Russia's overall condition as though forewarning the reader not to lose sight of society. Immediately following on from the disclosure of the interior church, Vladimir was presented with a vision of the future flourishing of the Russian nation-state with the tacit implication that the idea of the political did not disappear with personhood's concern with the transcendent:

> An open book of fate became visitable to Vladimir
> Foretelling that he will become the sun of his nation,
> That he will enlighten a people asleep in darkness,
> That the word of God will thunder throughout Russia,
> That the Dnieper will be famed with sacred relics
> And that all of Russia will be consummated with miracles.[445]

Kheraskov subsequently went on enumerating several Eighteenth-century Russian rulers, especially noting Paul I (1796-1801) whose masonic sensibilities he sought

[445] M.M. Kheraskov, 'Vladimir Vozrozhdennyi', pp. 359-60.

to cultivate with the publication of a revised version of *Vladimir Reborn*. Yet, beyond the obviously hyperbolic import typical of Russian poetry of the time which often strongly identified itself with the regime, was a serious belief in the indispensability of individual spiritual transformation in the well-being of the body-politic. It is noteworthy that the future as revealed to Vladimir, was entirely premised on his significance as a bringer of new spiritual forms and as an illuminator of the souls of his subjects rather than as a social and political reformer. Such categorisation was very much at odds with the conventional glorification of absolute monarchy as a force of historical change because it tacitly gave primacy to processes which ultimately, overcame history.

This of course, can be read as a very subtle rethinking of the role of the Enlightened monarch. It may seem that Vladimir was depicted in a similar key to Peter the Great insofar as both rulers paid close attention to religious affairs as part of their respective drives to consolidate their authority. However, the actual difference between them was vast because Kheraskov, far from limiting the authority of the monarch to develop rationally-conceived historical norms, extended it to the domain of the sacred. Therefore, if Peter's legacy was visible in the emergence of a Russian *Polizeistaat* accepted on a par by the European great powers, Vladimir's legacy was essentially promethean insofar as it firstly, set a personal example of total inward transformation and secondly, set the conditions for other personhoods to follow that example. Indeed, the fact that Kheraskov noted that Russia gained in terms of its embodiment of the sacred, contrasted with the secularising import of the state-sponsored Enlightenment. The task of the monarch was not in historicising belief by integrating it into the apparatus of the state as Peter had done but in giving citizens the means for an unmediated experience of the divine. Paradoxically, Kheraskov depicted Vladimir as a ruler who made a momentous historical impact and who also, demonstrated an intention towards a reality which could not be contained historically. As a result, religion was neither locked into an unreflective institutional rehearsal of dogma, nor subsumed in the privacy of the soul but instead, has drawn on elements of both.

Towards the end of his very long writing career, Kheraskov returned to the utopian outlook which has informed his *Numa Pompilius* published several decades previously. External religious norms were postulated to be pliable to the will of the monarch who could reform them as was done by Numa or adopt entirely new ones as was done by Vladimir. However, this faith in progress has evolved from its predominantly civic aspect and was internalised in the same way that the notion of ecclesia was retranslated into an inward fact of life. This may explain why Kheraskov moved from conceiving of the monarch as a reformer of mores to an agent of his own transformation. Thus, the very pertinent question for Eighteenth-century Russia as to firstly, who ought to have control over the religious affairs of the state and secondly, how that control was to be exercised, was radically reframed. Apart from expecting the monarch to take a keen interest in the functioning of religion and to take the lead in its reform if necessary, Kheraskov also expected the former to progress towards increasingly transcendent spiritual context wherein the continuing exercise of political control was impossible. That is, as a reformer, the monarch had temporal authority over religion in the state. This however, was restricted to that aspect of religion which could actually be controlled in any meaningful sense, namely its external infrastructure. Yet, when progressing towards the interior church, the monarch was merely setting an example. The monarch was, so to speak, exemplifying the possibility of existence in an ecclesiastical domain which was beyond any human authority, including his own.

Consequently, Kheraskov offered an alternative to the crisis of religious authority which has plagued Russian culture well into the Twentieth century. Mystical pluralisation of religious experience into temporal and transcendent forms and of its sharp separation of truths originating in human creativity from those presumed to derive from God, has subverted the established notion that the monarch could be totally in control of the religious life of the state. Kheraskov provided a unique framework whereby the monarch retained a central role but one which did not actually translate into absolute authority over the spiritual content of belief. Thus, if the interior church, as initially expounded by Lopukhin,

was a domain which resisted an overly temporal approach to spirituality, it was also, as taken up by Kheraskov, a domain which needed to be harmonised with politics. In this sense, Kheraskov has taken the Mystical Enlightenment further towards a more responsible and a more complex interaction between religion and politics. The dynamic of this interaction can best be surmised as one evincing the simultaneous effects of empowerment and limitation. King Numa was empowered by wisdom as personified by Egeria to transform society while he was also limited by its other-worldly nature which he could not possess. Similarly, Vladimir was empowered by his inner predisposition towards Christianity to drastically alter the religious sensibilities of his subjects while he was also becoming aware of an ecclesial structure which was not part of his earthly dominion. In both of these cases, action on the part of the sovereign was presupposed by an imperative to cultivate a relationship with a noetic reality not reducible to the temporal context of politics.

It would be somewhat inaccurate to note here a direct impact of a Platonic understanding of a philosopher-king whose immense authority to transform his polity was conditioned by his knowledge of objective reality beyond the senses which can he could only experience with effort and to which he must humbly consent. Such thinking percolated in a much more general sense via the vast number of esoteric texts circulating in Russia, especially those of a Hermetic nature, which were of particular interest to Rosicrucians such as Kheraskov. Consequently, it would be fair to think of the sovereign's participation in an ecclesia open to substantive modification by human will and in an ecclesia which emerged solely through grace, as Kheraskov's way of projecting a mildly theocratic notion of kingship. Prior to reforming the moral and religious sensibilities of his subjects, Vladimir had to experience the full scope of spiritual transformation of his own self and in doing so, to have simultaneously served as an example of authority and of deference. The utopian underlay to such thinking is evident if seen from the Russian masonic expectation of a future monarch who will be

representative in earthly as well as heavenly terms.[446] Yet, Kheraskov's recourse to this theme was quite original and Enlightened insofar as it underscored personal progress un-beholden to institutional authority. Out of all of the mystical writers in Russia, Kheraskov has done the most to maintain politics as viable topic of religious discourse. Politics should reach its natural limits at the threshold of the transcendent without ceasing to orient personhoods towards that which cannot be politicised. Thus, Vladimir was not only represented an idealised sovereign but also a sovereign personhood *sue generis* which has become free to experience the interior church.[447] It will be the task of the next section to outline how personhood was transformed in order for such an experience to be possible.

Structures of personhood

Kheraskov's nuanced approaches to personhood, tended to focus more on describing it as a privileged object of inquiry rather than detailing what he thought it actually was. This did not imply inattention to the need to substantiate the content of the self. Rather, having accepted the conventional theosophic accounts of personhood, Kheraskov attended to discussing how human beings need to undertake an ongoing self-relation in order to then, have the capacity to see the world in humanistic terms. Neither Skovoroda nor Lopukhin paid as much attention as Kheraskov towards personhood as an inherently sovereign entity and with showing how that sovereignty could only be cognised through an absolutely unique method of inquiry. The linchpin of Kheraskov's defence of personhood against the encroachment of the state and of rationalistic Enlightened thought was his belief that the former was unlike all other objects of experience. Such a view has had a decisive influence on Kheraskov's views regarding the structure of personhood as the latter had to be shown to be so different from other entities as to warrant a search for a non-reductive discourse of the self.

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[446] G.V. Vernadskii, *Russkoe masonstvo*, pp. 25-2.
[447] Prikazschikova, E.E. 'Nravstvenno-religioznaiia kontseptsiia cheloveka v poeme M. Kheraskova *Vladimir Vozrozhdennyi*,' p. 53.

The fact that the central theme of *Vladimir Reborn* was a moral transformation of the protagonist could not have been lost even to the more inattentive of readers. This is so not only due to Kheraskov's straightforward prioritisation of the inner life but also due to the overall cultural setting which was alert to the masonic emphasis on self-improvement. However, whilst *Vladimir Reborn* circulated widely and was one of the defining works upon which Kheraskov's reputation as one of Russia's premier literati depended, its content has not yet been exhaustively analysed. An examination of how Kheraskov turned to a mystical circumscription of personhood would be particularly valuable because such a turn occurred in regards to a crucial topic discussed in a popular text. A considerable amount of texts reflective of the Mystical Enlightenment were not in open circulation amongst the literate public but were strictly for the consumption of either a select number of trusted friends or high-ranking members of the Rosicrucian order. A focus on the mystical content of *Vladimir Reborn* can therefore, reveal what kind of complex ideas and attitudes educated Russians could freely access, resulting in a better understanding of the public face of late Eighteenth-century Russian intellectual culture.

Specifically, in relation to the subject of personhood, the writer who seemed to have influenced Kheraskov the most was the English poet, Alexander Pope (1688-1744). Whilst Pope's reputation was gradually declining in Western Europe throughout the latter part of the Eighteenth-century, this was not the case in Russia. There have been several Russian translations of Pope's *Essay on Man* (1734) throughout the century, usually from the French, the earliest being made in 1757 and published at Moscow University.[448] Pope's intention was to effect a new synthesis between nature and the person in a way which built on the early-modern approach to human being as microcosm, albeit with due deference to Newtonian science.[449] In this respect, the emphasis on maintaining the primacy of

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[448] L.M. Arinshtein, "Pope in Russian Translations of the Eighteenth Century", *Studies in Bibliography* 24 (1971), p. 166.
[449] B. Fabian, "Pope and Lucretius: Observations on 'An Essay on Man'", *The Modern Language Review* 74, 3 (1979), p. 537.

the human within a world which was increasingly seen as resulting from an interplay of impersonal forces, could not but resonate well with the Russian audience. Indeed, important as Pope's adherence to a modern scientific outlook was, *The Essay on Man* served as a warning not to attribute to reason the capacity to know the mystery of nature and thus avoid an overly optimistic appraisal of the human condition. Instead of directing itself outwards to visible nature and its inner processes, human beings ought to undertake a study of themselves:

> Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
> The proper study of mankind is man.
> Plac'd on this isthmus of a middle state,
> A being darkly wise, and rudely great:
> With too much knowledge for the sceptic side,
> With too much weakness for the stoic's pride,
> He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest;
> In doubt to deem himself a god, or beast;
> In doubt his mind or body to prefer;
> Born but to die, and reas'ning but to err;
> Alike in ignorance, his reason such,
> Whether he thinks too little, or too much:
> Chaos of thought and passion, all confus'd;
> Still by himself abus'd, or disabus'd;
> Created half to rise, and half to fall;
> Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
> Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurl'd:
> The glory, jest, and riddle of the world![450]

It was not the case that Pope presumed the unknowability of the creation in comparison to the knowability of the person. Rather, it was that the inattention to the person resulted in perpetuation of folly. For Pope, the person remained a riddle but one which was worth being inquired into. Thus, the point was not with setting aside what was deemed to be mysterious and focusing on what was not. What Pope suggested was that the inner life of the person represented a fitting mystery. A qualified turning away from the world was not merely brought on by a sense of powerlessness in the face of an inscrutable divine creativity but out of the

[450] A. Pope, 'An Essay on Man in Four Epistles' in Pope, A. *Selected Poetry and Prose* (New York: Reinhart, 1972), pp. 202-3.

perceived need to re-justify a specifically human outlook on existence.[451] A key aspect of this renewed emphasis on the person was the then very modern notion of person as a natural systematiser of knowledge and experience and as someone who was caught between the seemingly inexplicable mysteries within and without.[452]

Given the explosion of the discourse of the self in Eighteenth-century Russia and attendant to that, interest in moralising literature, *The Essay on Man* enjoyed a popularity which was peculiar to the Russian context. Discussion of moral matters outside of the conventional Orthodox settings and especially of theodicy was still a relative novelty in Russia as exemplified by the demand for didactic works. *The Essay on Man* not only satisfied the already existing desire for what was presumed to be a confessionally-neutral discussion of mores but more crucially, has offered an unprecedented vision of humanity as its own ultimate challenge. Such recourse to anthropology was consonant with the humanistic ethos of the Russian literati and could, with sufficient degree of re-accentuation, be interpreted from a mystical standpoint, obviously at considerable expense to Pope's rationalism. Kheraskov certainly knew of Pope not only because he was generally well-acquainted with Western European Neoclassical poetry but also because he translated some of his shorter poems.[453] If one of the overarching intentions of Kheraskov's poetic *oeuvre* was a localisation of the person within the drama of divine creation, then out of all of the poetic works which Kheraskov knew, the influence of Pope's work must be given its due because it stood closest to Kheraskov's intentions.

Kheraskov heavily emphasised the irreducible value of humanity which he understood mystically to be a world unto itself. In forceful terms, Kheraskov foregrounded the somewhat antiquated notion of the human person as a

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[451] J.C. Gray and J.E. Swearingen, "System, the Divided Mind, and the *Essay on Man*", *Studies in English Literature* 32, 3 (1992), p.483.
[452] *Ibid.*
[453] I. Shaitanov, 'Imia nekogda slavnoie' in Alexander Pope, *Poemy* tr. Bychkov, M.N. (Moscow: Hudozhestvennaia literature, 1988), pp. 1-3.

microcosmic representative of the universe. However, the upsurge of this Renaissance motif once prevalent in Western European contexts and only vaguely present in pre-Petrine Russia, functioned as a humanising force drawing attention to the uniqueness of human existence and of the crucial role of identity. The identity of personhood as an extract of the creation and as the image of God was unique precisely because in its innermost self, it was tied to the natural and divine processes determining it, thus extending its responsibilities far beyond the temporal horizon of every-day experience.[454] Such a humanistic conception underscored the inexhaustibility of inquiry into the nature of personhood and of the need to consciously experience this depth. To that end, elder Cyrus directed Vladimir's attention to his own mystery and to his status in the creation:

> The hardest of all the sciences until the end of time
> For man, is the science of man;
> Miniaturised by the almighty out of the universe
> He is in his essence, a small and perfect world;
> God has extracted the purest from all the creatures
> And breathed a living spirit into his immortal flesh;
> He is the mid-point, he is the heart of nature,
> In him is earth and air, in him fire and water lay hidden.
> This image of divine has shone like the sun
> And darkened the comeliness of matter;
> But he enjoyed his glory not for long!
> Attend to the beginning of Adam's fall…[455]

What Kheraskov here was arguing against, was the optimistic belief in the science of humanity which would be as exact and as foreclosed by laws as Newtonian natural philosophy was popularly taken to be. Yet, the image of a human being as his or her own science contrasted with the conventional Enlightened notion common to Voltaire that, morality had "something of the character of a mechanical law" and that it was possible to study it similarly to the way a scientist studied natural phenomena.[456] The kind of progress that Kheraskov envisaged was

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[454] S.V. Arzhanuhin, *Filosofskie vzglyady russko masontsva* (Ekaterinburg: Universitet Gor'kogo, 1995), p. 151.
[455] M.M. Kheraskov, 'Vladimir Vozrozhdennyi', p. 127.
[456] F. Meinecke, *Historism: The Rise of a New Historical Outlook* tr. J.E. Anderson (London: Routledge, 1972), pp. 59-60. Here, I use an aspect of Meinecke's analysis bearing in mind some of his contentious claims regarding the Enlightenment which were often oriented to support his

not merely one of mores but more importantly, one of recognition. That is, Vladimir could be said to have progressed in knowledge when he confronted his own self and recognised that it formed the ultimate object of his inquiry. However, this inquiry was not geared towards the discovery of truths of character and its inner motivations as determined by natural law but rather, an intellectual experience of the uniqueness of personhood in comparison to any other object of inquiry.

By such means, Kheraskov foregrounded the imperative whereby, personhood not only had to be discovered and experienced but crucially, made sovereign over all methods of inquiry especially those applied in science. It would not be too far-fetched to think of Kheraskov's emphasis on the difficulty of the 'science of man' as an early expression of anti-scientism in Russian intellectual history. The problem was not the growth in the explanatory power of scientific discourse. Russian freemasons have in fact supported, ideologically and financially, various scientific and scholarly endeavours. Rather, the problem was with the nascent positivism attributed to science when it enlarged into the distinctly humanistic concerns of self-worth and of imbuing life with a non-reductive teleology conducive to becoming. This tension between a humanistic circumscription of existence and the utility of science was particularly evident in Kheraskov's didactic poem *The Fruits of Science* (1797) which indirectly explains why inquiry into humanity is the most difficult of all pursuits. The latter poem praised Peter the Great as the Enlightener of Russia who brought technical innovation, especially in military affairs which put Russia on a par with other European nations. However, Kheraskov was also adamant that the roots of the Enlightenment were in the muses and that the latter represented "the first science" which illuminated the human condition.[457] It was the poet and not the statesman who gathered around himself people who were not yet living in a polity, endowed them with reason and most importantly, "induced them to form a

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understanding of the uniqueness of German historical science. However, the emphasis on mechanism I think holds true insofar as knowledge of natural laws was not necessarily synonymous with knowledge of the person.

[457] M.M. Kheraskov, *Plody nauk (didakticheskaia poema)* Pamiatniki literatury (Munchen: Imwerden, 2003), p. 5.

commonwealth with poetry."[458] The signing of the social contract which brought into being a sovereign who fostered the arts and sciences was therefore, not *the* foundational moment in the development of the Enlightenment but was itself founded on the transformation of the future citizens through language.[459]

Behind the readily-discernible effects of reforms undertaken by the Enlightened sovereign, was the much more elusive power of language to radically reorient human developmental trajectory. Thus, it is possible to think of an Enlightenment in a humanistic sense as intending towards an inner redevelopment of human predispositions and as intending towards a flourishing of communal life in a developed polity. The 'science of man' was difficult and unlike any other science precisely because it dealt decisively with the human condition prior to the emergence of all other discourses. Kheraskov's faith in the theurgical capacity of the word which could not be contained in any political blueprint for reform can be detected in *Vladimir Reborn*, albeit in a much more mystical sense. Immediately following up elder Cyrus' description of the uniqueness of personhood, was an account of the divine meaning inhering in language and which humanity has lost after The Fall:

> Cyrus diligently recounted the sacred narrative,
> How man was made of light and how he fell;
> He told the Tsar the literal meaning of the Scriptures
> And then revealed the spirit and the light within the letters.
> This sacred writ, he said, is a mysterious temple,
> Wisdom, brighter than all the stars is hidden there.[460]

In the above quotation, Kheraskov provided a non-literary, objective understanding of language as something which ultimately, could not be entirely separated from the meaning it imparted and most importantly, as a domain of wisdom. Vladimir's progress inwards towards his own personhood and towards wisdom was consequently, premised on a recovery of language circumscribing the latter. This

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[458] *Ibid.* p. 6.
[459] *Ibid.* pp. 6-7.
[460] M.M. Kheraskov, 'Vladimir Vozrozhdennyi', p. 127.

may explain why, whilst always possessing an insight into the nature of the political, the Mystical Enlightenment sought to locate the genesis of personhood as occurring beyond all existing social arrangements. Kheraskov's advancement of this theme took place via his prioritisation of the mysterious manner in which it could capture the entirety of the individual. From that perspective, the as yet un-political inhabitants living in a semi-natural state captivated by the poet and Vladimir's attention to the divine meaning of the words have undergone a similar process insofar as in both cases, exposure to a *poiesis* pregnant with wisdom was tantamount to a new beginning, a rebirth in an absolute sense.

It may be natural to inquire as to how language could function as a temple of wisdom and perhaps equally importantly, into Kheraskov's definition of the given that both of these aspects were instrumental in revealing and subsequently, in reshaping personhood. It is possible to think of language's function as an institution-like domain as Kheraskov's attempt to underscore the transcendent anchorage of meaning. To that end, in order not to slip into subjectivism, language must be thought of as a structure-forming entity containing meaning which is nonetheless, independent of it. Thus, again, language was not construed in conventional literary terms as a medium expressing a particular theme in the appropriate style. Instead, insofar as language disclosed a hitherto hidden reality and insofar as it was explicitly seen to be different to the literal interpretation of things, as evinced by Cyrus' two alternative narrations of the Scriptures, it was approximated to a *logos* which personhood must master. Arguably, Kheraskov captured the basic Platonic aspect of discourse as that which, in order to be understood, required the intellect to have progressed a certain distance in its becoming whilst also, being the means for further knowledge. Vladimir had to already progress along the path of self-knowledge in order for Cyrus to gesture to the former, the spiritual content of words. Language was therefore, a temple in a sense of being a receptacle of the divine and in light of its symbolic aspect which Kheraskov seemed to privilege, a distinct repertoire. Thus, Vladimir was under the onus of having to participate in the world of the symbolic in order to recover aspects of prelapsarian existence. It is curious that in one of her anti-masonic plays, Catherine the Great singled out serious,

contemplative reading as laughable but in way which was nonetheless reflected the mystical approach to texts as worlds unto themselves.[461]

It is possible to see how Kheraskov applied his predominantly symbolic understanding of language to the narrative structure of *Vladimir Reborn* in a way which suggested that the poem was meant to perform a temple-like function. In his introduction to the poem, Kheraskov made it quite clear that he was consciously breaking the rules of the epic genre by focusing on the allegorical significance of the composition.[462] If a temple is a certain kind of symbolic totality into which, personhood was initiated and from where it derived knowledge, then *Vladimir Reborn* can be thought as such a totality into which, a discerning reader could be initiated. To that end, Kheraskov's justification for not writing a traditionally heroic or historical epic was his desire to reveal the "wanderings of an attentive man along a path shone by truth."[463] In the course of such wandering, the individual "overcomes himself, finds the path of truth and having reached illumination, undergoes rebirth."[464] Of course all literature, be it devotional, fictional or philosophical purported to lesser or greater degree, transform the worldviews of its readers. However, in fulfilling this aim, not all texts projected themselves as absolutes into which, an inquiring mind was immersed in pursuit of its transcendent goals. By positioning itself as a text capable of leading the readers into their innermost selves and simultaneously, into the proximity of the divine, *Vladimir Reborn* could be said to have aimed at forming the interiority of its readers in the same time as it laid claim on facilitating spiritual experience. This accords well with E.E. Prikazschikova's argument that *Vladimir Reborn* was ultimately, written for a narrow circle of Kheraskov's fellow mystics, despite its considerable popularity in the wider reading public.[465] In doing so, the text has not only taken some of the

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[461] E.E. Prikazschikova, "Kul'turnaiia mifologiia masonstva v russkom literaturnom soznanii vtoroi poloviny XVIII v.: v poiskah obraza *chuzhogo*", *Izvestiia ural'skogo gosudarstvenno universiteta*, 41, (2006), p. 27.
[462] M.M. Kheraskov, 'Vladimir Vozrozhdennyi', p. VIII.
[463] *Ibid.*
[464] *Ibid.*
[465] E.E. Prikazschikova, 'Nravstvenno-religioznaiia kontseptsiia cheloveka v poeme M. Kheraskova *Vladimir Vozrozhdennyi*,' p. 53.

functions previously accorded to religious literature but most importantly, has gone some way towards subverting religion as a social institution only and instead, underscored its institutionality as inherently discursive and symbolic.

Kheraskov's foregrounding of the text in such a manner has not been the subject of scholarly discussion before even though, his postulation of the text as a personhood-forming agency struck a new note in the culture of the Westernised Russian elite. Whilst more precise and considerably more sophisticated in their outlook, neither Lopukhin nor Skovoroda were as explicit in their belief that a contemporary text not directly engaging with canonically-accepted religious literature could be the high-road to truth. This textualisation of reality and the approximation of knowing to the contemplation of symbol with a practical intent was expressed more clearly in Kheraskov's *The Fruits of Science* wherein, the philosopher, in contradistinction to the chemist and the metaphysician, could read the essence of nature and Enlighten mores:

> Removing with a skilful hand nature's covering,
> A philosopher reveals to us its charms.
> He reads the hidden meaning in the book of essence,
> Finds and unties its complex knots,
> And what is concealed from our eyes
> He teaches us to sense and feel and see.
> To Enlighten our minds and to correct our mores,
> He prescribes to us some useful rules.[466]

Obviously, to liken the world to a text was not in itself suggestive of originality. Medieval and especially Baroque Russian culture made a particular point of textualising human experience. Kheraskov did not passively replicate pre-Petrine Russian religious approach to the word which understood the latter as spoken by God.[467] Kheraskov was much more daring insofar as he thought that his own work

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[466] M.M. Kheraskov, *Plody nauk*, p. 10. The Russian word *estestvo* which in its more modern variant usually means substance, I have translated as essence in order to reflect the non-material insight into nature a philosopher could provide as evident in the poem.

[467] In A.M. Panchenko's outstanding discussion of this theme there is a clear suggestion to the effect that the sanctity of the text depended on the notion of God as a speaking being. See, A.M. Panchenko, 'Russkaia kul'tura v kanun petrovvskih reform', pp. 178-9.

must be read contemplatively in the manner which was usually accorded to Scripture. Consequently, the conceptual advance was not merely in approaching nature as a book written by God but in using this notion to consciously alter the relationship between the reader, the text and its author. This was precisely the import of the above quotation wherein, the philosopher has firstly, read reality as text and secondly, retranslated its meaning to those who could not, at least initially, engage with the latter directly. The philosopher had to create *logos* about that which was already deemed to be a text thus privileging the uniqueness of the word as reality and opening up for the possibility for the latter's multiplication through subsequent texts.

What this meant was that Kheraskov has contributed towards the emergence of conditions whereby it was at least implicitly conceivable to think of text as containing *new* truths geared towards the emergence of a *new* personhood. That is why it was absolutely necessary that wisdom be personified as was the case in *Numa Pompilius* and in the same time as a vitalising principle suffusing all of the creation as was the case in *Vladimir Reborn*. In the first case, wisdom acted as a stimulus towards knowledge and crucially, as an object of love whilst in the second, it sought to enlarge that sentiment to cover the creation as a whole by revealing itself as inhering throughout the latter. The sovereignty of personhood was therefore strengthened not only because the method by which it performed an inquiry into itself was autonomous from all other kinds of inquiry but also, because it had the capacity for a unique insight into reality without undue dependence on the senses. There was therefore, a rather complex isomorphism developing between personhood and personified wisdom as the latter revealed itself in nature. It would be difficult to think of personhood enjoying any meaningful independence if it were contextualised in nature conceived mechanistically. The only way that personhood could be integrated into the chain of causal relations was if it were itself understood in the same mechanistic terms as its habitué. This was one of the moves performed by materialistic Enlightenment psychology, the most extreme case being

La Mettrie's espousal of the *l'homme machine*.[468] Apart from the questionable status of free will, there was also the issue of whether it was in fact possible for any sense of novelty to arise in human consciousness if the latter was entirely subjected to the rigid operation of physical processes.

Kheraskov's projection of wisdom as a personified idea was diametrically opposed to the reductive implications of materialistic naturalism. Arguably, Kheraskov postulated that if nature was enlivened by a person-like wisdom, then nature too, up to a point, shared in the uniqueness of personhood. Therefore, personhood could not be said to have been under threat of being subsumed by nature if the latter's very essence was inimical to the impersonal and often predictable interplay of forces it displayed when approached via the senses. To that end, the reason why personhood and nature could be said have enjoyed an isomorphic relationship was because both entities were open to a humanistic interpretation insofar as both derived their authenticity from wisdom which was in turn, derived from God. Kheraskov grasped nature Neoplatonically as a domain which was inwardly enlivened by wisdom in a similar way that personhood was inwardly transformed through introspective praxis. Cyrus continued his paean to wisdom for Vladimir's instruction in terms implying a hidden vitalism within nature and the person:

> Divine wisdom moves from one horizon to another;
> She neither decreases nor expends its strength,
> Everywhere she is bright and potent;
> She gives being and ensouls all things;
> She births and prepares all creatures to be born;

[468] It is crucial to add here that in his early writings, La Mettrie not only sought to subvert the notion of a spiritual depth to personhood by promoting physiological arguments, but also to disestablish notions of novelty, uniqueness and spontaneity to human experience. A person was merely a doll-like creature: "Physicians have explored and thrown light on the labyrinth of man; they alone have revealed the springs hidden under coverings that hide so many marvels from our sight." See La Mettrie, *Machine Man and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 4-5. This intention may be radicalised further as, in the opinion of Blair Campbell, La Mettrie wanted to "persuade the egocentric individual that he possesses no intrinsic worth…" See his "La Mettrie: The Robot and the Automaton", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 31, 4 (1970), p. 562. Such dehumanisation was of course one of the key targets of Russian mystics and may explain their seemingly conservative polemic against the French *philosophe* tradition which was blamed for denying human beings their humanity and the corresponding attraction to Platonic and Neoplatonic accounts of a becoming soul.

She is God's ray – a great light;
Nothing impure can coexist with her;
She is God's transparent mirror,
God's sacred face, not different from him in any way;
She is one yet acts in all,
Whole everywhere and cannot be destroyed;
It pours upon mankind more bountifully than any stream,
Bringing light into souls and making prophets;
Burning more wonderfully than the sun or the moon,
Giving law to stars and gifting them with light…[469]

In contradistinction to the natural science of the day which sought to explain diverse phenomena through irreversible operation of natural laws, the above quotation seemed to almost entirely revert to a much older conception emphasising a Demiurge-like creativity inhering in, but distinct from, nature.[470] Yet, whilst indeed foregrounding wisdom as a world-soul, Kheraskov nonetheless saw it as a law-giving force, a move somewhat more in keeping with the Eighteenth-century search for regularity. This combination was crucial for the notion of personhood. What Kheraskov was able to do was to follow up the fixed laws obeyed by the stars with the dynamic utterance of truth by the prophet to the same source. Vladimir's initiation into the mystery of creation and into that of his own self was therefore, one of seeing beyond the well-regulated appearances and to experience the absolutely free and irrepressible creativity sustaining himself and the creation.[471]

It would therefore, be fair to suggest that, Kheraskov located personhood between the forces of regularity and those of the prophetic revelation of the new. This did not mean however, that Vladimir's self was bound by these forces in any straightforward sense. Rather, in light of the emphasis on the development of a sovereign personhood, such circumscription needs to be understood as a

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[469] M.M. Kheraskov, 'Vladimir Vozrozhdennyi', p. 128.

[470] It would be incorrect to view such an interpretation as an outright expression of anti-Newtonianism, for the reasons to do with general acceptance of Newton in Russia and Newton's own complex theosophic ideas. Yet, insofar as nature was moralised and spiritualised, it could be said to have been approached contra Newton's terms as the latter were commonly understood, see A.J. Kuhn, "Nature Spiritualized: Aspects of Anti-Newtonianism", *English Literary History* 41, 3 (1974), p. 412.

[471] Albeit without drawing on the poetry analysed in this chapter, L.G. Aleksandrov also noted the liveliness of Kheraskov's cosmos, see his "Filosfskie, duhovnye i obschestvennye idei M.M. Kheraskova, pp. 12-13.

demarcation of what Vladimir needed to experience in order to continue his becoming. The point of Cyrus' discourse was not to predispose Vladimir to submit to nature as such. To do so, would imply that Vladimir would also have to submit to his own natural inclinations which were not always savoury. Personhood was emancipating itself from the immediate constraints of its own corporeality not merely through an ascetic moderation of desire and the imagination. Like his friend, Lopukhin, Kheraskov too was concerned with the potentially destructive potential of the imaginary.[472] Emancipation reached a higher stage when personhood avoided an exclusive deferral to nature or to itself but instead, submitted to the transcendent ground which the latter shared and which was capable of providing a visible manifestation of itself. Insofar as Kheraskov has shown wisdom to be the prior condition of creation whose influence was ongoing in what was created, he has in fact, shown it to be the ground of existence. It was by being taught to consciously identify with that ground rather than merely with its tangible results that Vladimir was given a critical distance, an intellective vantage point from which to survey the creative operations of wisdom. Kheraskov expressed this by describing wisdom in terms usually reserved for nature. Ultimately, it was wisdom and not nature which was 'bountiful' and capable of 'birthing' other beings, thus denying to nature its role as an autonomous source and context of human life. Similarly, it was not entirely by itself that personhood configured itself in such a way as to become illuminated and prophetic but rather, became so in the fertilizing presence of a transcendent otherness. In either case, personhood's sovereignty resided in its irreducibility to anything other than the creativity which transformed it.

Kheraskov went to extreme lengths to defend the idea of personhood as wisdom, to the point of conflating the latter with God in ways which could not be countenanced by conventional Russian theological discourses of the day. Whilst it is obviously true that wisdom overshadowed the human self, the very fact that it was placed on a par with God can be read as the ultimate valorisation of personhood in Eighteenth-century Russia. It is striking that not only was wisdom explicitly

[472] Prikazschikova, E.E. argued that this was symptomatic of a more general Russian masonic distrust of the imagination, see her 'Nravstvenno-religioznaiia kontseptsiia cheloveka v poeme M. Kheraskova *Vladimir Vozrozhdennyi*, p. 59.

understood to be not different from God "in any way" but was also the face of God that is, in semantic terms, the most recognisable individuating feature of any being.[473] This presents a methodological and existential difficulty. Namely, if personhood as wisdom is God-like then it may be doubtful whether human personhood can aspire to such transcendence given its creaturely nature. There is no method by which the creature can progress and be able to enjoy an existence similar to that of its creator. However, what Kheraskov was very likely implying is that insofar as personhood was a metaphysical entity, there was no separation of any fundamental kind between various beings endowed with a self. Perhaps Kheraskov expressed this difficult notion most clearly when he combined the definition of wisdom as personhood, world-soul and Christ into a single descriptive trope emphasising a multi-faceted and sometimes contradictory reflection of the same divine essence. Following on from identifying wisdom as the source of regularity in nature, Cyrus detailed further its all-pervasiveness:

> She is God's breath and word,
> As ancient as the Divine yet is always new in all the creatures;
> She sets all nature into order,
> A world-soul, a saviour and the son of God.
> He is the one that reveals to us the Father and the Spirit,
> A chain that links Creator with the creature.
> You may ask, what is this face of God?
> It's God and man, our saviour, Christ.[474]

Such deliberate merging of gender and identity would be almost impossible to understand if it is not seen as reflective of divinity behind every creative act. That is, for Kheraskov, the forces which constituted the reality of human experience, were likened to personhoods. Given the earlier emphasis on the need for Vladimir to reshape his own personhood into a receptive organ open to its own mystery as well as to that of the creation, knowledge of the world of other personhoods depended on a prior spiritual rebirth which awakened the self.

In effect, Vladimir was being introduced to the notion that cognizance of

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[473] M.M. Kheraskov, 'Vladimir Vozrozhdennyi', p. 128.
[474] *Ibid.*

any individuality could imply proximity to God. If this is the case, then Kheraskov was suggesting that the process of becoming was akin to a process of recognising individuated forms. Vladimir was not inwardly transformed by becoming towards an impersonal divinity. Rather, the trajectory of Vladimir's *bildung* required that he consciously intermingle with other personhoods which were much more transcendent than his own self. By postulating such an understanding of enworldedness, Kheraskov was able modernise the notion of the person as microcosm. The earlier statement regarding the humanising intentions behind Kheraskov's recourse to the Renaissance understanding of the person as a mini-universe can now be clarified.[475] Kheraskov did not merely restate the old belief in the correspondence between the material, psychological and the spiritual forces constituting the person and those which constituted the creation. Whilst such thinking did privilege the notion of personhood by foregrounding the centrality of thinking and judging through analogy, it did not necessarily mean that creation itself was structured in a way which was intrinsically reflective of personhood.[476] By enlarging personhood to cover phenomena which were experienced intellectually, Kheraskov has in fact, turned the former into a blue-print which formed the basis of reality as such. This can be quite rightly taken as an extreme reaction to a perceived threat to personhood but in the same time, such prioritisation of self-consciousness was in equal measure, an indication of the perceived richness of the inner life. Therefore, Vladimir's conscious descent inwards did not terminate in an encounter with God within the recesses of the inner desert but was instead, a pathway towards becoming a member of a transcendent community of personhoods which collectively, constituted the world.

From the perspective offered by Kheraskov's modernisation of the microcosm motif, it is possible to detail further, how Vladimir was presented as a

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[475] See p. 23 of the present sub-chapter.

[476] A.I. Boldyrev contrasted the ancient view of 'man as microcosm' which suggested that a person was imprinted with a less perfect and quantitatively diminished image of the cosmos, with a Renaissance belief in man as a fulcrum of the creation. Russian freemasons found the early-modern notion of microcosm congenial because of its strong humanistic potential, see his *Problema cheloveka*, p. 100.

sovereign personhood. As already discussed, Vladimir's sovereignty had a moral component however, it was also of a much broader speculative significance. Specifically, sovereignty was also reflected in the way that knowledge was acquired. If the reality into which Vladimir was immersed was either informed or constituted by personhoods, then knowing the former was almost synonymous with recognising the existence of other personhoods. In this respect, Kheraskov was essentially suggesting that personhood was only capable of inquiring substantively into either itself or another personhood. Ultimately then, personhood was sovereign because it was simultaneously the object and the subject of inquiry. If Pope's injunction that human beings must orient themselves towards their own humanity at the expense of superfluous intellectual pursuits, could be read as a restraint on what the intellect could inquire into, Kheraskov's humanisation of reality represented an expansion of the confines of the human. A world was still open to a rationalistic scientific analysis but the former's status could not be determined by the latter's conclusions. The world was also open to an intimate perception as a result of which, its moral worth could be ascertained.[477]

It might be easy to mistake Kheraskov's intentions as reflective of an attempted return to an enchanted worldview which Enlightened thought sought to displace. There may very well have been a degree of nostalgia on the part of Kheraskov for an imagined time when religious sentiment was harmoniously integrated into individual and social existence and when the threat of atheistic critique was minimal. However, Kheraskov's emphasis on an active human stance towards the world within and without the person does not easily square up with the inherent passivity of an enchanted outlook. The intention to humanise reality was rather, symptomatic of an attempt to work out an objective account of personhood which did not entirely depend on experiences derived from subjectivity. The latter was still of key significance but as with Skovoroda's privileging of symbolism as a meta-language, the concern was with finding ways of correlating inward experience with outward reality. Thus, it would be more accurate to interpret Kheraskov's

[477] For the centrality of intimacy in the more radical masonic worldviews, see *Ibid*. p. 91.

mysticism as an effort to prioritise the discourse of humanity as distinct from any other discourse. Moreover, Kheraskov did not unreflectingly accept the theosophic notion of the human being as the centre of creation. Given Kheraskov's accentuation on personhood and given that the latter was not restricted to human beings, an early-modern form of egocentrism was problematic.

This may explain some of the vagueness with which Kheraskov discussed the structure of personhood. Kheraskov did not just look for personhood within the human subject. Important as the notion of the 'interior man' was, it was only a condition of being able to grasp the entire creation in personalistic terms. Thus, it is difficult to find aspects of individualism in a conventional Western Enlightened sense as a discourse of rights in Kheraskov. A conscious self-relation could never restrict itself to the confines of the self or of society but intrinsically intent to be open to all being. This does not imply a denial of rights. A certain degree of personal autonomy was necessary in order for spiritual self-development to be possible. However, personhood could not, in principle be framed around its supposed rights because its very identity depended on becoming towards beings other than itself. A focus on rights could therefore, be quite damaging because it could abridge the extent of personhood's becoming. Consequently, whilst there were some genuinely liberal tendencies in Kheraskov's worldview, such as his prioritisation of religious experience vis-à-vis tradition, these could be just as dangerous as their antitheses if they allowed personhood to be concerned with itself to the exclusion of its concern with others. For that reason, the ethical component of Kheraskov's *oeuvre* was far more concerned with fostering a mystical perception of nature as one of the preconditions of worldly action and in doing so, distancing himself from an overly social understanding of human flourishing.

Ascetic ethic

The ethical content of Kheraskov's thought had a strongly socio-political component, albeit from a mystical perspective. To a some extent, Skovoroda's

emphasis on the need to base ethics upon a practical understanding of human proclivities also raised specifically political questions regarding the inherent worth of social existence. Lopukhin's ethical thought opened into the political sphere by virtue of its re-justification of the *vita activa*. However, in comparison to the aforementioned thinkers, Kheraskov was the only one who allocated a role for the absolute monarch in the moral transformation of the citizens. Apart from attending to individual and collective improvement of mores, Kheraskov envisioned a much more substantive transformation of society resulting from ascetic praxis. Kheraskov went some way towards rethinking the established understanding of the ends of politics and of the duties of the sovereign on the basis of a deeply theosophical understanding of nature. Whilst Kheraskov's literary output did not incur any official sanctions, his insistence on the transcendent goals of human action went beyond the temporal horizon of the Russian *Polizeistaat* and in that sense, could be seen as a form of freethinking.

As with other thinkers constituting the Mystical Enlightenment, Kheraskov's approach to ethics was not intended to work out a systematic set of rules which would guide individual and collective solution to ethical dilemmas. Rather, Kheraskov was more interested in delineating the ultimate purpose of ethics and in unearthing the meaning of progress in politics and nature. Such treatment of ethics was very much in keeping with the emphasis on the part of the Mystical Enlightenment on setting the conditions for ethical worldviews rather than with the latter's actual development. Lack of attention to the specific content of ethical thought can be attributed to the enduring belief amongst Russian mystics that fundamental improvement in people's character and conduct was conditioned on the attainment of an alternative and more spiritual reality. The overriding commitment to a transcendent totality rather than to focusing on the establishment of normative processes of reasoning can be sourced to what S.L. Baehr called the "search for heaven on earth" as one of the central aspects of Russian culture.[478] From that perspective, Kheraskov's task was not so much to

[478] S.L. Baehr, *The Paradise Myth in Eighteenth-Century Russia*, p. 15.

change certain patterns of behaviour, but to orient the minds of his readers towards the idea of a near-total transformation if the former were to immerse themselves into wisdom. This did not of course preclude the possibility of specific changes to harmful practices afflicting individuals and society at large. However, whilst Kheraskov was prepared to condemn blatant social evils, his accentuation of the need to change the state of being of individuals if mores were to be improved remained at the forefront of his concerns as one of the leading Russian literati.

Kheraskov's utopian approach to social and individual progress has drawn on an array of Western European sources. However, the influence of François Fénelon's (1651-1715) *The Adventures of Telemachus* (1699) was of especial importance because of the latter's emphasis on the search for virtue and description of near-perfect societies. Fénelon was very influential in Russia as evident by numerous translated editions of his chief work and not least, by some of its native Russian imitations. To his many Russian admirers, Fénelon showed how to make progressive use of the golden age motif for the purposes of insightful political commentary.[479] Kheraskov's prose works in particular have shown dependence on Fénelon's way of exposing the evils of the present through an imaginary recovery of a simpler and more peaceful existence associated with the pastoral idyll.[480] Yet, it would be wrong to approach such texts as an exercise in fancy without attending to their serious attempts to find the mechanism of progress from rudeness to civilisation. The latter topos was of especial importance in Eighteenth-century Russia given the perceived momentousness of Peter the Great's transformation of Russia from a medieval state to a modern polity.[481] Fénelon's idealisation of agrarian life was meant to serve as a damning contrast to the vain pursuits of the French elite of his day. To that end, real progress was

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[479] J.H. Davis Jr. F*énelon* (Boston: Twyne Publishers, 1979), p. 166.
[480] N.K. Piksanov, 'Masonskaia literatura', pp. 78-9.
[481] A.D. Kantemir's unfinished epic poem about Peter the Great noted how the emperor cast his wise gaze upon the troubles afflicting Russia, including the moral development of its citizens, see his 'Petriada' in Z.I. Gershkovich, ed. A.D. *Kantemir. Sobranie stihotvorenii* (Leningrad: Sovetskii pisatel', 1956), pp. 242-3.

signified not by the increasingly sophisticated use of violence but by the capacity to make use of nature's abundance. To that end, in *Telemachus*, there was a scene describing how the fertility goddess Ceres imparted the knowledge of agriculture in a way which suggested that real barbarity was warfare:

> She appeared assembling together the people who before were dispersed, either hunting for their food, or gathering as they fell from the trees, the fruits that grew wild in the woods and forests. These savages she taught how to till the ground, and to procure themselves nourishment from her fruitful bosom. She made them a present also of the plough, and taught them how to use it by the yoke. The fertile fields were then seen laid open in furrows by the ploughshare, and afterwards overspread with the golden grain, which the reaper cut down with his sharp sickle, thus rewarding himself for all his labour. Of iron, that elsewhere is employed to destroy everything, no other use seemed to be made here, but to produce abundance and pleasures of every kind.[482]

The point behind the depiction of such a golden age was to unmask the arrogant pretensions of modernity by suggesting that real happiness could only be derived through peaceful occupations. By way of re-emphasising this backward looking utopia, Fénelon followed up this scene with a veiled reference to Isiah's prophecy of the wolf playing with the sheep as somehow, already fulfilled in the mythic past.[483] One of the conclusions Telemachus was meant to draw from this was that a wise sovereign should not hide the misery of his subjects behind a façade of opulence. Extraction of natural abundance and not the creation of an artificial one represented a more legitimate way of obtaining the well-being of the citizenry.

Whilst for Fénelon, the meaning of the term nature did not appear to have a significantly mystical orientation, his descriptions of its fertility were very conducive to being appropriated in terms which gestured towards its spiritual

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[482] F. Fénelon, *Telemachus, Son of Ulysses* tr. Riley, P. Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 226
[483] *Ibid.*

content open to human participation.[484] In *Numa Pompilius*, references to uncultivated nature were analogous to uncultivated individuality and in that sense, quite close to Fénelon's relatively rational use of nature for moralising ends. Yet, the presence of personified wisdom as a transcendent force problematized the predominantly mundane aspect of nature as a generous provider. For Fénelon, nature was reduced a literary significance whilst for Kheraskov, nature was a generative force valuable in its own right. Such spiritualisation of nature was carried on in *Vladimir Reborn* with greater intensity resulting in an eschatological vision of nature which was completely de-materialised. However, irrespective of the extent to which, nature was experienced mystically, it necessitated an ascetic mindset. The capacity to listen to the voice of wisdom and to be able to see the transfigured state of nature not only depended upon a wilful negation of the accepted appearance of things but more importantly, upon the overcoming of the self which accepted such appearances as true.

One of the over-arching ethical principles then, emerging out of Kheraskov's writings was that a just life must depend upon a just approach to nature. Even if for a moment, the explicitly mystical notion of the imperative to liberate nature from its grossness is set aside, there was still the suggestion that nature's potential was not realised if human beings did not actively seek to actualise it. The clear contrast in *Numa Pompilius* between an earth covered with thorns and an earth turned into fields underscored the role human beings played in the progress of nature. There is some obvious influence of the typical neoclassical belief that nature which was ordered in accordance with reason was superior to nature in its original wild state. However, Kheraskov did not seem to imply that the fate of nature was in its outright submission to the transformative effects of human creativity. Rather, it was more the case that human and natural potentialities necessitated each other for their development. Indeed, in *Vladimir Reborn*, the aforementioned distinction between bareness and fertility was complemented with disclosure of the essence of nature to the gaze of a spiritually

[484] Nonetheless, there were some mystical overtones in Fénelon's conception of nature, see J.H. Davis Jr. F*énelon*, p. 102.

transformed Vladimir. What this means is that, far from imposing itself upon nature and utilising it towards its own ends, human personhood revealed its own essence in proximity to that of nature. Consequently, the approach to nature was not ultimately determined by the desire for control but with the desire to experience qualities which were deemed to be innate to personhood and nature.

In one of Kheraskov's shorter epics, *The Universe: A Spiritual World* (1790), the complex inter-relationship between personhood and nature in terms of mutual justice was given a more concrete expression. In that epic, which is yet to receive comprehensive scholarly attention, Kheraskov chartered the creation of the world by God as well as of the human and of the latter's fall. The expulsion of Adam from Paradise was interpreted as not merely an event in the history of humanity. The loss of Adam's god-like stature was an event of cosmic significance because it incurred the fall of nature into its present state of materiality. The ethical implications of the need to recover prelapsarian bliss was therefore not restricted to humanity but included nature as well. In somewhat melodramatic fashion, Kheraskov expressed the latter theme by referring to the way nature identified Adam as the cause of its anguish:

> The earth I hear, is howling at him:
> Give me back my everlasting bloom!
> Give us our quietude, exclaimed the waters.
> We are suffering because of you, all nations cried.
> You have made us cruel, shrieked the elements;
> They all avenge themselves and beat him on the chest.[485]

It is noteworthy that one of the decisive implications of such thinking was that nature, when taken in its present state, could not be thought of as either intrinsically good or evil. Nature could not be approached as inherently good because it fell together with Adam yet, it was neither completely bad because its evil deeds were sourced in actions of which it had no part. Nature was therefore,

[485] M.M. Kheraskov, 'Vselennaia. Mir duhovnyi' in Kheraskov, M.M. *Tvoreniia Kheraskova Chast' III,* pp. 89-90.

suffering injustice in a double sense. Nature was in a state of injustice due to being alienated from itself. Nature was also in a state of injustice as a result of its antagonism to humanity. This is precisely why Adam and his descendants had to labour unceasingly in order to derive sustenance from nature which was not always predisposed to share its bounty.

Of course, from the vantage point of Eighteenth-century psychology, the notion of a straightforward correlation between personhood and physical nature was anachronistic. Whilst Kheraskov did presume that since Adam concentrated within himself the entirety of the creation which therefore shared his fate, the kind of isomorphism which he espoused was open to a much more modern reading. It was not that the intrinsic state of visible nature directly depended on human beings. Rather, it was the more general sense of enworldedness which critically depended on the moral state of humanity. The two polarities reflective of that state were usually enfolded within the distinction between heaven and hell which were in turn, representative of inward conditions of personhood. Such subjectification of otherwise conventional religious discourse was sourced not only in the various theosophic doctrines but more specifically, in the work of Milton. Kheraskov referred to Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) throughout *The Universe* and has not only accepted Milton's anxiety regarding the unfathomable chaos underlying nature but most importantly, the belief that it is the mind which can make "a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven."[486] Consequently, the way nature manifested itself to human consciousness was very much dependent upon whether the latter was in a state of order or disorder. Such moralisation of nature was a modern phenomenon in Western Europe and even more so in Russia for implied an impossibility of returning to the static great chain of being worldview whilst also, disallowing a complete acceptance of a Newtonian cosmos devoid of any substantive role for human subjectivity.[487] This did not mean however, that nature was passive and depended entirely on how it was taken up by human

[486] J. Milton, *Paradise Lost* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 9.
[487] C.G. Martin, "Boundless the Deep: Milton, Pascal and the Theology of Relative Space", *ELH* (63, 1 (1996), p. 55.

reason. Kheraskov seemed to have argued for a nature which not only possessed agency but which also, reacted in accordance with the moral state of human consciousness.

Such emphasis on preserving a purely humanistic space within a vast creation brought to the fore the imperative of an ascetic outlook. Kheraskov returned to the archetypal ascetic concern with bridling the passions but in a way which was reflective of his understanding of nature as a domain which was in part, determined by the inner life of personhood. Not content with the notion that individuals merely internalised certain aspects of nature which needed to be controlled, Kheraskov set a more radical tone by suggesting that chaos was not something external to the visible orderliness of the creation but rather, embedded within the person. Thus, imposition of will upon nature and the capacity to transform it made sense primarily in terms of the individual's self-relation. Kheraskov warned that it was impossible to leave chaos behind because it was always carried inwardly:

> What is fitting for me to sing upon my lyre,
> The one who is in darkness and is at war with one's own self,
> Following the way of a corporeal repentance,
> Weighed down by a chaotic body and spirit?
> Chaos, in in its entirety, is within me rather than without,
> We carry a jumble of rebellious elements in our breasts;
> Heavenly beings we hardly resemble;
> Rather, it is in the fallen angels that we have our mirror…[488]

The difference between merely assuming that human beings are subject to the passions and the belief in the inward presence of the elements is considerable. Passions designate particular inclinations of the individual towards an unworthy object of the flesh. Elements however, are forces in their own right possessing a teleology of their own. The task of asceticism then was not limited primarily by the imperative of taming desire. Apart from the latter, personhood also had to reckon

[488] M.M. Kheraskov, 'Vselennaia. Mir duhovnyi' p. 51.

with the dark and potentially evil ground of its own being which for Kheraskov, was the very essence of chaos. Most radically, Kheraskov presumed that chaos pre-existed the creation of humanity thus implying that, self-transformation was not reducible to dealing with sinful urges peculiar to any given individual. Rather, personhood had to contend with some of the original conditions of the creation contained within itself. This in turn, meant that introspective praxis had to reach beyond all subjective predispositions and locate the metaphysical receptacle which could either embody good or evil.

In *The Universe,* Kheraskov was at pains to show how chaos was instrumental in the actualisation of evil without actually being its intrinsic cause. Chaos was likened to a womb into which, evil seeds were sown in the course of a rebellion against God by some of the angels.[489] Arguably, under the influence of Böhme's understanding of the *unground* as a terrible and irrational force which resists its own progress towards a self-conscious actuality, Kheraskov went beyond Milton in characterising chaos as an ongoing state of self-rupture. Chaos was described as lacking any definitive form and as something which disclosed itself only in the violent agitation of the elements in occasioned.[490] The internecine clash of the elements was of such intensity that chaos itself was at risk of its own dismemberment.[491] Emphasis on the ever-impending catastrophe was of course, at the very heart of a theosophic intuition of the threat that formlessness and to some extent, nothingness posed to the objective order of nature and humanity. In presenting chaos as something which was on the verge of its own extinction, Kheraskov has drawn attention to a rather complex paradox which goes some way towards explaining why chaos could not really be grasped apart from its affects. Evil could be said to have reached its apogee if it could overcome the very ground from which it arose. Thus, Kheraskov was implying that the womb was so fertile that it could potentially be superseded by its own seed. What the inquirer could actually see, in a metaphorical sense, was the process of supersession and not so

[489] *Ibid.* p. 63.
[490] *Ibid.* p. 62.
[491] *Ibid.*

much the latter's ground.

Crucially, a similar logic was in operation when chaos was seen to be under the influence of absolute goodness. Namely, under the influence of goodness, chaos played a decisive role in the genesis of the creation and was in some respect, a medium through which God exercised his creative potency. In a very forthright departure from a canonical understanding of the creation as occurring *ex nihilo*, Kheraskov envisaged a submissive transfiguration of chaos through divine logos resulting in the birth of the creation. As though underscoring the sheer irrationality of chaos and in doing so, underscoring its existence primarily as a basis for things extrinsic to it, Kheraskov described a chaos which was not fully conscious of the logos which illuminated it and of its future fate:

> Chaos was gyrating beneath a clear heaven,
> It was finally weighed upon divine scales;
> God has felt the agitation of the elements with his hand,
> And has given it his attention;
> He thought to quieten the unruly elements,
> And to create a bright world out of the sombre darkness;
> So that the enemy of God would not take pride in evil,
> Eternal wisdom builds a house above the abyss.
> Chaos felt God's sacred thought,
> And prepared the underworld for submission;
> What he is and what he will be he does not know,
> He turned his ear to the clear heaven,
> And heard God's mighty word:
> Chaos may you transfigure and may the new creation be revealed![492]

Admittedly, the fact that chaos was made to submit implied that it could not be seen as entirely independent in the way that Böhme's *unground* was. Nonetheless, the fact that it was through chaos that creation came into being implied that God had to reckon with existing conditions in order to create. In fact, a very interesting contradiction emerges out of Kherakov's desire to maintain the sovereign authority of God without unduly lessening the ever-presence of the chaotic. The creation

[492] *Ibid.* p. 72.

seemed to emerge by divine command. However, wisdom was shown to have operated in a domain quite distinct from chaos. Presuming a certain interchangeability of the terms logos, wisdom and creation, Kheraskov gave some scope to the idea that original conditions are never entirely negated in the course of progress. Consequently, even though Kheraskov departed from some of the complexities of Böhme's heterodox notions, he has expressed the basic theosophic belief in chaos as an ever-remaining pre-existence of things.

From such a highly speculative standpoint, the moral state of the individual appears in a very different light. Explanations of why human beings were prone to evil based on accounts of original sin and the resulting pursuit of destructive passions are overly simple because they do not take into consideration the prehistory of creation. Individuals do not merely inherit the consequences of expulsion from paradise. What *The Universe* seemed to imply was that individuals also inherit is the terrible drama which precipitated the emergence of creation. To some extent then, personal transformation did not just mean a substantive alteration of the inner life and of the processes underpinning it. More ambitiously, transformation had to include some of the original conditions existing before the creation. If to some extent, chaos could be said to have been a partner, albeit an unequal one, in God's creative endeavour, then a similar analogy could hold true for personhood as well. Individual attempts to transform the inner chaos by way of an increasing receptivity to wisdom replicated the transformation of chaos through divine logos. It was not merely the case that individuals were responsible for perpetuating the effects of the original sin. Individuals were primarily responsible for *completing* the creation within the depth of their own being. Therefore, it was insufficient to justify moral improvement solely by appealing to personal guilt. What was also needed was an intuition of an ever-present threat to existence based on the knowledge of the violent and painful prehistory of the creation.

It may thus, not be too surprising that Kheraskov self-conception as a poet was determined by the imperative to seek out the darkness belying existence as an integral aspect of his asceticism. This is important because Kheraskov's authorial

interventions into the narrative of his works, far from serving stylistic or justificatory purposes are intended as advice to the reader. Seemingly, Kheraskov returned to the well-worn ascetic trope of a dramatic rejection of worldly knowledge in favour of an intense engagement with sacred texts. Yet, the denigration of freethinkers as agents of a chaotic rebellion and the deflation of the figure of the philosopher as a maker of systems out of empty words was intended towards a rather unexpected end.[493] Kheraskov was interested in the extent to which, spiritual literature was able to provide him with the means to experience the metaphysical conditions existing prior to the emergence of reality proper. This is why, Kheraskov distinguished between the futile knowledge which was fit only for calculative reason and the divine wisdom accessible to the heart.[494] Recalling the intuitive rather than an emotional understanding of the term heart, what Kheraskov was in effect suggesting that the past could never be an object of rational deliberation because the latter could not canvass something as irrational as chaos. Consequently, personhood had to experience rather than attempt to analyse, the very elusive beginnings of existence.

Kheraskov did not outline in detail how insight into the primordial darkness was to be achieved. Indeed, the bulk of the theosophical literature which was informed by such themes was not clear regarding the method through which speculative knowledge was possible. Even Böhme was quite vague in terms of showing how an individual could replicate the same set of mystical experiences apart from emphasising the imperative of inner transformation which would result in greater intuitive capacity. Kheraskov seemed to think that firstly, artistry had a role to play in the development of insight and secondly and most importantly, that his own poetry offered the means for the readers to experience their own prehistory. Thus, whilst Kheraskov spoke of the sublime effects of the muses, he nevertheless maintained that what he has written was truth and not literary fancy:

> My quill is shaking and my chest is quivering;
> The muse has shown me a dark pathway towards the elements;
> I am not pulled by my inflamed imagination,

[493] *Ibid.* pp. 55, 66.
[494] *Ibid.* p. 66.

> I sing the truth as painted by my quill;
> I do not write fictions nor speak of dreams,
> I speak only of what I can read in the womb of the night.[495]

Of particular importance in the above quotation was the difficulty that Kheraskov had in finding appropriate terms which would designate something which was neither a common-place fact nor outright fiction. One way of interpreting this challenge is to see it as an instance of near-impossibility of thinking beyond the perceived coherence of the creation without having recourse to human capacity to re-create experiences. This problem of intelligibility, which figured largely in ascetic praxis, was very much to do with the unreliability of language when the latter had to canvass domains independent of its own logos. Consequently, if Kheraskov's anxiousness is to be taken seriously, then the extent to which, his soul moved out of fear in unison with his quill is representative of the extent to which, he felt in proximity to an otherness which could not be contained either emotionally or linguistically. The effects of closeness to a deeply destabilising reality were therefore, one of the few ways through which, insight could be directed towards its barely comprehensible object.

One of the key conclusions which can be drawn from Kheraskov's focus on trying to experience the origin of sin was that the latter was construed as an object of becoming. That is, an ascetic personhood had to make a transcendental move not only towards God but towards the conditions with which the latter had to work with. From that standpoint, the notion that moral improvement depended solely upon approximation to God was too simplistic. Of course, it may be possible to counter-argue that since becoming is largely an inward process, there is no inherent difference between searching for the divine-like inner man and chaos. Yet, nonetheless, Kheraskov opened up the possibility for a metaphysical experience of something other than God. What Kheraskov may have had in mind was a process whereby, personhood performed in regards to chaos, a similar action to one performed by God in order to pacify the elements and set the conditions for the

[495] *Ibid.* p. 62.

emergence of the creation. Personhood had to illuminate its own inwardness and in doing so, prepare the ground for its own future transformation.

In light of Kheraskov's later work, especially *The Universe*, can be helpful in uncovering the ethical intentions of his earlier and more overtly literary texts. This interpretive move is premised on the assumption that whilst Kheraskov's *oeuvre* showed strong signs of variation, it was nonetheless expressive of some thematic unity which was very much to do with Kheraskov's attempts to elaborate his spiritualist worldview. This is particularly pertinent because Russian and Anglophone scholarship has thus far, witnessed a very limited number of discussions regarding the connection between Kheraskov's politics and mysticism. Specifically, the role of politics and with it, of the sovereign in taming chaos and in promoting the bountiful effects of nature has not yet received much attention.[496] Given that *The Universe* made such a forceful case for the similarity of the personhood and the prehistory of creation, there was tension between the ascetic demands of the individual and the need for social improvement. In terms of ultimate teleology, Kheraskov did intend towards a complete transfiguration, yet this intention did not blind him to more practical imperatives which were nonetheless, set against the backdrop of his otherwise uncompromisingly transcendent vision.

For this reason, Kheraskov had to develop an understanding of asceticism which was not totally world-denying but rather, negatory of certain undesirable aspects of worldly life. Consequently, traditional Christian forms of asceticism could not always serve Kheraskov as a guide without additional support from early-modern proponents of the need for a critical detachment from vain pursuits and idle living. The precedent set by Fénelon was crucial in this regard because the latter was able to make a case for a morally-motivated rejection of some social norms and to tacitly suggest that the space for solitude should not be located too

[496] The relatively recent essay by T.V. Artem'eva on Kheraskov and wisdom does not touch on this salient issue, see T.V. Artem'eva, 'Sophiocraticheskie idealy i epistemologicheskie utopii Mikhaila Kheraskova' in Artem'eva, T.V. and Mikeshin, M.I. eds. *Filosofskii vek. Al'manakh 12. Rossiiskaia utopia* (St. Petersburg: St Petersburg Center For the History of Ideas, 2012): 13-47.

far away from society.[497] This interpenetrative approach to the realms of the sacred and of the profane was very much in evidence in Kheraskov's work. In all cases, wise and virtuous souls were either temporarily in the midst of worldly activity or have resided within relatively close proximity to populated areas. Such juxtaposition is not to be taken too literally. A more metaphorical reading would imply that whilst the source of virtue was to be found outside of society, it was nonetheless only fully realised in the confines of the latter. The distinction between the source and the application of virtue was conducive to a mystical understanding of existence which was qualitatively determined by its position vis-à-vis its ultimate source.

For Kheraskov, the issue of proximity was largely synonymous with an ethical distinction between spiritual bareness and superabundance which in turn, partly depended on human capacity for transformative labour. Instances of this typically Rosicrucian way of thinking were already present in *Numa Pompilius* where, the soul's solitary exposure to wisdom was tied to improvement of society and even, of nature.[498] Such an isomorphic relationship between individual self-consciousness and the latter's context implied the sheer impossibility of a complete commitment to, or a complete withdrawal from, the affairs of the mundane world. This was so not only on account of the undeniable importance of social existence but more crucially, due to the discovery of nature as a domain with which human beings could interact without dominating it. Kheraskov expressed this theme metaphorically in a conversation between Egeria and Numa as nature's invitation to all to partake in its riches in a feast of plenty:

> ...Come and gather the fruits which I have prepared for you! Come to me for a banquet, not for the sake of a single day, but for the sake of all the seasons which are there for you. This banquet, which will be of little trouble and only require some useful labour, will result in a great

[497] F. Fénelon, *Telemachus,* p. 194.

[498] Here, I refer to the alchemical approach to nature favoured by Rosicrucianism as an opening up of its secrets for the purposes of social and political reform, see F. Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 280-1.

> bounty and in sweet longing. Come towards me! I will open to you my deepest recesses which will bring forth bounty which will be your solicitude. Thus spoke nature, but you have not listened and have spurned her gifts, instead, preferring to seek honour and riches through vainglory.[499]

What gives this passage particular weight is its connection of an erotic allure of nature's bounty with a non-violent existence. Obviously, nature's repeated invitation to participate in its largesse need not be taken literally as nothing more than a promotion of noble savage existence. Whilst there is indeed some influence of the egalitarian aspects associated with such state of affairs given that nature was shown to have offered itself to all, the intention was nevertheless, to undertake an active stance not only in relation to human interiority, but in relation to nature as well.[500] This description is the ultimate antithesis to primordial chaos and, as shall be seen subsequently, one which justified the existence of political will as one of the means to bring about natural plenitude.

In ways which anticipated some of the themes in his subsequent literary output, Kheraskov sought to reinterpret the very notion of desire as one of the key determinants of moral progress. One may note that, Kheraskov did not merely imply a replacement of warlike tendencies with peaceful pursuits. Rather, it was a much more complex displacement of one kind of longing with another. It is necessary to draw on contemporary ascetic theory as understood by postmodern thinkers to detail the latter point. According to G.G. Harpham, the process of ascetic remoulding of the self culminates in a victory over "life as temptation" and the onset of life as a "banquet of desire."[501] That is, asceticism does not ultimately seek to do away with desire even if at a certain moment, temptation is deemed to be necessary. Rather, it signifies an intensification of desire, its redirection and fixation as a constant feature of existence. Kheraskov obviously could not have

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[499] M.M. Kheraskov, *Numa Pompilii,* pp. 43-4.
[500] For the concept of the noble savage, I draw on T. Ellingson, *The Myth of the Noble Savage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 46-7.
[501] G.G. Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 133.

been aware of the deconstructive intentions behind recent attention to spirituality as a transformative praxis, he was nonetheless expressing the need on the part of the intellect to undertake a conscious movement towards desire and to see desire as in itself, worth desiring. That is why such an erotic openness was expressed as an invitation to a banquet. Some desiring labour is necessary in order to come to it. Yet, the banquet itself was merely a reason to stimulate a much greater desire and simultaneously, to allow for the experience of a much greater bounty. Thus, to progress morally meant to cease identifying desire with its immediate objects and to recognise that its horizon was greater than its immediate embodiments.

If nature was seen as bounty, it may be difficult to understand how this notion harmonised with nature also being seen as a domain which could be improved through human activity. Either nature is the source of goodness or it is merely material upon which human will could be imposed for specifically human ends. Perhaps in response to this, Kheraskov implied that, incapacity to consciously relate to nature was in principle, a harmful state of affairs. That is, just as human existence was transformed on account of its re-grounding into nature's eros, nature itself could be thought of as moving towards its own culmination when it was in a position of being enjoyed. Moreover, reorientation towards nature was up to a point, inseparable from politics insofar as the latter signified a reconstruction of natural goodness through human will. In the latter case, nature could be said to have been improved by virtue of its extension into social structures beyond its original confines. Kheraskov accounted for both of these aspects by postulating nature as suffering from human injustice. It was the responsibility of absolute monarchs to redress this:

> Who will uproot this evil? Who will cure this ulcer when monarchs, who are the healers of people's ills, their Enlighteners and saviours of societies from harm – do not concern themselves with this? From you monarchs, from you nature herself and the entirety of the human race await their salvation, their quietude and their prosperity. You have been given absolute authority to restrain violence, remove vice, to Enlighten and to direct your

subjects with reason.[502]

Notwithstanding the hyperbolic tone, Kheraskov made a clear connection between an action perpetrated upon the polity with an action perpetrated upon nature. In this sense, it could be argued that the monarch was tasked with setting up the conditions for an ascetic engagement with nature. One way of clarifying this complex theme further is to think of ascetic social critique enfolded in Kheraskov's attempt to ignite desire for bounty is to think of it as a specifically religious call to return to nature in part, via socio-political structures. Again, some contemporary accounts of asceticism seem to give credence to this insofar as they make a point of characterising asceticism's "different frame of existential reference" as an "earthbound" movement undertaken in response to problems in communal life.[503] Consequently, not only was it the case that human and natural orders could intersect, but that they ought to inform one another's teleology.

Whilst, as has already been mentioned, the bulk of Kheraskov's *oeuvre* can be classified as advice literature seeking to justify Enlightened absolutism, the kind of ethical concerns that he raised were vastly different from those inhering in established conceptions of effective rulership. The standard, state-sponsored definition of the ruler in the mould of Peter the Great implied a focus on a rationalised leverage upon the course of historical development.[504] Kheraskov agreed with this view insofar he participated in nuanced dialogue with several Russian monarchs. Yet, the content of this dialogue was very different because it was presupposed by an alternative understanding of nature. If Petrine reforms were to some extent, founded on faith in a stable universe guaranteeing the integrity of human activity within it, then Kheraskov's theosophical leanings read nature in a much more dynamic sense foregrounding its role in human becoming. Arguably, this

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[502] M.M. Kheraskov, *Numa Pompilii,* pp. 48-9.
[503] L.E. Vaage, 'Ascetic Moods, Hermeneutics, and Bodily Deconstruction' in Wimbush, V.L. and Valantasis, R. eds *Asceticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 254.
[504] C.M. Whittaker, *Russian Monarchy*, p. 140.

difference can explain why nature as a topos was largely missing from Russian Enlightened discourses unless it was necessary to prove its independence from God in order to justify the validity of temporal reality. A mystical perception of nature not only necessitated that it be cognised speculatively as a source, but also a recognition of its enriching otherness so as to preclude a totalised commitment to historical immediacy. Kheraskov attended to this ethical element by sharply contrasting in *Numa Pompilius* a polity almost completely immersed in the gratification of desire as though nature did not exist and the promise of a polity founded on a conscious acceptance of the latter's bounty.[505] For Kheraskov, an Enlightened monarch was not primarily involved in replicating certain norms derived from nature in society. Instead, the task of sovereign authority was to reveal nature and its mystery as a deep context underlying all human endeavours. In effect then, Numa was representative of an ascetically reconsidered apologia of absolutism in light of his simultaneous openness to the otherness of wisdom and of nature in conjunction with his awareness of the primitive condition of social mores.

It is necessary to turn to Kheraskov's *Vladimir Reborn* in order to follow up the theme of nature as an object of ascetic contemplation which can only be beheld in its essence by souls prepared to undertake self-transformative praxis. Whereas in *Numa Pompilius*, nature was only described as plentiful and as suffering, in *Vladimir Reborn*, nature was actually revealed in a mystical vision. Indeed, in the latter work, the presence of the monarch in different realities which were in turn, informed by different levels of self-awareness was sharpened to a much greater degree, thus further detailing the turn towards ascetic ethics. One of the most important effects of a more concerted engagement with mysticism evinced by the latter work, is a sharp decrease in the utopian elements and their replacement by emphasis on personal transfiguration. This represented a critical advance in the development of Kheraskov's mystical thought because he was able to explain

[505] M.M. Kheraskov, *Numa Pompilii,* pp. 43-4.

how nature was integrated into personhood's transcendence and in doing so, acquainted his wide readership with one of the most decisive aspects of early-modern mysticism. Without a proper understanding of this integration, it would be quite difficult to note one the defining characteristics which distinguished Russian spiritual tradition given that often, Western rationalised spirituality conceived of the "natural order as ethically neutral."[506] Both as a sovereign and as an archetype of a spiritually awakened personhood, Vladimir exemplified a totalised ascetic commitment to all types of experience whether it was for the purposes of inquiry, moral judgement or reform.

Bearing in mind the complex account of the creation in *The Universe*, it would be fair to presume that the role of Numa and of Vladimir was to reproject logos derived from wisdom into the chaotic conditions afflicting their own selves and their polities. If Numa's primary concern was to moderate the disorderly mores of his subjects, Vladimir's task was to quieten the elements of his own self in order for divine truth to be revealed. In both of these cases, emphasis on the need for personhood to attain a transformative discourse was apparent. Consequently, by imbuing the monarch with transcendent responsibilities without at the same time, risking a theocratic social order, Kheraskov was arguably hinting at the possibility of combing inward religion with political foresight without undue dependence on external religious authority. Whilst, as this chapter has shown, civil religion was necessary, the impetus behind its formation and its ultimate telos was shaped by individual spiritual development. This is why, it may have been of such importance for Kheraskov to understand nature and chaos as simultaneously, extrinsic contexts to personhood and as its inward conditions. By showing that persons and nature which formed the former's context shared the same receptive ground which influenced their moral state, Kheraskov was able to suggest that political will was of significance for the creation as a whole. To that end, apart from a purely individual relationship with God which

[506] W. Proudfoot, "Conceptions of God and Self", *The Journal of Religion* 55, 1 (1975), p. 64.

resulted in the descent of logos, Kheraskov envisaged a less transcendent logos of more immediate social significance emerging from an astute sovereign.

This difficult combination of personal mystical intuition with social prosperity was presented in a vision which seemed to counterbalance a previous emphasis on transfigured nature with an equally transcendent understanding of a transfigured polity. Deification was no longer restricted to either the individual or nature, but included some of the political arrangements already in existence. Reversing his earlier pattern of exposition wherein, nature extended the invitation to its own banquet, Kheraskov had the entire creation being invited to a banquet hosted by the city of God. If the metaphorical significance of the idea of the city is thought as a synthesis and a reconciliation, then it makes sense as to why ultimately, recourse was made to political discourse. Thus, Kheraskov seemed to have blurred the distinction between nature and humanity and saw both terms as possessing a futuristic projection intending towards paradise. At a certain point in his spiritual becoming, Vladimir was shown a future transfigured state of the creation which ultimately, was to be the goal of his own self-inquiry:

> In the city of God a communal banquet has been set
> Whereto, a transfigured world has been invited.
> A groom in divine porphyry and crown
> With his bride, ascends a luminous throne.
> Elders upon golden altars are there with him,
> Their gaze is like the stars and their faces shine.
> These are the good tsars invited to repast
> With their meek courtiers mingling amongst them.[507]

There is an obvious presence of a language of participation in divine life towards which, all of the creation ought to aspire. Beyond the conventional reference to the other-worldly fate of virtuous rulers common in advice

[507] M.M. Kheraskov, 'Vladimir Vozrozhdennyi' p. 141.

literature, is a more complex interplay between the salvation of the individual and of creation. Arguably, the complexity is vested in Kheraskov's attempt to overcome the quietist focus on a direct and usually solitary relationship between the individual and God, to the near exclusion of other individuals and shared contexts.[508] Specifically, Vladimir's gradual descent into his own inwardness, far from distancing him from the world, has in actual fact, occasioned a vision of the world as a totality suffused with divine love. Vladimir's intense preoccupation with the oneness of his soul as it became towards the truth, resulted in a noetic experience of many souls in conjunction with an understanding that creation was worthy of invitation. Kheraskov has therefore reinterpreted eros as a form of generosity stimulating the world towards the divine.

The merging of nature, politics and self-knowledge exemplified a belief in the impossibility of progress localised to a single aspect of reality. Nature could not be divorced from an intuitive experience of personhood simultaneously as, political will to embody truths derived from both of these contexts necessitated action in the world. This meant that, the virtuous rulers at the banquet and the soon-to-be virtuous ruler who will Christianise Russia, progressed morally together with nature. This mutually-shared teleology is crucial because it implicitly subverted the understanding of politics in a narrow *Polizeistaat* sense as rationalisation of processes involved in rulership through a systematic alienation of human beings from experiences not reducible to state-controlled social norms. That is why it was so important for Kheraskov to show that the rhythm of political life proceeded alongside that of nature and ultimately, of divine reality itself.[509] There may have been some risk in

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[508] For a competent discussion of quietism and its inward approach to God and the challenges it rises in relation to authority which clearly expresses the contours of a major tradition which informed the Mystical Enlightenment but in the same time, one which was not accepted uncritically, see D.L. Gilbert and R. Pope, "The Abbe and the Lady: The Correspondence of Fenelon and Mme Guyon", *The Journal of Religion* 21, 2 (1941): 147-172.

[509] Attempts to construe all Eighteenth-century Enlightened expressions, including those which were critical of the regime as nevertheless, symptomatic of a *Polizeistaat* are therefore somewhat off the mark because they fail to account for the vast differences in the understanding of what constitutes reality and what processes sustain in it. For one of the

misunderstanding Kheraskov's description of an Enlightened ruler as essentially reflective of a priest-like being. However, it seems quite clear that to be Enlightened, be it in a political or personally spiritual sense implied the capacity to maintain and reproject intellectual vision of a largely disembodied life.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown how Kheraskov was able to mystically rethink the notions of ecclesia, personhood and the ascetic ethic for the rapidly growing Russian reading public. In this sense, Kheraskov's position in the history of the Mystical Enlightenment is unique given that his most mystically-informed texts were neither works which were for his own private edification nor for reading amongst select Rosicrucian groups. Obviously, the bulk of Kheraskov's work may have been read by the average member of the literate class primarily for its narrative content and emphasis on the miraculous and the wonderful. However, given that the authorial intentions were deeply symbolic and moralising, there was sufficient scope to approach Kheraskov's prose and poetry in a symbolic key in which it was written and to take on some of its reformist attitudes. As with other mystics covered in the present study, Kheraskov did not seek disestablishment of established religious and political authority. Yet, perhaps in a more radical move, he gave existing power structures an alternative teleology and set the latter's dynamic against the imperatives of nature. Thus, in his own particular way, Kheraskov managed to maintain the tension between an intellectual vision of an eschatologically transformed future with the possibility of practical political innovation in religious matters. This tension reached an agonistic pitch in the thought of Lopukhin as will be seen in the following chapter.

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clearest statements of this somewhat reductive position, see A.V. Gordon. 'Rossiiskoe Prosveschenie: Znachenie natsional'nyh archetipov vlasti' in Karp, S.Ia. and Mezin, S.A. eds. *Evropeiskoe Prosveschenia i tsivilizatsia Rossii* (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 2004), p. 126.

CHAPTER FIVE: IVAN VLADIMIROVICH LOPUKHIN

There is no weeping in their wanderings and no grieving in their gatherings, the praises of the angels above surround them on every side.
St. Ephrem the Syrian

Introduction

In this chapter, I will analyse Ivan Vladimirovich Lopukhin's (1756-1816) rethinking of conventional notions of ecclesia, personhood and the ascetic ethic as speculative states of transcendent origin, given through intellective experience. Lopukhin's treatment of these themes exemplified the progress of the Mystical Enlightenment in Russia, by virtue of its explication of how human beings were simultaneously, subjected to temporal necessity yet capable of a transcendentally free enworldedness which did not necessarily conflict with their duties as historically-bound creatures. Lopukhin was concerned with the need to emancipate human capacity to undertake an intellective actualisation of an innate spiritual predisposition and on its basis, to justify the inherently limited but in the same time, absolutely essential nature of historical attempts to impose limits on belief, identity and action. In this chapter, I will discuss Lopukhin's deployment of a substantive mystical critique of established notions of religious, personal and ethical conduct, but which did not require their disestablishment. Instead, within the overall tenor of the Mystical Enlightenment, Lopukhin was able to combine the seemingly utopian implications of mystical praxis with a very realist assessment of the human condition and of the sheer impossibility of attaining intellective existence in the present life.

Ecclesiastical structures

Lopukhin's mystical thought implied a revision of the conventional understanding of historical ecclesiastical structures as receptacles of grace and their repositioning as false but necessary agents for outward civil peace and inner spiritual praxis. Insofar as, in the Russian context, the notion of ecclesia was usually synonymous with the Russian Orthodox Church, the thrust of Lopukhin's mystical critique was of a particularly practical significance because it deliberately sought to reform how the titular confession was approached.[510] Yet, concurrently, the

[510] Enlightened debates on religion in Russia were more directed towards state and individual relation stance towards Orthodoxy rather than to toleration of other faiths, see O.A. Tsapina, 'Secularization and Opposition in the Time of Catherine the Great', 334-7.

critique overcame the conflation of Orthodoxy with ecclesia and beared down upon the origin of religious sentiment in the human condition itself. In doing so, Lopukhin made some advances in comparison to Skovoroda's and Kheraskov's treatment of religion primarily through a clearer demarcation of the limits and of the utility of ecclesiastical structures in transcendent and temporal domains. In both cases, the conservative socio-political concerns enfolded within Lopukhin's critique of religion were quite strong, even though they could not be given a comprehensive expression in light of the sensitivity of the subject-matter and the ensuing severity of censorship.[511] As a writer, Lopukhin had to cater to a highly literate audience in the absence of exact native terminology and sufficient literary precedent, which in some sense, was helpful in obscuring the entire extent of his critique which went far beyond its immediate Rosicrucian application.

Whilst the actual circulation of Lopukhin's *Spiritual Knight* (1784) and *Some Characteristics of the Interior Church* (1798) is still uncertain, the implied readership was Rosicrucian and, consequently, especially concerned with the imperative to work out a position in regards to established Orthodox faith without either drawing additional accusations of heterodoxy, or of risking personal spiritual autonomy.[512] In his *Memoirs* (1809), Lopukhin suggested that the latter treatise was written for his Rosicrucian brethren, precisely at a time when official and public opinion concerning their activities was becoming increasingly negative.[513] Thus, far from merely being an apologia in the face of growing prejudice, it was primarily a work seeking to explain to members pursuing mystical praxis seriously, how to correlate their inner activity with outer duty to entrenched religious norms. Inner, here, having a double-sense: firstly, signifying spiritual processes occurring

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[511] A. Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought*, p. 21.

[512] A.G. Surovtsev, *Ivan Vladimirovich Lopukhin. Ego masonskaia i gosudarstvennaia deiatel'nost'. Biograficheskii ocherk* (St. Petersburg: Izdanie Peterburgskogo Uchebnogo Magazina, 1901), pp. 36-49.

[513] I.V. Lopukhin, *Zapiski senatora Lopukhina* Number 20 in the 'Memoir Series' (Newtonville, Mass.: ORP, 1976), pp. 37-40. *The Interior Church* circulated in manuscript form at least ten years prior to its first publication. For a very interesting discussion on the importance of Lopukhin's memoirs as a spiritual text in its own right, see E.E. Prikazschikova, 'Kul'turnaiia mifologiia masonstva v russkom literaturnom soznanii vtoroi poloviny XVIII v.: v poiskah obraza *chuzhogo*,' pp. 32-35.

within the human subject and secondly, alluding to the secretive lodges fostering these experiences. Obviously, both of these aspects could be seen to be subversive because they were apt to being misunderstood to mean a total self-sufficiency of the believer and of his Rosicrucian context, making traditional Orthodox faith unnecessary. It was the need to allay fears that, a more speculative approach to spirituality was necessarily transgressive and self-sufficient, which prompted Lopukhin to discuss how ecclesiastical structures functioned and to what ends.[514]

Various early-modern Western mystical and theosophical literatures have used the notion of an 'interior church,' 'interior castle' and 'interior solitude' to bracket a more personal domain where the effects of faith could be witnessed, without entirely circumventing established ecclesiastical structures. This domain was seen to be the new locus of spiritual life, capable of withstanding the often contradictory demands of predominantly utilitarian approaches to being in the world and offering a far more tangible sense of the salvific process. One of the clearest examples of these sentiments, which did inform much of Lopukhin's critique, were to be found in the writings of the Spanish quietist Miguel de Molinos (1628-1697), whose *Spiritual Guide* (1675) was printed in Lopukhin's printing press in Russian:[515]

> …Although exterior Solitude does much to assist for the obtaining of internal Peace, yet the Lord did not mean this, when he spake by his Prophet, "I will bring her into solitude, and speak privately to her." But he meant the interior Solitude, which joyously conduces to the obtaining of the precious Jewel of Peace Internal. Internal Solitude consists in the forgetting all the Creatures, in disengaging one's self from them, in a perfect nakedness of all the affections, desires, thoughts, and one's own will. This is the true Solitude where the Soul reposes with a sweet and inward serenity in the arms of its chiefest good.[516]

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[514] Lopukhin's mystically-tinged emphasis on a fundamental transformation of personhood was correlated with stalwart refusal to accept political change, see A.M. Martin, *Romantics, Reformers, Reactionaries: Russian Conservative Thought in The Reign of Alexander I* p. 68.

[515] For brief discussion of Lopukhin's publishing activity, see A.G. Surovtsev, *Ivan Vladimirovich Lopukhin*, p. 29.

[516] M. de Molinos, *The Spiritual Guide Which Disentangles the Soul, And Brings It By The Inward Way To the Getting Of the Perfect And the Rich Treasures of Internal Peace* (London: 1688), p. 121.

With important differences, Lopukhin accepted this type of discourse for his own exploratory purposes. Here, solitude was approximated to a distinctive state of being normally associated with a quietist outlook, whereas for Lopukhin, this condition was inseparable from an inner personal ground wherein it was contained, presupposing a much greater degree of self-reflective activity. The kind of separation from external bodily and institutional concerns described by Molinos, which attracted many Russian intellectuals to Masonic and Rosicrucian lodges, not only needed to be harmonised with established faith, but had to be shown to depend on and to be applicable to, external religious architecture. That is, certitude emerging from the experience of solitude had to be applied to test the validity of religious truth-claims in general.[517]

Lopukhin's response to these basic challenges posed by an increasingly subject-based understanding of faith to established religious norms, involved a concretisation of the perceived separation of the irreducible private grasp of the divine from the authority of external religion, as a distinction between two types of ecclesia. This required a re-interpretation of the entire post-Fall creation from an ecclesiastical perspective which begun with a visible historical 'exterior church' for all and gradually narrowed inward into a largely ineffable 'interior church' for the select few. Such a schematisation of a relatively common motif was novel insofar as it was promoted in an overwhelmingly Orthodox country and has problematised ecclesia as inherently plural in nature, defined as a set of ordered realms distinguished by the extent of their dependency on human creative capacity.[518] Not only was there not a single representative church, but the conventional Augustinian distinction between church visible and invisible was redeveloped in such a way that, it was no longer clear whether the latter type was not, in fact, anchored in the indivisible ground of the self in present life. Emphasis

[517] H.C. Lea, "Molinos and the Italian Mystics", in *The American Historical Review* 11, 2 (1906), pp. 249-50.
[518] In this instance, it possible to conceive of Lopukhin's recognition of pluralised ecclesia as part of a larger Eighteenth-century critique of belief in the possibility of a "pure insight into universal truth." See D. Bates, "Idols and Insight: An Enlightenment Topography of Knowledge", in *Representations* 73, 1 (2001), p. 2.

on this kind of *devotio moderna* has therefore, foregrounded the artificiality and historicity of all types of ecclesia which could not be encountered in the state of inner solitude.

That is why, Lopukhin was able to approximate religious institutions and the dogmatic systems supporting them as at best, well-meaning forms of imposture lacking genuine ontological commitments. Nevertheless, these forms were tasked with a propaedeutic function which has foregrounded them as necessary and privileged components of the mundane world. Lopukhin did not seem to believe that revelation was directly communicated through established historical religion, but was only imagined there. It is the transformation of imagined content into obligatory creed which made it possible for religion to act as a stable moral guide throughout history. The distance separating outward religion from revelation has positioned the former as a means towards and not the locus of the intellect's transcendent goal. The distinction between religion's corruption throughout history and its relevance for the process of spiritual becoming notwithstanding, was clearly posited in *Some Characteristics*:

> And so, the pathway of external religion is the means towards internal and true Christianity. Despite the fact that it has split itself from its source and the guiding light which has established it has vanished from it, this religion is necessary as a means; and now many good-intentioned people can use it, confirming their beliefs by the revelation in the Gospels. Slaves of error, passion and sin who do not want to free themselves, are carried away by the vanity of the world and form a multitude surrounding the Church and do not seek ways to it.[519]

The idea that God was responsible for the establishment and maintenance of the ecclesia in its earthly form was minimised. God was still the originator, but he was absent from the institutions he has deployed because the latter have careered away from the divine trajectory which has informed them at their origin. God was

[519] I.V. Lopukhin, .V. Lopukhin, 'Nekotorye cherty o vnutrennoi tserkvi' in Lopukhin, I.V. *Masanskie trudy: Duhovnyi rytsar'. Nekotorye cherty o vnutrennoi tserkvi* (Moscow: Aleteiia, 1997), pp. 88-89

neither working directly through these religious establishments, nor was he adequately reflected in them. This meant that, in the remote past when God ceased to inhere in conventional religion, ecclesia was reduced to a human institution, utilising predominantly human means for its efficacy to ameliorate human anxiety in the face of finitude. Indeed, the language in the above-quoted passage was one of withdrawal: it was not merely that religion has split itself away from its source, but that God has wilfully evacuated from its errant institutions, leaving behind a temporal construct open to historical modification.

The contrast between the temporal and the transcendent ecclesial dimensions was sharpened by Lopukhin's insistence that true Christianity could not be found in external religion. Rather than construing the latter as a visible continuation of the revelatory process witnessed by the Gospels, Lopukhin envisaged a fundamental break between what he thought was genuine revelation and its institutional re-enactments. In fact, beliefs derived from external religion could not possibly be tested therein and were indirectly approximated to fictions until confirmed by the Gospels. What was striking in this logic was the rejection of the typical early-modern Russian understanding of liturgical participation in the creation which did not depend on the need for a regular individual grasp of the sacred texts – and its replacement with the indispensability of a personal confirmation of religious claims through an individuated experience of revelation.[520] Arguably, what Lopukhin meant by confirmation, was a process in the course of which, the Gospels revealed themselves within the believer in such a way that to make autonomous judgement regarding religion possible. There was thus, an emerging sense of worldliness associated with external religion, insofar as it was subjected to interpretation rather than being a privileged interpreter in its own right. If revelation was meant to enlighten the fallen world, then insofar as religious institutions were deemed to require a conscientious validation, they were

[520] For the most substantive discussion of specifically Russian Orthodox emphasis on regular sacralisation of the self and of the outer world, see A.M. Panchenko, 'Russkaiia kul'tura v kanun petrovskih reform', pp. 133-5.

also a part of the fallen context with limited projective capacity beyond their temporal confines.

Notwithstanding such a forthright de-sublimation of established religious authority, Lopukhin gestured towards its propaedeutic usefulness. Insofar as Lopukhin presumed outer Christianity to be false and its inner counterpart to be true, whilst maintaining the need for both, he was deploying a Martinist insistence on the cognitive value of erroneous judgement.[521] Outward religion was valuable precisely because its erroneousness provided a context wherein the intellect could mature beyond appearances and products of its own creative labour through a recognition that it was in a state of deep separation from God. In the thought of the French mystic Louis Claude de Saint-Martin (1743-1803), these appearances were instrumental in stimulating the intellect to conceive of an underlying reality. This notion was expressed in Saint-Martin's *Of Errors and Truth* (1775), which was printed in Lopukhin's printing press in Russian:

> When man is completely divorced from Light, can he, by himself, light the beacon which is meant to be his guide? How can he, through his own efforts, produce a Science which would allay all of his doubts? Does not the gloss of external forms of truth which, in his beguiled imagination, man believes he has discovered, becomes easily dispelled through the simplest inquiry? And, having created these phantoms lacking in life and essence, is man not forced to fill them with his aspirations which suffer the same fate, leaving him much perplexed?[522]

Perplexity, here, suggested a moment of crisis, capable of demolishing faith in heterogeneous images of truth.[523] For Lopukhin, the realisation of separation did not always need to be so severe. It was sufficient for the intellect to be certain that it lacked access to revelation in a temporal domain which would predispose it to make an inward turn. This did not mean that rites and dogma could not be received

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[521] D. Bates, "The Mystery of Truth: Louise Claude de Saint-Martin's Enlightened Mysticism", in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 61, 4 (2000), p. 640.
[522] L.C. de Saint-Martin, *O zabluzhdenii i istine, ili vozzvanie chelovecheskogo roda ko vseobshchemu nachalu znaniia* (Moscow: Vol'naia tipografiia Lopuhina, 1785), p. 2.
[523] D. Bates, 'The Mystery of Truth', p. 641.

in good faith. However, they would have fulfilled their ultimate purpose when their artificiality was exposed, forcing the intellect to confront the sheer absence of a reality completely independent of its own idolatrous projections. Idolatrous, meaning a reliance on the aesthetic sense to hide the absence of truth in order to satisfy the perennial human urge to institute cultic organisations, which was in turn, prone to being mistaken for literal embodiments of revealed truth.[524]

The latter conclusion was of particular relevance for the credibility of the Orthodox Church due to its complex ceremonial repertoire and its implicit insistence on a liturgical rehearsal of the revelatory processes.[525] Indeed, the seeming marginalisation of Orthodox belief in favour of more modern spiritual practices amongst the cultural elite was explainable as a growing anxiety regarding the potentially idolatrous nature of all faiths too concerned with exterior arrangements. Orthodoxy was, on the one hand, promoting a rather static and formalised religiosity which was only slightly enlivened by the re-emerging tradition of individual asceticism and on the other, deferred the ontological substance of its edificatory intentions into a post-apocalyptic future. As a result, acceptance of its creed was often seen as one civil obligation amongst many other civil obligations which could not be easily challenged because they were all sourced in the fabric of an absolutist Russian state.[526] This was not an overly reductive revision of the role of the church because Lopukhin was able to gesture towards its indispensability in its civil role in a larger process of spiritual self-actualisation. That is, Orthodoxy's authority in socio-political terms, was a reflection of a successful maintenance of basic religious precepts without ongoing divine guidance. The issue then, was not so much whether Lopukhin and other contemporary Russian mystics were Orthodox or not, but at what functional level did these mystics see Orthodoxy within a spiritual economy encompassing a

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[524] A.E. Waite, *The Unknown Philosopher: The Life of Louis Claude de Saint-Martin and the Substance of His Transcendental Doctrine* (New York: Rudolf Steiner Publications, 1970), p. 329.
[525] A. Lipski, 'A Russian Mystic Faces the Age of Rationalism and Revolution: Thought and Activity of Ivan Vladimirovich Lopukhin', pp. 177-78.
[526] D.V. Pospielovsky, *The Orthodox Church in the History of Russia* (Crestwood, NY.: St Vladimir's Press, 1998), pp. 129-30.

pluralised conception of personhood.[527] Dissatisfaction with Orthodoxy necessitated not only a search for new spiritual forms but also, a more subtle understanding of individuality.[528] Whilst this was not a peculiarly Russian response to existential problems, in Russia, renegotiation of the contours of the self was often seen as a decisive strategy in dealing with loss of meaning and authority.

Partly to appease the censors, but largely to limit undue expectations that inward religion did not require Orthodoxy, Lopukhin foregrounded mysticism's dependence on hierarchical external authority. The claim that, Russian Rosicrucians were interested in combining the richness of Orthodox worldview with more modern mystical precepts, must be seen in this light.[529] Lopukhin believed in the superiority of the Orthodox creed not only because it has managed to survive historical upheavals relatively unscathed, but also because its staunch adherence to its statutes was an example of the kind of regularity Lopukhin wanted to achieve in the 'interior church' which Orthodoxy was merely prefiguring. As indicated in *Some Characteristics*, human intellect ought to be made aware of the deeper significance of historically-conceived faith:

> Most forms of observance and symbols of ancient Judaic and contemporary Christian external religions enact Divine sacraments that have been borrowed from the images of God's sacred works in the human soul, in the sacred body of Christ's church and in nature and can reveal them to those who have the eyes to see them. Varieties of dogmas and forms of religion, particularly the Greek one, which above all has adhered to its honourable statutes, thus benefiting those who observe them, could and must prepare for the most righteous and efficacious application of spiritual exercises of internal Divine Service.[530]

Whilst Orthodoxy was one ecclesia amongst many others, it was nevertheless, in historical terms, interpreted as a successful organisation. It is at this junction that Lopukhin has gone some way in overcoming the more explicit self-referential

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[527] G. Florovskii, *Puti russkogo bogosloviia*, p. 115.
[528] A.I. Boldyrev, *Problema cheloveka v russkoi filosofii XVIII* veka, p. 91.
[529] R. Faggionato, *A Rosicrucian Utopia in Eighteenth-Century Russia: The Masonic Circle of N.I. Novikov*, p. 82.
[530] I.V. Lopukhin, 'Nekotorye cherty ', pp. 88-9.

implications of his reliance on quietist sources. Apart from the conventional notion that external rites served to orient the intellect towards a transcendent realm, Lopukhin seemed to imply that, the believer's experience of these rites hinged on a formal acceptance of divine otherness made familiar through human effort and that this otherness will be replicated in the 'interior church' without recourse to imagination. In both cases, the believer's interiority was not as much an object as a gradually rarefied context of increasingly speculative experiences of divine origin. This was very different from the traditional quietist understanding of a radical openness of a detached self to *all* experiences, irrespective of whether they were deemed to be sensual, mental, or divine. What allowed Orthodoxy's external service to be a relatively accurate prototype of an internal one, was its firm anchorage of sensorial cognition into a set of rituals capable of regulating how and to what end, the inherently fallible creative capacity was used.

Arguably, Orthodoxy was seen to function as a kind of civil religion, albeit concerned not merely with promoting piety needed to instil basic moral precepts and loyalty to political institutions, but also with the more challenging task of restraining enthusiastic dependence on products of the imagination and their conflation with products of speculative entelechy. Saint-Martin passed on to Lopukhin the typically French ambivalence regarding imagination as an "entryway for error and disorder" and the latter moderated this anxiety by foregrounding the church as a largely public domain.[531] Orthodoxy's authentic core was its combination of an exceptionally rich and subtle liturgical rehearsal of human aspirations and stringent rules making this rehearsal inviolable and inimical to individual ecstatic and prophetic projections. Paradoxically, despite Orthodoxy's temporal character, none of the believers could claim that the rites they were participating in, were sourced in their own subjectivity because the former have remained unchanged for centuries, thus curbing the threat posed by private impressions based on external sensory phenomena. Orthodoxy institutionalised

[531] J. Goldstein, 'Eighteenth-Century Smear Words in Comparative National Context' in Klein, L.E. and La Vopa, L.J. eds. *Enthusiasm and Enlightenment in Europe, 1650-1850* (San Marino, Cal.: Huntington Library, 1998), p. 30.

ritual in such a way that its obligatory and communal aspects encouraged the use of imagination for a transcendent end, without risking the emergence of a deluded belief in the sufficiency of self-generated sentiments normally found amongst sectarian movements.[532] In this sense, Orthodoxy fulfilled a civic role as a domain which sought to prevent the emergence of beliefs incompatible with communal life.

The problem with imagination was not merely its ability to fragment authority through a conflation of truth with individual identity. For Lopukhin, religious imagination seemed to have a natural mimetic aspect, capable of substantiating its creations to the point where they could be considered to be autonomous versions of their distant prototypes. In conjunction with the aforementioned assurance that external religion was not directly reflective of divine life, this gesture towards mimesis underscored the extent to which, imagined objects or states were capable of objectification and consequently, entered the fabric of temporal reality.[533] Such animation was dangerous because it was able to successfully replicate qualities typically considered to be righteous or divine, but that were nevertheless, of human origin and serving specifically human ends, as was pointed out in *Some Characteristics*:

> Having discovered the possibility of salvation and eternal bliss, it is natural to strive for them. Yet, how many religious fanatics, through false morality and false patriotism, have joyously immolated themselves to idols of their own creation for the sake of future bliss. Even contrition can be distorted by nature

[532] J. Schulte-Sasse, "Imagination and Modernity: Or the Taming of the Human Mind", *Cultural Critique* 5 (1986): pp. 23-48.

[533] A clearer expression of a consciously imaginative grasp of religious ritual was provided by N.M. Karamzin (1766-1826), a sentimentalist Russian writer, poet and historian loosely associated with the Russian Rosicrucians, in his *Notes of a Russian Traveller* (1792), in response to attending a Catholic service: "The splendour of the church; the loud but pleasant singing accompanied by harmonious sounds of the organ; the solemnity of the parishioners and the priests' arms raised to heaven – all of this combined, has produced within me an exalted awe. I imagined that I stepped into an angelic world and was hearing the voices of saintly spirits glorifying the unspeakable one. My legs have weakened, I sunk on my knees and prayed from all my heart." Of note here was the curious co-presence of clearly perceived workings of the imagination, the indescribable deity and the resulting sincerity of religious sentiment, see N.M. Karamzin 'Pis'ma russkogo puteshestvinnika' in *Russkaia Proza XVIII veka* Tom vtoroi (Moscow: Izd-vo hudozhestvennoi literatury, 1950), p. 308.

> in such a way that not only an inexperienced observer, but also its practitioner will be deluded into believing that it is of Divine origin… Thus, all of the effects which should have been characteristic of a truly Christian nature, can arise without the latter.[534]

The allusion to the sheer replicability of Christian nature was tantamount to admitting that, qualities pertaining to Christ himself, the ultimate example of goodness, could be conjured into being independently through human effort only. Specifically, Lopukhin drew attention to visions, prophecies and miracles as potentially deceiving yet actual capacities sometimes operating in society without divine inspiration.[535] Arguably, at the heart of these anxieties was Lopukhin's implicit belief in the inherently theurgic nature of human self-contextualisation in history, expressed as a traumatic descent into "the kingdom of illness work and death" wherein human creative labour formed a palliative attempt to reshape reality in the image of prelapsarian bliss.[536] It is this temptation to transform temporality with the hope of reclaiming a lost transcendental status which was the underlying stimulus for the imagination, deluded into conceiving of its own products as successful attempts at overcoming historicity.

External religion was therefore, a necessary establishment because it was capable of securing the imagination within a predominantly ceremonial context without actually allowing for its radical deployment. A particularly rich repertoire imbued with meaning and closed to serious alteration such as the one to be found in Orthodoxy, was often satisfactory in its aesthetic sense because its complex enactment of the divine drama was usually much more powerful than any single individual believer could create relying solely on private imagination. Ambiguities raised by doubts regarding the actual efficacy of the rite were moderated within the rite itself by virtue of its careful projection of its own uncertain meaning, guaranteeing its continuing resiliency.[537] Even though, external religion was

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[534] I.V. Lopukhin, 'Nekotorye cherty', pp. 95-6.
[535] *Ibid.* pp. 94-5.
[536] *Ibid.* p. 80.
[537] G. Lewis, *Day of Shining Red: An Essay On Understanding Ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 8-9.

estranged from divine guidance, its liturgical content was structured in such a way that it was less likely to be taken literally, insofar as it implicitly gestured beyond itself.[538] Thus, religious institutions were uniquely adapted to institutionalise an absence of the divine and, in light of Lopukhin's concerns, were as much responsible for the prevention of destabilising attempts to redress this absence via the imagination as they were its symptom. There was consequently, less opportunity for private manipulation of external arrangements in the vain hope that this would be of decisive bearing on the salvific process.

A scrupulous observance of all outward duties imposed by the titular confession was necessary in order to allow participation in an engineered context which was an inalienable aspect of human existence without at the same time, stimulating the intellect towards a regressive infatuation with its own products. One of the most poignant examples of Lopukhin's insistence on the indispensability of the civil role of religion was his critique of the Dukhobor sect for refusing to take part in Orthodox rites. In his role as a senator, Lopukhin was commissioned in 1801 to inquire into unrests occasioned by attempts to forcibly reconvert these sectarians to Orthodoxy and, upon first-hand acquaintance with their beliefs, concluded that whilst the sect was fanatical in character, its religious sentiments were true and very close to those espoused in his own writings. In his *Memoirs*, Lopukhin provided a very sympathetic account of the Dukhobors' interiorised spirituality and called for an immediate end to their mistreatment by the authorities and for their limited toleration. Nonetheless, Lopukhin disagreed with the Dukhobor rejection of ecclesiastical establishment:

> Except for extremely fanatical prejudice against all forms of exteriority and a sectarian preference for people of their own faith, I found their understanding of Christianity to be exceptionally firm and correct… In fairness, agreeing with them that everything essential is hinged within one's interior, I nevertheless tried to convince them of the necessity and of the utility of going to church and of submitting to all

[538] K. Flanagan, "Liturgy, Ambiguity and Silence: The Ritual Management of Real Absence", *The British Journal of Sociology* 36, 2 (1985), p. 195.

> ecclesiastical rules: 'do so, I told them, for the love of your neighbours without which it is impossible to be a Christian, do it at least so that your neighbours will not fall into the sin of hating you.'[539]

Lopukhin was clearly prioritising religious conformity over a genuine experience of divine indwelling. Irrespective of how valid and transcendent a particular spiritual experience was, it did not completely remove the believer from his or her socio-political context. The concern here was with the possibility of an enthusiastic disregard for all socio-political norms on the basis of a numinous inspiration, if at least one important authority was allowed to be entirely circumvented.[540] Insofar as Orthodoxy was a historical construct, albeit originally sourced in a divinely-inspired ecclesia, it occupied the same temporal terrain as other historically-emergent forms of authority and its rejection was implicitly conducive to a larger, potentially chiliastic, rebellion against historicity itself. This rejection was already perceived to be present in embryonic form, in light of Lopukhin's mention of the sense of exclusivity informing Dukhobors' preference for people who shared their beliefs. Such obstinate aloofness was not only reflective of an erroneous concern with accepted social norms as inhibitive of salvation, but presupposed their modification as a consequence of experiences which in Lopukhin's view, could never be adequately institutionalised on account of their ineffability.

Without ecclesial restraint, the temptation to institutionalise experiences which were not sourced in temporal contexts was often too strong. It is this process which was regressive because, given the inherent incommensurability between historical and transcendent norms, it would inevitably result in dissatisfaction which would in turn, stimulate further attempts at institutionalisation. Lopukhin has indicated this threat by referring to the "various wisdoms and schisms" created by the impressionability of the "psychic man," located in the outer precincts of the exterior church.[541] These schisms Lopukhin held responsible for leading the

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[539] I.V. Lopukhin, *Zapiski*, pp. 125-6.
[540] R. Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment* (London: Norton, 2000), pp. 125-8.
[541] I.V. Lopukhin, 'Nekotorye cherty', p. 87.

intellect astray by way of further distancing it from the true object of its activity. At the heart of this thinking was the assumption that, irrespective of how certain a particular experience of divine revelation was, it was insufficient without strong organisational structures preventing the emergence of potentially nihilistic attitudes stemming from the belief that such an experience made human institutions redundant. In effect, Lopukhin modified Rousseau's distinction between the "sublime and true" inward religion of man and the "deceitful" religion of the citizen with which he was quite familiar.[542] In a complex political society wherein loyalty was owed to an absolute monarch who was formally the head of the Orthodox Church and tasked with enforcing basic moral precepts, secession from the latter challenged the legitimacy of that authority. The potential for social unrest, which Lopukhin conceived as neighbours' hatred, amplified the interpenetration of religious and civil dissent because, an uncompromising adherence to only those truths and practices that were experienced and created by a select group, would inevitably result in the proliferation of mutually exclusive norms. It seems that Lopukhin was quite unique in Russia in claiming that groups which hold true religious beliefs are nevertheless, in part, responsible for how they are perceived by the adherents of the titular confession.

Of course, by chastising the Dukhobor sectarians on account of the mode and not the content of their beliefs, Lopukhin was defending his own mystical critique and his Rosicrucian milieu which was open to similar accusations by those who held prejudicial notions regarding freemasonry.[543] Probably to Lopukhin's surprise, his *Some Characteristics*, because of its mis-perceived privileging of inner experience to the exclusion of established religious authority was not only circulating amongst the intended elite audience, but was also popular in various dissenting circles from lower social strata, including the Dukhobors.[544] As a way of

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[542] J.J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract* tr. Cranston, M (New York: Penguin, 1983), pp. 181-82.

[543] Catherine the Great was particularly keen on showing the absurd and potentially dangerous Masonic beliefs, see D.J. Welsh, "Philosophers and Alchemists in Some Eighteenth-Century Russian Comedies", *The Slavic and East European Journal* 8, 2 (1964), pp. 154-7. For a detailed analysis as to why Catherine saw alchemy and mysticism as a threat see, R. Collis, "The Petersburg Crucible: Alchemy and the Russian Nobility in Catherine the Great's Russia", *Journal of Religion in Europe* 5 (2012): 56-99.

[544] A.N. Pypin, 'Bibleiskaiia secta dvadtsatyh godov' in Pypin, A.N. *Religioznye dvizheniia pri Aleksandre I* (St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii Proekt, 2000), p. 418.

counteracting such a misuse of the deconstructive aspects of mystical praxis, Lopukhin's *Memoirs* reminded his readers of the inherent weakness of the human condition, requiring firm religious authority of a temporal nature. Lopukhin re-emphasised the primacy of the Orthodox faith, but from a more realist perspective than in his previous writings:

> In order to raise those fallen into sin on this mysterious path of Christian life and for their gradual advancement towards the receipt of grace, ecclesiastical regulations, rites and services and the like, are needed. That is why a sanctioned religion is most sacred and salvific. From amongst all Christian religions, the regulations of the Eastern-Greek Church I consider to be the most efficacious, not only because I was born into it, but on account of my persuasion by my heart and mind.[545]

However, prefacing the above statement was a warning that the truth of all outward religion lay not in itself but in its preparatory capacity. Insofar as all humanity was in a state of sin, there was no alternative to existing temporal religious structures which exerted some control over the predominantly corporeal understanding of the divine. To think otherwise, was to implicitly gesture towards the possibility of attaining perfection in the course of a single life-time in current embodied form. Whilst Lopukhin accentuated the need for a particular religion to be subjected to a process of justification undertaken within the interior of the individual believer, it was expected to result in a confirmation of the established confession, albeit as means towards the truth rather that as its direct conduit. This wilful submission to an external authority was an exercise in self-amelioration intended to prevent the emergence of an arrogant belief in self-sufficiency and presumed overcoming of an inherently sinful human nature. Irrespective of how transcendent a particular experience was, it failed to deify all aspects of personhood, thus the continuing need for institutions capable of controlling it.

The notion of civic peace, ensuing from the control of personhood and contingent on outward religious uniformity was reflective of the extent to which, spiritual concerns in the social sphere were interpreted as inherently political in

[545] I.V. Lopukhin, *Zapiski*, p. 135.

nature.[546] For Lopukhin, the proliferation of various beliefs intending towards social separation was due to an absence of an Enlightened attitude towards the innumerable ways of worship. That is, a desire to institute a new system of worship was synonymous with zealotry because it misplaced the proper centre of gravity of spiritual praxis towards the "search for the best possible form" of belief, risking political division.[547] Yet, this process was *a priori* political in light of the typical Rosicrucian view of politics as a necessary compromise with human weakness evident in human incapacity to exist in solitude without succumbing to animal inclinations. Therefore, a break-up of a single confession into many sects, rather than prolonging the largely intermittent moments of inner illumination, had the contrary effect of obscuring the initial stimulus towards schism and further enmeshing the intellect into corporealised structures foreclosed to transcendence. In this case, the espousal of indisputably correct spiritual principles could be the very reason for the degeneration of religious norms and the emergence of civil disorder. Again, it may be useful to note Rousseau's criticism of what he took to be the absolutist nature of Christianity and its corrosive effect on politics as a potential influence on Lopukhin's thinking regarding the interplay between transcendent belief and temporal authority.[548]

Lopukhin did not see an irresolvable problem posed by the fundamental difference in beliefs exercised privately to those exercised publicly as long as neither realm absolutised its claims. If Orthodox rites did not necessarily threaten the essential features of a particular spiritual culture, then neither was Orthodoxy itself threatened by the unfathomable indwelling of the divine within individuals. Reflecting early-modern Western *imitatio Christi* discourse, Lopukhin based his notion of civil peace on the need for the believer to be prepared to give up private opinion in favour of one that might be wrong, especially in instances when it was presumed that the believer was in a state of grace.[549] Such a paradoxical self-

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[546] G.V. Vernadskii, *Russkoe masonstvo v tsarstvovanie Ekatiriny II*, p. 259.
[547] I.V. Lopukhin, *Zapiski*, p. 136.
[548] J.J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, pp. 181-82.
[549] T. À Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* tr. L. Sherley-Price (London: Penguin, 1952), p. 36. Obviously, in Kempis' case, the injunction to refrain from following up a firmly-held opinion was primarily intended for a monastic setting. However, the wider social implications associated with a

limiting was a precaution against an enthusiastic re-projection of this transcendent state of freedom associated with grace into a mundane state of contingency associated with law. Insofar as both of these states represented inalienable yet conflicting aspects of a single human nature enjoying a difficult relationship between soul and body, restraint was needed in the exercise of their respective capacities. Lopukhin has noted the implicit presence of this restraint amongst the Dukhobors when, prior to their persecution, they were able to correlate their unique inner experiences with outer Orthodox duties, implying that it was possible to deconstruct established truth-claims without subverting their literal embodiment.[550] The urge to achieve this kind of cohesion was sourced in the imperative to develop a more just attitude towards the potentially inimitable projections of the soul and the relatively standardised expressions of human corporeality, through a clarification of the distinct commitments of the inner and the outer churches.

The latter conclusion foregrounded the definition of civil religion as a predominantly corporeal establishment, albeit intending towards an overcoming of gross materiality in a very distant future. The notion that, in their civil aspect, cultic forms were needed in order to satisfy corporeal needs was evident in Lopukhin's belief in an inherent weakness of the human body, occasioning the deployment of religious institutions.[551] It was impossible for a person to have an ongoing cognizance of the divine uninterrupted by the constraints of the body as only God was capable of a sustained intellective contemplation of his own

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deliberate self-restraint of correct opinion for the benefit of civic cohesion, are evident when seen from the standpoint of a desire to avoid absolute mutual exclusion of belief systems. For Kempis this higher purpose was not only conceived in terms of harmony, but the indwelling of God within the collective of the faithful: "Everybody gladly does whatever he most likes, and likes best those who think as he does; but if God is to dwell amongst us, we must sometimes yield our own opinion for the sake of peace. Who is so wise that he knows all things? So, do not place too much reliance on the rightness of your views, but be ready to consider the views of others. If your opinion is sound, and you forego it for the love of God and follow that of another, you will win great merit." Lopukhin has expressed this attitude regarding the Dukhobors by firstly, considering the latter's plight and secondly, by foregrounding the extent to which, temporal peace and transcendent presence of the divine were conditioned by mutual toleration. *Ibid*.

[550] V.M. Bogoliubov, N.I. *Novikov i ego vremia* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Sabashnikova, 1916), pp. 220-21.

[551] M. Silk, "Numa Pompilius and the Idea of Civil Religion in the West", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72, 4 (2004), p. 874.

divinity.[552] Since human personhood was not entirely of an intellective make-up, external rites were "necessary for people composed of soul and body."[553] In his *Memoirs*, Lopukhin advocated the application of an often erroneous sensorial apparatus towards a spiritual goal which was nevertheless unreachable in a corporeal sense, as a way of integrating the sinful human body towards a higher purpose and sanctifying its soul in the process:

> Apart from established ecclesial sacraments which sanctify the soul and cure the body through faith, opening the way for the sacrosanct action of the divine spirit, all ecclesial canons and rites are salvific and useful because therein are the external means to exercise outward feelings to aid the spirit and to stimulate the heart towards the observance of duty and, through visible forms and descriptions of invisible truths, to communicate the latter to reason. And so, the rejection of all exteriority is obviously an error, but it must be corrected through illumination rather than through a cruel use of force.[554]

This was a clear gesture towards the sheer effectiveness of religion which was otherwise, quite false. It is this revision of Orthodoxy as a realm which did not need to be true in itself in order to be successful, which defined it as inherently civil in nature, even though its ultimate source was at least theoretically presumed to be divine.[555] Of importance here, was the emphasis on the imperative to "exercise" corporeal functions in order to impose regularity upon them, thus minimising the emergence of a largely corporeal experience of freedom. Whilst the more conventional Orthodox approach to the body and soul called for their gradual cleansing and deification in temporal and transcendent terms, or at least a liturgical imitation thereof, Lopukhin envisaged a more modest and realistic understanding of sanctification as a commitment to outward duty, and not a substantive modification of matter occurring within existent temporal constraints. To imagine and to re-create invisible truths was a prophylactic measure intending

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[552] I.V. Lopukhin, *Zapiski*, p. 137.
[553] *Ibid.* p. 136.
[554] *Ibid.* p. 139.
[555] M. Silk, 'Numa Pompilius and the Idea of Civil Religion in the West', p. 889.

to support ongoing activity in the mundane world and to provide a stimulus for the intellect's own praxis.

Criticism of a misunderstanding of the contingent character of historical reality associated with sectarianism was also applicable to Russian Orthodoxy, because its persecution of the Dukhobor sectarians was seen to be sourced in a crude emphasis on ritualism, preventing the development of a more conscientious approach to faith. In its present state then, Orthodoxy was not always functioning as a civil religion despite its obligatory status, because it was not always capable of delimiting itself from experience of the divine undertaken solely within the bounds of private intellect. Whilst Lopukhin's thought was expressive of the limits of religious toleration, his limit was far more accommodating in comparison to the one operating in Orthodoxy even though, it did not presuppose an inalienable right to act in accordance with individual conscience sustained by heterodox espousal of Christian truths.[556] What it did presuppose, was the right of every believer to systematically deconstruct the historical nature of the established confession strictly at an intellective level without the threat of persecution. That is, having subordinated the corporeal aspects of personhood, Orthodoxy ought to leave its purely spiritual projections alone, provided the latter were not unduly corporealised. Otherwise, the very purpose of civil religion – to prevent excessive institutionalisation of products of the imagination and of revelation as absolute truths – would be negated because the intellect would fail to overcome temporal reality.

It was only after the threat of enthusiasm resulting from unnecessary exteriorisations of private experiences and a concomitant defence of these experiences from the threat of persecution that the full extent of mystical praxis could be legitimately deployed. The general thrust of Rosicrucian thought on this matter, which Lopukhin shared, suggested a gradual recognition of the impossibility of fully replicating pre-Fall conditions which were held to be largely

[556] B.S. Tinsley, "Sozzini's Ghost: Pierre Bayle and Socinian Toleration", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 57, 4 (1996), p. 609.

disembodied and lacking exterior arrangements.[557] It was the lure of the perceived capacity to either find or to institute these utopian schemes stemming from an uncritical fixation upon defective human nature that has stimulated the emergence of fragmented and idolatrous organisational forms. If it is correct to view the potentially subversive implications of these aspirations as reflective of a larger "search for heaven on earth" constituting a "central theme of Russian culture" throughout the Eighteenth-century, then a practical approach to external religious authority was a sober delineation of the ultimate limit of purely human attempts to actualise prelapsarian bliss within a finite world.[558] When this sobriety was present, the deep dissatisfaction with historicity in general and historical ecclesia specifically, would not result in the rejection of either but would be un-known inwardly.[559] Lopukhin saw the commencement of this dissatisfaction within the rubric of repentance initially experienced by Adam, occasioning the recovery of the 'interior church' with a simultaneous re-ignition of the divine *pneuma* innate to all human beings. As was outlined in *Some Characteristics*:

> Adam's first sigh of repentance can be conceived as the first ray of Light and the beginning of the Divine Interior Church on earth. Subsequent Patriarchs, Righteous and pious souls who are born into faith and are beatified by Abel's kindness and innocence, live in the fear of the Lord, together form this single Church within which the Lord performs his great task of regeneration. Whilst those inflamed with Cain's dark spirit perpetuate the world of falsehood, filth and enmity, have built the church of the Anti-Christ.[560]

Whilst the 'interior church' was located within the human subject, it was not a self-contained entity but rather, an immaterial ecclesia inclusive of other human subjects who have likewise turned to the presumably divine aspects of their own selves. Of crucial significance here was the reference to the actual location of the

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[557] 'Stat'i iz zhurnala Moskovskoe ezhemesiachnoe izdanie 1781' in Malyshev, I.V. ed. *Novikov i ego sovremenniki* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Acedemii Nauk SSSR, 1961), p. 210.
[558] S.L. Baehr, *The Paradise Myth in Eighteenth-Century Russia*, p. 15.
[559] Russian sentimentalism which, in some respects, overlapped with Lopukhin's thought in its focus on inward experience and the importance of cultivating a sense of wonder in regards to nature, has also expressed the futility of attempting to revert to a 'golden age' by way of its elegiac remembrance, see N.D. Kochetkova, 'Tema "zolotogo veka" v literature russkogo sentimentalizma' in Kochetkova, N.D. ed. *XVIII vek*. Sbornik 18 (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 1993), pp. 185-6.
[560] I.V. Lopukhin, 'Nekotorye cherty', p. 81.

regenerative process which was thought to be transcendent in character. What was being regenerated, was not the nature of a particular set of organisational forms and their mode of operation, but the very condition of personhood which was neither bodily nor historical. At the heart of this process, Lopukhin postulated the possibility of an inherently disembodied commonwealth sustained by intellection rather than creaturely needs.

A similar kind of remorseful alienation to the one experienced by Adam was meant to be replicated in individual selves in order to effect an inward turn. Repentance can be understood to mean a realisation of a fundamental weakness of the purely human efforts to substantively improve the temporal world and a concomitant disbelief in its decisiveness. Thus, undue emphasis on human labour was approximated to evil because it merely perpetuated the very conditions which it vainly sought to overcome through recourse to the same capacities which were responsible for the disruption of paradisiacal existence. Whilst this did not mean an outright indifference to improving political and economic conditions of society, it did imply a predominantly philanthropic concern with human well-being. In more modern terms, alienation was not as much a withdrawal as a critical distance allowing for greater separation from a context which was otherwise inescapable. Lopukhin was quite alert to these ascetic implications in light of his contrast between the selfless and innocent labour performed by Abel and the self-centred and divisive deeds undertaken by Cain. Indeed, if asceticism is understood as a gradual process of knowing through disillusionment, then the repentance felt by Adam was an implicitly ascetic event because it presupposed a greater knowledge of the human condition by way of its qualified repudiation.[561] That was the basis of this alternative ecclesia, reflecting its commitment to moral and spiritual reform through a slow and intermittent restoration of the revelatory process and openness to the latter's salvific effects.

[561] A.G. Cooper, "Maximus the Confessor on the Structural Dynamics of Revelation", *Vigiliae Christianae* 55, 2 (2001), p. 169.

The sense of exclusivity associated with the 'interior church' must be seen in light of the imperative to approach time and historicity as reflective of personhood's progress rather than as possessing innate value in themselves. That is, the Rosicrucian solution to the issue of how an individual could be sceptical regarding an inescapable context was to liken the former to a pilgrim, traversing the latter as a lesser feature of his own self.[562] Lopukhin was under some influence of the gnostic undercurrent informing this thinking, which presupposed a direct correlation between the interiorising effects of repentance and the emergence of a select trans-historical 'pneumatic' community positioned between the present fallen world and the hoped for future state of spiritual restoration.[563] That is why, in his *Spiritual Knight*, Lopukhin interpreted the search for wisdom as a heroic progress towards the limits of discursivity and materiality:

> For the sincere warrior of wisdom and virtue, who in his finite life has courageously accomplished the feat of his renewal and was crowned with the glory of triumph over evil, is relocated directly into the kingdom of eternal Joy, Good and Rest where his labour will cease, but where his flow cannot cease because he flows into eternity. And this indescribable flowing particle, like a drop swallowed up by the ocean, whirling in the infinity of light towards the abyss where wisdom is sourced, is pulled by the movement of divine strength and is unceasingly descending into a new brightness of the Light.[564]

The language in the above passage was not one of ecstatic uplifting of the intellect to a cognition of permanence, but one of inward descent revealing a vision of a future "new heaven and a new earth."[565] Underscoring the uniqueness of this revelation and of the limited number of privileged individuals able to experience it, was Lopukhin's understanding that, the inquiring individual was ascetically wedded to wisdom and concomitantly, in a loose communion with like-minded souls. As a result of these abstractions from temporal structures, the individual could be said to be capable of functioning *in* the mundane world without being

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[562] V. Sakharov, 'Tsarstvo Astrei: Mif o zolotom veke masonskoi literatury XVIII v.' in *Russkoe masonstvo v portretah* (Moscow: AiF, 2004), pp. 111-12.
[563] I.S. Gilhus, "Gnosticism: A Study in Liminal Symbolism", *Numen* 31, 1 (1984), p. 120.
[564] I.V. Lopukhin, 'Duhovnyi rytsar'', pp. 34-5.
[565] *Ibid.* p. 35.

entirely *of* the mundane world.[566] In contrast to the rigidity of outward religious forms, inward spiritual activity was therefore, quite dynamic and, in light of the ambiguous location of the other members of the interior ecclesia, was relatively free of authoritative supervision.[567]

In its communal sense then, the 'interior church' was not quite synonymous with the elitist Rosicrucian lodges on account of its inclusion of members separated by time and space, who would have enjoyed a far stronger relationship with their inner selves and with the divine than with one another. The kind of communion which may have been possible was essentially one of remembrance and, in more theoretical terms, based upon the experience of universal affinity with all kindred souls as a consequence of introspective praxis. More importantly, Lopukhin was clear that his depiction of the innermost ecclesia as a special sanctum was of metaphorical rather than actual import.[568] Such a vague status of this concept, simultaneously anchored in a community of souls as well as in the depth of a private self was arguably, the source of its strength because its primary function was to open up an intellectual space wherein pressing metaphysical problems could be examined. Vague, implying an indeterminate state of pure potential: an individual inner ground and the community of brethren conscious of possessing the former, were states to be actualised fully in a future

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[566] R.A. Horsley, "Spiritual Marriage with Sophia", *Vigiliae Christianae* 33, 1 (1979), p. 54.

[567] Whilst a particular emphasis on dynamism as a major defining characteristic of the soul is often suggestive of a mystical focus on freedom derived from contemplating intellective and spiritual processes, it must nevertheless, be seen in a larger context which included more rational accounts of the reasons stimulating the soul's continuous activity. Rationalistic Russian thinkers such V.T. Zolotnitskii (1743-1797) were not averse to postulating the soul's love of goodness as a key stimulant of its movement in part, presupposed by desire for, and unattainability of, goodness in present life. Regarding the interconnection between freedom and dynamism in the soul, Zolotnitskii rhetorically exclaimed: "Let us consider the soul's innate restlessness and unlimited desire towards absolute goodness spreading within us, sometimes right up until our end. What is the meaning of this infinite thirst towards something better, evident when some people, having received all conceivable gifts of perfection, are still dissatisfied and are driven on by a mysterious force and strive towards hitherto undisclosed perfection to the minds of mortals? When these substantive stimulants in our souls are given to us by God, then their object – unknown and outmost goodness – must have its own being. However, since in this world, this object cannot be found, then of course, it is preserved for us in the future…" V.T. Zolotnitskii, 'Dokazatel'stvo bessmertiia dushi chelovecheskoi' in Artem'eva, T.V. ed. *Mysli o dushe: Russkaia metafizika XVIII veka* (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 1996), p. 165.

[568] I.V. Lopukhin, 'Nekotorye cherty', p. 84-5.

existence of absolute self-consciousness in a free unison with other self-conscious beings.

Aspirations towards a disembodied existence may be misconstrued as utopian, unless it is presumed that, enfolded within these sentiments was the imperative to reconceive human freedom as a transcendent principle forming the ultimate horizon of human experience. From within the interior solitude, Lopukhin hoped to catch a glimpse of a future restoration of paradisiacal state wherein, intuitive grasp of the totality of creation was possible due to the general evolution of natural and human self-consciousness. Implicitly, Lopukhin argued that, it was the latter aspects which formed the basis of freedom resulting from a re-deified fallen world. These emancipatory implications were expressed in *The Spiritual Knight*:

> The sting of the emaciated elements will disappear in the cleansing fire and, in the virginal realm of a new heaven and a new earth, will be reborn into a bright transparency of pure and immortal Paradisiacal Creature. An unremitting ray of regenerative light will effect the embodiment of wisdom. Everywhere, immortality will reign. Created beings will celebrate their freedom from decay and, in the midst of bliss, will sing the freedom of the Sons of Wisdom and shine in the glorious golden robes of their immortal spiritual bodies.[569]

Themes of togetherness and deliverance from the contingent nature of the temporal world containing temporal bodies was contained within the larger and an implicitly ethical notion of a transfiguration of the natural and human contexts, resulting in absolute freedom for both. It is in this sense that the notion of the 'interior church' expressed an uncompromised understanding of freedom, with the attendant invocation to undertake a personal spiritual becoming. As part of this process, Lopukhin foregrounded an initially annihilatory progress from being conceived temporally, "through non-being to new being" conceived transcendentally.[570] The identification of the attainment of wisdom with becoming

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[569] I.V. Lopukhin, 'Duhovnyi rytsar'', pp. 35-6.
[570] D.C. Matt, '*Ayin*: The Concept of Nothingness in Jewish Mysticism' in Forman, R.K. ed. *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 145.

its filial relation in communion with similar relations was suggestive of the paradoxical disclosure of the 'many' via an introspective focus on the 'one' to the point where, the seeking intellect became a rarefied extension of the very object it sought. In temporal terms, the latter identification was symptomatic of an enthusiastic conflation of the intellect with its products whereas in the present transcendent case, it was revelatory because it indicated how consciousness could be its own object without also being completely alone and self-referential.

Far from aiming at a quietist withdrawal, Lopukhin wanted to demonstrate how a retreat into inner solitude prefigured a future breakthrough into a community of disembodied selves. Indeed, spiritual praxis centred upon the location and experience of that solitude for the purposes of achieving a momentary grasp of a future transfigurative state. What this praxis entailed, was a sharp disaggregation of the intellect from its temporal objects in such a way that the former would be aware of its sheer incommensurability with its exterior manifestations. Since the experience of one's own consciousness presupposed that the latter could not be cognized as one entity amongst a myriad of objects, an emphasis on self-consciousness was emancipatory because it made possible a higher form of intellection.[571] Thus, the gradual descent into the 'interior church' intended to realize a radically naked, solitary self as a precondition for its subsequent intimacy with other spiritual beings and with God.[572] Lopukhin was influenced by the Neoplatonic approach to gnosis in its counter-intuitive sense and was not averse to risking the intellect's temporary subsumption within divine negativity to which he referred to as the 'abyss' where wisdom was sourced.[573] The private interior negation of truths which were adhered to in the exterior domain, was in some sense, a rehearsal of the much more dramatic un-knowing Lopukhin hoped would happen in the future.

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[571] M.B. Woodhouse, 'On the Possibility of Pure Consciousness' in *Ibid.* p. 267.
[572] K. Corrigan, "Solitary Mysticism in Plotinus, Proclus, Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo-Dionysius", *The Journal of religion* 76, 1 (1996), p. 33.
[573] T.V. Artem'eva, 'Oblast' dai umu…' in Artem'eva, T.V. ed. *Mysli o dushe*, pp. 26-7.

The ultimate telos as realisable in present earthly life only within the confines of the 'interior church' was a state of ineffability, briefly emancipating the intellect from its subservience to its creaturely context. Ineffability and the associated God-like gaze the intellect directed upon itself was not, for Lopukhin, an apogee of subjectivism but a realisation of the presence of an objective order foreclosed to any kind of particularisation and analysis.[574] The location of this limit was the primary goal of spiritual praxis. Just as a historically evolving ecclesia formed the limit to further constructive activity undertaken through the imagination, the emergence of an inner ecclesia corresponded to the limit of deconstruction occasioning a proportional increase in experiences incapable of easy assimilation into the current state of human nature.[575] That is, not only was the intellect in the process of shedding its conventional bodily projections, but some of its spiritual ones as well because neither were reflective of its innermost receptive capacity. As Lopukhin put it in *Some Characteristics*:

> While God's mercy prepares the soul towards regeneration, it has announced its own approach through sweetness, ecstasy, secret signs during sleep, inner visions and the illumination of the understanding. All of this is done for the soul's encouragement, consolation and guidance conventionally by means of numerous forces God is able to call upon for his own ends. This takes place in the outer spiritual regions open to the entry of unclean spirits masquerading as angels. That is why, wise mystics urge us to beware of inner sweetness, especially if it bears upon outward feelings and to test whether the former are divine. All of the abovementioned occurs outside of that centre where divine kingdom is disclosed in its true potency and where nothing impure can intervene.[576]

Lopukhin did not further clarify what and where exactly, "that centre" was. However, consistent with an apophatic approach to gnosis, there was only an indication of a cessation of established forms of knowing and a demarcation of the centre through reference to activities which did not actually transpire there. Even

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[574] D.M. Mackinnon, 'Some Epistemological Reflections on Mystical Experience' in Katz, S.T. ed. *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 135.
[575] K. Hart, 'The Experience of Nonexperience' in Kessler, M. and Sheppard, C. *Mystics*: *Presence and Aporia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 194.
[576] I.V. Lopukhin, 'Nekotorye cherty', p. 104.

if prophetic stirrings in the soul were of divine origin, there was a nuanced suggestion that the former were neither reliable nor of sufficiently transcendent origin. By distancing the transcendent from outer historical structures and from the more inward discursive processes, Lopukhin affirmed the divine otherness operating within an inner otherness of the human subject, resulting in the foregrounding of a potentially unfathomable depth inhering in all persons which conditioned their existence as intellective beings.

In effect, Lopukhin made a case for the need to maintain two kinds of ecclesia, one for the body and another for the intellect. The first was primarily communal and intended to minimise individuated deployments of truth whilst the second was presently, relatively solitary but intending towards a realisation of a spiritual and disembodied commonwealth. A mystic who occupied both of these domains was under the onus of having to examine the extent of his or her commitment to the respective truth claims found there without either completely abandoning or, totally submitting to them. This meant that, notwithstanding the fleeting state of ineffability the mystic may have experienced, there was nevertheless, a requirement for an ongoing critique of spiritual phenomena. When taken separately, each ecclesia was not completely reflective of a dynamic human intellect searching for certainty: the outer due to hierarchical commitments was inimical to genuine change whilst the inner was too open to the divine to allow for a continuing sense of an individuated self. Yet, when taken in conjunction, as mutually supportive domains, the intellect assumed a dynamic posture precisely because it was forced to shuffle between them for the duration of its earthly existence. That is why, "existential certitude" regarding the inherently uncertain nature of mundane as well as transcendent datum was possible because, the intellect was regularly subjected to glimpses of realities which were always deemed to be greater than the ones contextualising it at any given moment.[577]

[577] N. Smart, 'The Purification of Consciousness' in Katz, S.T. ed. *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 126-7.

The application of these idealistic themes towards a reconsideration of the status and purpose of ecclesiastical structures was quite novel in Eighteenth-century Russian thought.[578] Of particular note was Lopukhin's preparedness to draw rational conclusions regarding human idolatry and the threat of the imagination on the basis of an otherwise consistently mystical worldview. An argument for the necessity of the maintenance of false approaches to spiritual truth for the preservation of civil peace and as a guarantee of the integrity of the intellect has evinced a realistic treatment of the limits of historical progress. In comparison to utopian over-estimation of the possibility of instituting a quasi-paradisiacal existence, or with utilitarian belief in the need to anchor all human capacities into temporality, Lopukhin's qualified disaggregation of outward policing of the human animal and inner progress of the human intellect was a realistic response to the inherent problems with the course of Enlightened thought in Russia. What Lopukhin has implicitly noted was that, religion was capable of stimulating the development of both of these erroneous attitudes and therefore, was at the heart of any perspective impetus for reform. A misunderstanding of the true locus of spiritual activity could result in overly utopian as well as unduly utilitarian enforcements of a free human consciousness into these unrealisable projects, stunting the growth of a strong culture of inwardness sustained by reconfigured structures of personhood.

Structures of personhood

Lopukhin's reconsideration of ecclesiastical structures implied a corresponding revision of the notion of personhood from its conventional conflation with a unitary self, the 'I' operable in a utilitarian context, to one based upon personhood's transcendent self-relation via its multiple selves. Insofar as, in the Russian context, personhood was often conceived to be largely given via its worldly activity and to be decisively shaped by the latter, Lopukhin's mystical

[578] V.V. Zenkovskii, *Istoriia russkoi filosofii* Tom I, pp. 108-9.

critique was of a particularly practical import because it sought to reveal personhood's dependence on an interrelationship between its own constituent parts for its identity. This did not mean that, contrary to established foregrounding of historical reality as the key locus of human life during the Petrine Enlightenment, Lopukhin subverted the basis of historicity. Rather, there was an implicit attempt to correlate the functions of different dimensions of personhood with different kinds of realities in which they were sourced. In doing so, Lopukhin made some advances in comparison to Skovoroda's and Kheraskov's treatment of the same topos, primarily through a more consistent discussion of how personhood reconfigured the transcendental significance and not temporal presence, of its constituent parts. These theosophic undertones informing Lopukhin's approach to personhood were symptomatic of the perceived need to provide personhood with strong idealistic foundations in response to a growing scepticism regarding its continuing subservience to an extrinsic reality.[579]

Emphasis on an outer and inner self, usually within the rubric of 'old Adam' and the 'interior man' respectively, followed up the distinction between outer and inner ecclesia. Lopukhin was interested in working out a type of personhood capable of functioning within the latter distinction and to be reflective of spiritual praxis occurring therein. Some of the vagueness regarding the specific nature of what kind of activities were undertaken in the 'interior church' noted by scholars, can be clarified if personhood is taken to be one of the most important objects of spiritual enquiry.[580] That is, exploration of personhood's self-relation served as a concrete example of deconstructive activity undertaken in anticipation of the disclosure of a much greater good than the one experienced in the mundane world by an individuated self. The typical Rosicrucian insistence on introspective activity was underlined by the difficult notion of deification in a manner not completely inimical to its Orthodox variant and, in Lopukhin's thought, taken to imply a promise of elevating personhood to the status of an 'earthly god' once the individuated earthly self was marginalised. If interest in various theosophic

[579] A. Gleason, 'Ideological Structures', pp. 106-7.
[580] A. Lipski, 'A Russian Mystic Faces the Age of Rationalism and Revolution,' p. 177.

doctrines amongst Russian intellectuals was part of a concerted move to deploy an 'intellectual religion' as has been claimed, then the re-emergence of deification discourse amongst lay intellectuals was one important aspect of that trend, hitherto absent in indigenous mystical literature for elite urban readership.[581]

Various early-modern Western mystical and theosophical literatures distinguished the earthly outer and the spiritual inner selves in order to make a case for innate human autonomy in the face of the contingent character of the historical context. Such seemingly retrograde anthropology was in fact, crucial in stimulating discussions regarding the limits of personhood conceived theoretically rather than largely through the senses. Theoretically, referring to a process of intuiting an inexhaustible and inexpressible condition of personhood which was free on account of being prior to, any configurations personal organisational forms might take. One of the most important sources used by Lopukhin in this regard, is the thought of Böhme whose *The Way to Christ* (1623) circulated in manuscript Russian translations amongst senior members of the Rosicrucian lodges:

> When you are gone forth wholly from the creature and have become nothing to all that is nature and creature, then you are in that eternal one, which is God himself, and then you will perceive and feel the highest virtue of love. Also, that I said whoever finds it finds nothing and all things; that is also true, for he finds a supernatural, supersensual Abyss, having no ground… it is not comprehensible; and because it is nothing, it is free from all things… If you find it, you come into that ground from whence all things proceed, and wherein they subsist, and you are in it a king over all the works of God."[582]

Obviously, Lopukhin's reception of Böhme's complex thought was somewhat simplified. A foregrounding of the most authentic and in the same time, the most distant source of personhood attracted some Russian intellectuals because it supported an alternative vision of progress to the one found in more rationalistic thought. Unlike the typical emphasis on institutional and common-sense personal improvement advocated by the latter discourse, such a mystical approach was

[581] T.V. Artem'eva, 'Oblast' dai umu…', p. 27.
[582] J. Böhme, *The Way to Christ*, p. 179.

perceived to be capable of according and then defending, the absolute uniqueness of the human person's place in the creation.[583] Indeed, preoccupation with fostering the recovery of the 'interior man' was a way of relating this uniqueness not merely to the self-conscious capacity of the intellect, but also to the restoration of harmony between competing and often mutually-exclusive selves.[584]

The challenge faced by Lopukhin, was to prevent the potentially nihilistic misreading of Böhme's *un-ground* as a domain intent on overturning established truths and the conventional selves depending on them for their functioning in the temporal world. Rather, it had to be shown that, not only was the deconstructive potential of the original void actualised transcendentally but also that, in order for the former to be a possibility, an individuated self which was likely to misuse this potential, needed to be firmly locked in its temporal confines. That is why, Lopukhin was prepared to risk some agonistic side-effects to such an enforcement of the egotistic human will as this was done in order to break the latter's stranglehold on the personhood's latent unity with its transcendent source. The typical mystical injunction to limit the self in order to know one's soul, present in several German mystical traditions, was clearly at work here in light of the emergence of an enriched personhood as a result of a marginalisation of one of its selves.[585] It is in this sense that it was possible to conceive of harmony emerging out of a momentary cognizance of the pure potential ground linking all beings to each-other, to creation and to God because, its experience by the intellect was tantamount to deification through freedom. Yet, in more limited personal terms, it was sufficient to emancipate intuitive capacity from its subservience to the desires of the ego for the human subject to be considered to be reborn into a more harmonious – if not completely divine – personhood as the Russian Rosicrucians had hoped.[586]

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[583] V.D. Zdenek, "The Influence of Jacob Böhme on Russian Religious Thought", *Slavic review* 21, 1 (1962), p. 52.
[584] R. Faggionato, *A Rosicrucian Utopia in Eighteenth-Century Russia*, pp. 154-5.
[585] A. Weeks, *German Mysticism from Hildegard of Bingen to Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Literary and Intellectual History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), p. 89.
[586] R. Faggionato, *A Rosicrucian Utopia in Eighteenth-Century Russia*, pp. 116-7.

To a considerable extent, either a complete negation of the earthly aspects of the self, or an undue privileging of its divine intellectual part was checked by the Rosicrucian reiteration of the inalienability of the material content of the human subject. This did not necessarily postulate this content as in any sense good merely that, prior to a future transfiguration, material projections could not be ignored at their own level without destabilising the entire constitution of the person.[587] A mildly optimistic attitude to progress and to matter amongst the Russian Rosicrucians and the attendant rise of humanist sentiments, has been noted by scholars.[588] What needs to be added to this valuable assessment is the definition of personhood underlying the humanist implications of mystical critique. In his *Spiritual Knight,* Lopukhin entertained the possibility of a direct and an ongoing correlation between the creation of the universe and of the human person on account of the shareability of the materials used in the creation and of the intellective power sustaining it:

> What is needed in order to know the constitution of the great world? It is necessary to know the origin of all things. What is the origin? Chaos was and is the root cause of all things. What is needed in order to know the constitution of the little world? It is necessary to know oneself as a tripartite structure. What is man? A small world for he is an extract from all of the creatures and consequently, like the great world. He is also like God by virtue of possessing an intellective soul which was divinely poured into a celestial spirit governing his body constructed out of the elements.[589]

As the above passage indirectly implied, it was impossible not to give some consideration to the material content because it was one of the conditions of a person's sense of enworldedness. Lopukhin was certain of the structural significance of the creaturely identity of the person and consequently, its complete repression in present circumstances was not feasible because it formed an extension of the much larger world in whose likeness it was made. The injunction

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[587] C. McIntosh, *The Rosicrucians: The History, Mythology and Rituals of an Esoteric Order* (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1997), pp. 4-5.
[588] C. McIntosh, *The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason: Eighteenth-Century Rosicrucianism in Central Europe and Its Relationship to the Enlightenment* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), p. 155.
[589] I.V. Lopukhin, 'Duhovnyi rytsar'', p. 40.

to know oneself not only as an immaterial essence enveloped in gross matter, but also as the envelopment itself and the instinctual matrix operable therein, was a conscious commitment to these distinct components of personhood in preparation for their subsequent rearrangement.

Such a microcosmic approach to the structure of personhood was not, as may be presumed, an attempt to revert to conceptualisations of the human subject as a being whose identity was 'scattered' throughout the cosmos, prevalent in early-modern Russia.[590] The latter notion, whilst not always inimical to a strong emphasis on individuality, has nevertheless placed an onus on cosmic processes as the origin of events occurring in the soul and body. Lopukhin's recourse to this theme was diametrically opposed to the subjugation of human identity to the workings of the cosmos. It was rather, the human subject who, through intellection, exerted decisive leverage upon the fate of the creation by virtue of being its replica. Thus, Lopukhin was concretising or, gathering personhood into a coherent agent fit to act in temporal as well as transcendent domains. Far from suggesting passivity in the face of natural processes, the implication here was on the need to further maximise human potential sourced in a personhood that was simultaneously, the agent and the locus of its own activity. Arguably, self-reflexive knowing of one's own constituent selves was an activity with ramifications for the entire created world and, insofar as it was held to be of such importance, it has foregrounded the sufficiency of self-experience and self-modification to effect change, provided these processes were undertaken transcendentally rather than temporally.

Yet, Lopukhin was quite careful in preventing the emergence of a belief in a self-sufficient personhood, once it was present to its own intellection and therefore, as though already deified. In the foregoing section, the issue of the disclosure of the ineffable source of things as a result of marriage to wisdom has been raised in order to clarify the emergence of otherness from a focused spiritual

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[590] V.M. Zhivov, 'Religious Reform and the Emergence of the Individual in Russian Seventeenth-Century Literature' in Baron, S.H. and Kollman, N.S. eds. *Religion and Culture in Early Modern Russia and Ukraine* (De Kalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), p. 189.

praxis. When applied to the teleology of personhood, this logic was radicalised because there was the resulting notion that this otherness, which was not ultimately sourced in the interior ground of the self, nevertheless revealed itself there. Specifically, prior to an escalation of self-reflection, the human subject needed to be forewarned that, when personhood was refined to become a receptive organ of truth and seemingly self-sufficient, it was in fact in a moment when it was most dependent on the source of truth in order to realise it within itself. In his *Spiritual Knight*, Lopukhin explained this difficult paradox through a Platonic notion of mental pregnancy ensuing after the lover of wisdom was fertilised by his 'bride':

> If the Light enlightening him vanishes on account of his inexperience in constancy, then this happens not so that he will be cast into darkness. The Light hides itself from the immaculate young lover solely in order to test his devotion and capacity to observe faith in a state of marriage. To the lover who has endured after the strictest tests, the Light will reveal itself in its full glory and imbue him with the strength to become a husband perfect in spirit. A fiery baptism will cast off his old clothing and he will put on a new immaculate robe, conjoin the Celestial Virgin through a spiritual marriage and begin the great task of birthing the children of wisdom…[591]

On the one hand, a cleansed personhood was, in some measure, deified because it was chosen by wisdom but on the other, it was completely at the latter's mercy because it could not birth any progeny solely through its own efforts. Crucially, a double-otherness was at work here. In the first instance, personhood was distinguished from wisdom, the latter forming the as-yet unknown object of its desire. Whilst in the second, personhood was a vessel where the discourse making the otherness more familiar was occasioned by a direct intervention of that very otherness. In both cases, personhood was positioned as an entity reaching its own limits not through its own innate efforts important as they were, but by virtue of its receptivity, or a radical openness to the effects of the knowledge it sought. The metaphor of mental pregnancy was particularly well-suited to express these notions because, its inherent flexibility allowed for an interiorisation of certain

[591] *Ibid.* pp. 30-1.

virtues of deificatory import which were nevertheless, clearly postulated to be independent of the person in terms of their ultimate source.[592]

Standing in the way of this enrichment of personhood to which it ought to aspire, was a wilful and possessive self, the 'I' which prevented personhood's further actualisation. Whilst Lopukhin was not intimately familiar with Plato's discussion of what happened when mental procreation failed to take place, he did give some continuity to the latter's warning that sometimes, "we retain our children unborn and suffer badly" by pointing out the most important impediment to mental pregnancy.[593] When Lopukhin mentioned the violent birth-pangs associated with all kinds of births, for which the lover of wisdom ought to be prepared to overcome the gulf separating the mundane flux from the constancy of wisdom, he indicated the stunted nature of personhood when it was neither reborn itself nor birthed anything greater than itself.[594] The self-referential 'I' was arresting the dynamic character of personhood because it was geared to function under the presumption that human self-interested labour was the decisive mode of existing, occurring in the absence of direct divine guidance. Consequently, the needs and capacities of this unitary self were not only misconstrued to exhaust the entire range of what constituted reality, but this reality was in some sense, 'owned' by the egotistic self as though there was no otherness to which it had to consent. In contradistinction to the self as proprietor, the idea of transformation through birthing otherness has offered a conception of personhood based on a process of "successive actualisation" of "innate potentiality" and not of an innate possession of a core self exercising core knowledge.[595]

The consistency with which Lopukhin has re-emphasised the imperative to slay the 'old Adam' was symptomatic of his concern with limiting and ultimately, overcoming the individualistic principle and of recasting personhood as a

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[592] E.E. Pender, "Spiritual Pregnancy in Plato's Symposium", *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series, 42, 1 (1992), p. 85.
[593] Plato, *Symposium*, 206d.
[594] I.V. Lopukhin, *Duhovnyi rytsar'*, pp. 20-1.
[595] G. Rawson, "Platonic Recollection and Mental Pregnancy", in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 44, 2 (2006), p. 148.

receptacle rather than a self-sustaining essence. This intention was informed by the immense popularity of various Pietist discourses to which many Russian intellectuals have turned to support their search for a more speculative insight into personhood.[596] Far from exhibiting notions of rigorous piety and its often obscurantist tendencies, Russian readers have found in Pietism and its related traditions, a detailed set of prescriptions on how to institute an ongoing self-relation as not only a cornerstone of faith, but of the very idea of personhood. A particular attraction of these theologies which the Russian Rosicrucians were eager to study and to diffuse amongst a select reading public, was the imperative to emancipate personhood from its subservience to a single self on the basis of a perceived inner nothingness in the face of the fullness of divine inscrutability. The thought of the German theologian Johann Arndt (1555-1621) was pivotal in this regard, whose *True Christianity* (1610) was printed in Lopukhin's printing press in Russian:

> The man who wishes to be something is the material out of which God makes nothing, indeed, he makes a fool out of it. However, a man who wishes to be nothing and considers himself as nothing is the material out of which God makes something; he thus makes for himself glorious, wise people. A man who considers himself before God as the most paltry creature, as the most miserable, is in God's eyes the greatest and the most glorious. The man who considers himself the greatest sinner is the greatest saint before God.[597]

What interested Lopukhin here, was the dramatic collision between the potency personhood exhibited when it denied itself its own individual self, and the disclosure of a much greater divine potency capable of creative activity by means of the resulting sense of nothingness. Arndt was quite clear that, in order for this to be possible, the self-loving 'old Adam' had to be defeated and in his place, "a new man will be living."[598] Thus, a very paradoxical attitude to personhood was promoted as a consequence of close engagement with early-modern Western

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[596] N.D. Kochetkova, 'Pietizm i russkoe masonstvo' in Bartlett, R. and Lehman-Carli, G. eds. *Eighteenth-Century Russia: Society, Culture, Economy*, p. 234.
[597] J. Arndt, *True Christianity* tr. P. Erb (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), pp. 99-100.
[598] *Ibid.* p. 83.

spiritual literature. Personhood appeared to derive its value in the mundane and transcendent terms, not from its presumed unity of identity, but from its self-limitation intending to overcome its undue affiliation with its own projected unity. This meant that, notwithstanding the numerous invocations to annihilate one kind of a self, the underlying logic has nevertheless, presupposed personhood to be the primary agent of its own reconfiguration.

Even though the purely creaturely aspects of personhood have naturally coalesced to form a unified self and consequently obscured its divine intellective capacity, insofar as it was a receptacle, personhood proved itself to be greater than its own individuality. It is in this sense, that it is possible to speak of a sustained self-relation Lopukhin wanted to ignite in his readers. Whilst there was no alternative to an egotistic self for personhood's survival in its worldly context, questions regarding its limits and of its ultimate value in relation to existence as such, stimulated introspective interrogations which could only strengthen the belief in the inexhaustible nature of personhood. Inexhaustible here meant the elusiveness of the essence of personhood was the primary stimulus for the process of becoming. The contrast between the seemingly contradictory states of complete self-abnegation and of the certainty that personhood was somehow, strengthened by the ensuing indwelling of otherness within itself, attested to the identification of self-relation with the irreducibility of personhood, notwithstanding the annihilations it has inflicted upon itself. Thus, for Lopukhin, there was no need for a core self, because he has postulated self-consciousness as an essential activity sustaining personhood.

Personhood then, was capable of enduring beyond its own individualistic principle. Lopukhin wanted not merely to marginalise the 'I' on account of its superfluousness, but to create the conditions wherein, it would know itself to be unimportant outside of its temporal confines and, as a result, would play a decisive role in its own marginalisation. Early-modern Western spiritual discourses have frequently likened this process to an inner 'crucifixion of the flesh' through which,

self-interested orientation of the human nature was tamed.[599] In its specifically Rosicrucian variant however, this motif has gained an additional purpose of heightening the self-reflection of 'I' to such an extent, that it was forced to begin to deconstruct itself as a consequence of sheer anxiety. Such an approach has gone some way towards an overcoming of the conventional Christian concern with fostering a potentially indefinite struggle between flesh and soul as though these were monolithic substances and not, organising principles open to speculative insight and reorganisation. The latter point was elucidated in *Some Characteristics*:

> The light of grace, illuminating the person in the process of rebirth, reveals his inner eyes according to his progress and dispels the darkness shrouding his true self from himself. That is when, the shroud of blindness is torn and the person sees the depth of his fall, senses his spiritual depravity and all the suffering caused by his rejection of divine love. The salvific torture of the internal cross, expels the gathering of sins sourced in the original sin, breaks down the barrier of unclean bodily heart to make way for the birth of a new and clean spiritual heart and unwinds – until the last thread – the soul's old clothing covering the sin's nest and the I, this root of sin, is unclothed and becomes terrified of itself.[600]

The kind of personal continuity envisioned here, hinged upon the fertilization personhood received from divine otherness. Specifically, personhood perpetuated itself by virtue of its receptivity which allowed it to give birth to 'children of wisdom' as indicated by the reference to the growth of a new spiritual heart in place of an old earthly one. Yet, what was striking in Lopukhin's vision of how that birth transpired was the emergence of self-reflection in the 'I', in proximity to the fertilizing otherness to which it had no relation and over which it could exercise no control. Arguably, the state of self-terror was symptomatic of the moment when an individuated self realised that it was occupying only a small portion of a much larger personhood and was therefore, not the primary agent it previously presumed itself to be. By means of an explicit contradistinction between on the one hand, the continuing development of personhood and on the other, the

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[599] *Ibid.* p. 42.
[600] I.V. Lopukhin, 'Nekotorye cherty', pp. 133-4.

disenfranchisement of the unitary self from participation therein, the latter was positioned to witness its own inaction which in turn, disclosed its irrelevance.

Lopukhin's language was quite nuanced in its expression of the connection between deconstruction and knowledge. Obviously, the metaphorical description of the soul's old clothing hiding the weakness of the 'I' was intended to point out dependence on illusion and ignorance for individuality to lay claim on the entire personhood. Underlying this sentiment however, was a more subtle suggestion that the illusion itself was not merely dispelled, but revealed and inquired into, until the last thread constituting it. This important qualification has, to a degree, granted some realness to embodied projections because it has recognised their capacity to coalesce into an organisational form. The reorganisation of personhood could only occur transcendentally without a literal suppression of the body because the latter strategy did not necessarily imply an intimate insight into the very object needing suppression. Lopukhin sidestepped this conventional ascetic trope by checking any attempt to curb the individuated self if it did not proceed via self-reflection of the entire personhood and specifically, of the 'I' within it. At this stage then, whilst the intellect was gradually emancipated and regained its divine likeness through becoming increasingly self-conscious, the 'I', which was the entity intellect was meant to supplant, was withdrawing away from its position of pre-eminence as a result of the very same introspective scrutiny.[601]

Such deployment of self-consciousness towards two entirely contradictory ends was reflective of the particular moment selfhood found itself in, once it has become less dependant on the 'I' for its temporal and transcendent functioning. The kind of personhood Lopukhin was now describing was a de-centred one, lacking a single self-conscious guide directing it. Indeed, there seemed to be an indication of a moment when selfhood's constituent parts were temporarily autonomous agents, not quite certain to whose authority to submit because the individual self has not yet vacated its place to the intellect. This almost

[601] P.S. Shkurinov, *Filosofiia Rossii XVIII veka* (Moscow: Vysshaia Shkola, 1992), p. 181.

chaotic personhood was an ideal state from which it was possible to commence its re-harmonisation according to the divine likeness it nonetheless exhibited. The ascetic manner of breaking up and subsequently, reconfiguring personhood's organisation was reflective of the imperative to undertake an "activity of self-deformation" as a necessary prelude to "perfect self-transcendence."[602] Lopukhin was giving scope to both of these interrelated activities as he was clearly prioritising the break-up of the present conventional and earthly structure of personhood with the view towards the future onset of a spiritual personhood which would by its mode of being, transcend the particularity of a self-centred life.

The crucial moment when self-centredness revealed itself as the ultimate obstacle to personhood's further spiritual becoming occurred when its capacity to claim possession of over inner states and qualities was seen to be directly caused by the self's de-centring. Lopukhin was attuned to the difficulty of dispossessing the 'I' especially if, as a result of the latter's self-reflective capacity, it presumed that it was the key reason for personhood's bliss precisely because its own marginalisation was the condition for personhood's further progress. That is, a speculative approach to notions of pride and arrogance suggested that, these sentiments were able to find a particularly powerful stimulation from self-abnegation. Egoism could not only be immune to successful assaults on the 'I', but it could also be strengthened by the success of these assaults, once it found a way to thrive on the sense of superiority in comparison to those persons who were not prepared to unleash self-annihilation upon themselves. Thus, there was a danger of the re-emergence of individualism in a much more perverse and subtle form as a result of attempts to overcome it. As stated in *Some Characteristics*:

> Spiritual pride, self-love and ignorance can cause the man to mistake the harbingers of the proximity of the Divine Kingdom for its arrival, for the actual presence of Christ and for sensing the latter's strength which constitutes the heavenly kingdom. Spiritual images intended for man's awakening and instruction can be used to gratify the desires of his intellectual eyes through feelings of inner sweetness that can invoke a shadow of divine presence and feed spiritual cravings and cause the

[602] G.G. Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism*, p. 28.

> man to secretly conceive himself to be superior due to his newly-acquired inner powers.[603]

The more personhood resembled a receptacle, as attested by the increasingly realistic visualisations of its future state, the greater was the temptation to conceive of the images it received as actualisations of the reality they have merely foreshadowed. It is possible to detect here a similar logic informing Lopukhin's ambivalent attitude to exterior religious arrangements. Specifically, whilst the acceptance of dissatisfaction and subsequent interior negation of the transcendental validity of temporalized truth signified a genuine instance of spiritual progress, such maturation could easily backfire and degenerate into an enthusiastic belief in personal self-sufficiency. Personhood's receptivity, which was meant to gradually usher in divine otherness capable of enriching and of perpetuating it within increasingly intellective domains, could also be the very reason for its separation from the divine because it claimed the latter's otherness as its own. Paradoxically then, even though the hegemony of the 'I' was counteracted, this was done at the risk of further enmeshing personhood into its creaturely existence, unless the "newly-acquired inner capacities" were simultaneously cognized as gifts and as temptations inferior to the disembodied state personhood might enjoy.

The correspondence of this critique of pride and arrogance with the critique of the virtuous and at the same time, the erroneous faith of the Dukhobours is quite striking. The latter have clearly advanced in their displacement of a worldly self with one tending towards *imitatio Christi*. However, the successful but as yet unfilled effects of this displacement have fuelled the optimistic assumption that, all possible derivatives of a renewed faith in the present temporal life have actualised themselves and consequently, individuals possessing them ought to separate themselves from those who do not.[604] What this meant in Lopukhin's terms was that, whilst it was possible to shape a kind of personhood capable of exiting the 'exterior church,' at least at the level of its historical validity,

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[603] I.V. Lopukhin, 'Nekotorye cherty', p. 105.
[604] G.G. Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism*, p. 88.

there was no guarantee of arriving at the 'interior church' because this would require a fundamentally different kind of personhood. In fact, the act of overcoming of historicity, whether in the form of religious institutions or of a post-fall egotistic self, could give rise to new challenges blocking a genuine breakthrough into the transcendent. The Dukhobours appeared to be in a situation where, personhood was sufficiently de-centred to allow for a disbelief in the conclusiveness of a predominantly embodied historical existence, but it continued to foreground its own primacy and ultimately, power. For Lopukhin, the loss of individual hegemony was only a stage towards spiritual transfiguration and intended largely to demonstrate the absence of "a given, invariable, core self."[605]

It may be recalled that, wisdom graced its lover irregularly, approximating and distancing itself according to the lover's progress on the basis of prior revelations This pattern foregrounded the imperative of ongoing introspective praxis to determine the extent of the indwelling wisdom and instituted the temptation to conflate wisdom with vestiges of a core self as a necessary complication to further becoming. In a highly speculative fashion, Lopukhin seemed to have implied two kinds of self-relation operating simultaneously in a personhood in the process of reconfiguration. The first was implicit and underdeveloped, tending to envision the disclosure of an inner otherness, whilst the second was explicit and relatively developed, tending towards self-regard. The value of temptation was precisely in its ability to bring out and subsequently, to instil resistance to the manner in which, benefits of divine otherness were self-consciously cognised as properties of personhood and not as the results of personhood's openness to an otherness it was gradually realising within itself. As pointed out *Some Characteristics*, the lover of wisdom could:

> Falsely understand the lessons provided by the mysterious sacred images, mistake them for clarity of the divine revelation itself and, wishing to follow them, he will wander around guided by his sense of property. In this blind state, having discovered the potency of the name of God and

[605] R. Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason: The Modern Foundations of Body and Soul* (New York: Norton, 2004), p. 370.

> motivated by covetousness, he will misappropriate the holy name for evil deeds of empowerment of his own wilful capacity. Through this, the approaching Divine Kingdom will be distanced, the possibility of rebirth will be hampered and all traces of the emerging grace within him will be stamped with the image of property. That is how the task of rebirth is liable to be disfigured.[606]

The risk of degenerating into a proprietor-type self was akin to a stagnant self, incapable of further development.[607] Personhood was wilfully misusing images it mistook for revelation and has achieved some degree of self-reflective grasp of its own progress as a consequence of divine action, albeit of a delusional kind. Concomitantly however, personhood was prioritised as a self-sufficient entity capable of invoking divine potency to satisfy itself. In both cases, whilst self-reflection has clearly gained a much firmer footing within personhood in comparison to its status when the latter was entirely subsumed within the 'I', self-reflection was nevertheless geared towards the discovery and deployment of certain strengths to promote personhood's interests. As a result of the ebb and flow of grace, personhood was always on the verge of falling into mere seemliness of self-relation which was in actual fact, self-referentiality because in the absence of fertilizing wisdom, personhood was reduced to dependence on imagery. The same imagery which Lopukhin believed to be responsible for encouraging personhood towards an increasingly intimate relationship with wisdom eventuating in transfiguration, could also be responsible for its degeneration. This threat was meant to be taken as a warning to maintain a strictly transcendental self-relation as otherwise, the figurative content of inner imagery would disfigure rather than beatify, if conceived solely as personal property.[608]

The temptation of self-empowerment through possession was reflective of the inherently theurgic nature of human creativity which did necessarily restrict itself to the creation of historical organisation forms but was also operable as an

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[606] I.V. Lopukhin, 'Nekotorye cherty', p. 105.
[607] It would be a mistake to see this as a direct critique of the Western concept of *Homo Oeconomicus*. At the same time however, any mystically-derived self which resembled at least in some way, Lopukhin's descriptions thereof, could possibly derive its dignity from economic pursuits.
[608] G.G. Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism*, p. 131.

agent of personhood. In stark contrast to the conventional scholarly opposition between medieval personhood developing in accordance with a preconceived divine plan and a more modern notion of a self-shaped personhood, Lopukhin presumed that the use of seemingly innate potential could be symptomatic of regress and not reflective of personhood's true identity.[609] The emphasis on the almost magical power vested in the name of God was suggestive of the extent to which, it was possible to invoke divine authority at will without actually being in consonance with that authority. In the historical context, these instances of theurgy were seen to be completely within the confines of the 'exterior church' and lacking any positive relationship with the divine without ceasing to be quite powerful. In this case however, theurgy was strengthened by the appearance of a direct correlation of image and divine reality within personhood's interiority, without overcoming its definition as only a surrogate of divine creativity. In the absence of a hegemonic 'I', individual action was still possible because the power in the divine name was "automatic" and in some respects autonomous, without differentiating the intentions of its users and therefore, was freely available to be used by the intellect.[610]

Such availability of divine potency in a seemingly undiluted form without any concomitant ethical restraints was the ultimate temptation for personhood. If recourse to human creative labour in the mundane was permissible because historicity was essentially a realm of necessity where it was difficult to choose not to depend on it, within the increasingly transcendental realm of personhood, the possibility of freedom of choice increased correspondingly. It is in this sense that personhood could degenerate further due to misusing the results of its progress. That is, Lopukhin indirectly implied that, evil was largely realised not within the dependant mundane reality where absolutes failed to unfold without compromising themselves, but within the highly receptive inner ground of personhood which appeared to be quite neutral. The moment when the 'I' was in

[609] J. Martin, "Inventing Sincerity, Refashioning Prudence: The Discovery of the Individual in Renaissance Europe", *The American Historical Review* 102, 5 (1997), pp. 1329-30.
[610] N. Janowitz, "Theories of Divine Names in Origen and Pseudo-Dionysius", p. 362.

the process of marginalisation, leaving personhood decentred, was to some extent akin to the chaotic origin of things, serving as a free potential for subsequent actualisation. The mystical import of emphasis on chaos, which Lopukhin thought had to be cognized in order to grasp the structures of personhood, was its openness to new being as well as to new knowledge proper, giving personhood the opportunity to either orient itself towards becoming to being or to possessing new knowledge.[611] If the key instance of freedom was to choose a different kind of being to the one experienced historically, then the key instance of temptation was to reject the latter precisely when some progress has been made towards it and to choose knowledge instead.[612]

Irrespective of personhood's progress towards being and the extent to which it managed to reconfigure itself to facilitate its own becoming, it remained tripartite and until transfiguration, would always be under threat of falling into temptation. Lopukhin's particular concern with the power of imagery, whether of human or divine origin, indicated his realist treatment of human rootedness in the elemental processes inhering in the creation, incapable of being overcome permanently solely through human effort. The intellect was not able to exist permanently in an intellective mode because it could not sufficiently distance itself from encroachment by the corporeal aspects of personhood. This rootedness could lead towards a grasp of corporeal spirituality precluding transcendence and in doing so, merely deluding the intellect into thinking that it has exceeded its embodiment. As argued in *Some Characteristics*, personhood could delude itself into believing that it was genuinely illuminated by the divine, when in fact, it was merely engaging the farther regions of the creation:

> Incorrect understanding regarding spirituality and the distinction between the elemental-astral, the Angelic and the Divine spirituality, eclipses the understanding of true illumination and knowledge which become increasingly distant and is imagined to be the actual cognizance of Divine things themselves. Those who partake of astral spirituality

[611] S.S. Khoruzhii, *K fenomenologii askezy* (Moscow: Izd-vo gumanitarnoi literatury, 1998), p. 222.
[612] *Ibid.* pp. 39-40.

> consider themselves to be illuminated because their astral wisdom, beautified by the exteriority of letters has collated in their imagination images of spiritual and Divine things which often do not even resemble the shadow of the originals. All of this transpires in the psychic man incapable of knowing Divinity because he deems it to be foolishness.[613]

What Lopukhin referred to here by the term "psychic man" was a personhood governed by the appetitive and the elemental psyche able to think only through the means of imagery. Through this type of insight, the intellect failed to appreciate that knowledge was not the goal in itself. Rather, there was a nuanced pairing up of illumination with the concomitant growth of understanding as though the latter enjoyed a solely epiphenomenal relationship to the illuminative state signifying being. A breakthrough into the somnambular realm could be suggestive of firstly, a dissatisfaction with historically developed religious norms and secondly, of a relatively rarefied personhood. Yet, openness to occult experiences also meant a final surrender to the intervention of the external image into interiority, likened by Saint-Martin to a confrontation with the "violent spirits of the world" whose projection of the tangible form of truth was far inferior to the truth's formless disclosure from with the interior.[614] Lopukhin was in full agreement with this judgement albeit, he seemed to have been even more forthright in his condemnation of the illuminated psyche as self-centred and divorced from intellective experiences.

Nonetheless, the critique of the occult has enfolded within itself a fundamental difficulty with meeting the demands for an increasingly intellective existence of personhood, without undue recourse to the senses. What was particularly striking in Lopukhin's suspicious attitude to the corporeal powers of the psyche was the latter's usefulness in either effecting personhood's becoming or its degeneration. God, the elemental forces and individual imagination have all made use of human receptivity for imagery by seeking to reveal themselves via corporeal means. This meant that, not only were all of these powers made equal

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[613] I.V. Lopukhin, 'Nekotorye cherty', pp. 108-9.
[614] Saint-Martin in A.E. Waite, *The Unknown Philosopher*, p. 48.

by their imagistic representation to the intellect, but insofar as the focus was on the image, there was little ontological difference between the actual representations because they were all occurring at the same level. Just as personhood was capable of possessing an image sourced in the divine, it could in equal measure, lay claim to images derived from elsewhere not merely because it might have been inclined towards covetousness, but because irrespective of the image's content and ultimate origin, it was still generated within personhood. Thus, if divine invocations were liable to be misunderstood and misused whilst their more corporeal counterparts were prone to the same pitfalls, the problem was not only in a personhood adept at manipulating and reprojecting the results of its progress at will, but in the manner of the invocations themselves.[615] Irrespective of whether personhood desired to become further and irrespective of the intentions of the imagistic encouragements it has received, it was forced to rely on its theurgic nature and consequently, towards self-centredness.

Lopukhin's response to this impasse involved an introduction of a solely intellective activity into personhood which was conditioned by the preceding marginalisation of the 'I' and whilst also, completing this marginalisation without further recourse to re-creative agency. A relatively de-centred personhood remained tripartite and therefore, depended on compromise for its continuity as evident in the mediating significance of the image. Obviously, such a deferral to mimesis evinced no easy relationship between the body and the soul because both were complex and enjoyed a difficult and at times contradictory union.[616] This Platonic undercurrent in Lopukhin's thought presupposed the need for the intellect to consciously replicate divine activity through its self-relation as a way of circumventing its dependence on a sensorial reception of the truth.[617] When personhood outpoured and surrendered itself to a fertilizing otherness resulting in its own birth at a higher ontological level, it was mirroring in reverse, God's

[615] This critique of inner imagery and inner invocation can be seen as part of an Enlightened suspicion of an overly affective experience religion, see L.E. Schmidt, "From Demon Possession to Magic Show: Ventriloquism, Religion and the Enlightenment", *Church History* 67, 2 (1998), pp. 275-8.
[616] H.D. Rankin, *Plato and the Individual* (London: Methuen, 1964), p. 40.
[617] *Ibid.* p. 65.

outpouring and surrender to humanity, resulting in the birth of the logos in the flesh. In both cases, human and divine personhoods broke out of their respective self-centredness without at the same time, ceasing the process of their dynamic disclosure.

An ascetic war against the body and its production of imagery was insufficient and in some cases counterproductive because it was not a completely intellective activity and because it still required imagery for its perpetuation. Beyond the emancipation of personhood's tripartite structure which followed in the wake of the negation of 'I', there were two alternatives: either personhood was empowered and reverted to self-interest because it experienced the pleasure of its own annihilation or, it overcame the immense power of its own capacity for self-negation. Lopukhin proposed the latter alternative through which, personhood would be in the process of deploying its own intellection in regards one of its own intellective principles rather than those rooted in its own corporeality. As stated in *Some Characteristics*, negation of negation was the moment of separation between the old exterior man and the birth of a new inner man existing without an egotistic self:

> Love is the soul of the new inward body in the process of rebirth, emerging according to its maturity. This body can only mature within the decaying old outer man. Towards the mysterious extinction of this sinful man the method is a deep self-negation which is subsequently supplemented with love and followed by a negation of that self-negation. The I must not only not act, but not see its own inaction so as not to be pleasured by it. As through such self-pleasuring, Lucifer may instantly erect his altar in the heart. Property is the root of sin, a magnet for the one who birthed it and his primary weapon.[618]

The foregoing process whereby personhood was gradually disengaged from its exclusive concern with self-preservation was symptomatic of a deep self-negation. Yet, the insufficiently transcendent and the overly deconstructive mode of this process failed to result in the grasp of any positivity associated with the divine or indeed, with personhood as its receptacle. So, the need to check self-negation was

[618] I.V. Lopukhin, 'Nekotorye Cherty', pp. 97-8.

spurred by the need to conclude the potentially endless fragmentation of personhood and the various internal and external authorities it relied upon as well as to prevent the false belief that, mere denial will automatically bring about an evolved and richer personhood.[619] Böhme's correlation of love, the sense of inner nothingness and the ensuing deification of the person are detectable here as Lopukhin presupposed a displacement of the old body with the new, arising out of the soul's interiority. There was no longer any engagement on the part of the intellect, with entities and processes which were not themselves intellective.

Emphasis on eschatology was divorced from its role in closing historical development and relocated into personhood where it represented the subject's most extreme capacity for self-modification.[620] The extent of the modification was evident in the incapacity on the part of the 'I' to apprehend its own incapacity for action not because it was repressed but because, it could not register a purely transcendent activity of yearning.[621] That is, if in the earlier stages of personhood's redevelopment, the 'I' was induced to self-consciously experience terror at its own unimportance, presently it was completely circumvented as an organising principle whose self-consciousness reached a point of such incomprehension, that it could not even perceive it. It is in this sense that it is possible to interpret Lopukhin's aspirations to institute an evolving personhood in increasingly transcendent terms as an inherently kenotic process, reshaping personhood according to its relation to being which was the determining factor of its identity and to which the 'I' was absolutely blind.[622] Ultimately, what has allowed Lopukhin to see self-relation as an activity undertaken without risking self-sufficiency, was his explicit emphasis on the "value of dispossession" as a critical response to notions of personhood as proprietor foregrounded by various philosophical, theological and political

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[619] A. Schnole, "The Scare of the Self: Sentimentalism, Privacy, and Private Life in Russian Culture, 1780-1820", *Slavic Review* 57, 4 (1998), p. 730.
[620] H. Jonas, "Myth and Mysticism: A Study of Objectification and Interiorization in Religious Thought", *The Journal of Religion* 49, 4 (1969), p. 318.
[621] D. Cupitt, *Mysticism After Modernity* Religion and Modernity (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1998), p. 87.
[622] S.S. Khoruzhii, *Opyty iz russkoi duhovnoi traditsii* (Moscow: Parad, 2005), p. 17.

discourses throughout Eighteenth-century Europe.[623] The notion that personhood engaged in its own dispossession and in doing so, strengthened its identity in highly idealistic terms, involved an implicitly eschatological gesture towards the belief in self-divestment as a process of recovery of a state of being rather than a gain of corporeal and spiritual 'goods' whose possession was mistakenly seen to constitute personhood.

As existing entities, the structures of personhood were not done away with. Lopukhin was quite careful in his expectation of a final reversion to a constantly spiritual existence which was entirely left to God to enact. However, as determinants of a particular configuration personhood might take and as agents of its transcendent development, these structures were reconfigured anew around the notion of personhood as self-conscious receptacle. That is why, such sentiments were sometimes seen by scholars to be of pivotal importance in safeguarding the "freedom of the searching spirit" in an intellectual and religious climate predisposed towards enforcing personhood into predictable temporal confines.[624] Mystical critique of the terrain personhood occupied, made futile any attempt to squarely focus on personhood as either already given via its temporal relations or, as conditioned by its divine essence.[625] Instead, notwithstanding Lopukhin's language recalling the embedded *pneuma* within every personhood, he has managed to interpret this inner presence of divinity in much more modern speculative terms as an *un-ground* engaged in a dual process of reception and invalidation. At no point was personhood lost or subsumed within a greater reality because, a transcendental annihilation was ultimately, a gain requiring personhood to responsible for the effects of its progress through its increasingly self-relatable posture.[626] As personhood was gradually rarefied to become a member of the intellective community of the 'interior church' it was also becoming obliged to develop an ascetic ethic towards worldly and natural contexts and to

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[623] C.J. Coleman, "The Value of Dispossession: Rethinking of Discourses of Selfhood in Eighteenth-Century France", *Modern Intellectual History* 2, 3 (2005), pp. 299-301.
[624] V.V. Zen'konskii, *Istorria russkoi filosofii*, p. 108.
[625] S.S. Khoruzhii, *Posle pereryva. Puti russkoi filosofii* (St. Petersburg: Aleteiia, 1994), p. 296.
[626] J. Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe Since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 254.

seek their moderate improvement even though, their direct transcendental value was questioned.

Ascetic ethic

Lopukhin's belief in the disembodied 'interior church' and of the self-conscious personhood occupying it as uniquely transcendent entities enjoying absolute freedom, foregrounded the need to re-evaluate social and natural realities as a single worldly ascesis wherein, the pursuit of *vita activa* was a positive obligation undertaken in a fallen world of dependency. Insofar as, in the Russian context, active temporal life was often conceived as either a proper replacement of a spiritual one or, as inherently sinful and in need of monastic correctives,[627] Lopukhin's mystical critique was important because it presupposed personhood's qualified integration into the mundane as an ethical expression of its transcendent becoming. The created world had a rightful claim on the more corporeal aspects of personhood and was a fit object of its activity because creation's prerogatives were as irreducible as personhood's capacities. Such a correlation between the creature and its immediacy was an intrinsically ascetic condition, which for Lopukhin, could not be adequately dealt with in established religious institutions. Instead, there was a perceived need to emancipate ascetic ethic from its narrow religious application and to broaden it to the level of a general attitude towards mundane existence. In doing so, Lopukhin has made some advances in comparison to Skovoroda's and Kheraskov's treatment of the same topos, primarily through a more consistent discussion of why it was unethical to repudiate worldly concerns in favour of spiritual aspirations. The growth of Russian mystical discourses was particularly symptomatic of the increasingly urgent attempts to bind the contradictory teleologies of natural, social and spiritual processes into a single

[627] A.M. Panchenko, 'Russkaia kul'tura v kanun petrovvskih reform,' pp. 299-300

ethical stance, capable of overcoming their overly restrictive utilitarian conflation.[628]

The overall thrust of the foregoing discussion of ecclesial and personal structures seemed to have presupposed quite rightly, that there was an immense gulf separating the temporal from the transcendent and quite wrongly, that whilst the former was a domain characterised by obedient passivity, the latter was characterised by a radically open activity. Yet, even though the desire to modify religious and political authority was condemned as the chief reason for enthusiastic descent into untruth, there was still left a considerable scope of action in relation to social and natural orders which escaped the otherwise absolute injunction against tampering with the workings of the status quo. Lopukhin's emphasis on the need for personhood to maintain itself ethically within the mundane was a direct response to a growing sense, amongst educated Russians, of a sheer impossibility of acting ethically neither within Orthodoxy nor within the more secular precincts of the Petrine state.[629] The problem was not merely that, however inspiring, Orthodox repertoire was better adapted to a ritualised enactment rather than to a lived application, whilst its secular state counterpart was too superficially Stoic to exact genuine veneration without in the same time, invoking servility.[630] Lopukhin hoped for the reintroduction of a religious sentiment into the experience of the mundane as an object of charity and not, either as an object of outright rejection or a complete identification as the ultimate measure of human life.

Various early-modern Russian journals of masonic leaning have condemned conventional ascetic repudiation of temporality as untenable and argued for a more balanced approach to self-introspectivism. Whilst in its transcendent aspect, introspective praxis was of absolute value because it was

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[628] D. Smith, *Working the Rough Stone: Freemasonry and Society in Eighteenth-Century Russia*, pp. 111-2.
[629] J.M. Hartley, *A Social History of the Russian Empire: 1650-1825* A Social History of Europe (London: Longman, 1999), pp. 232-4.
[630] I. De Madariaga, 'Freemasonry in Eighteenth-Century Russia' in De Madariaga, I. ed. *Politics and Culture in Eighteenth-Century Russia*, p. 159.

instrumental in heightening personhood's receptivity of divine otherness, this kind of absoluteness was unassimilable to the relative demands of ordinary life which foregrounded compromise and utility in the absence of direct divine guidance. Thus, together with the rhetoric praising self-inquiry as the most important of all types of inquiry, there was also a warning not to source moral precepts to self-reflexive activity. Specifically, Lopukhin's further development of this theme was reflective of an earlier discussion in one of the issues of the Russian masonic journal *Morning Light* (1780) where, moral reform was seen to occur within the bounds of society, yet without the false premise that divine-like perfectibility was in fact achievable:

> Why are minor imperfections sometimes such an obstacle to major virtues? Because some moralisers have convinced us of false ideas about perfectibility or that virtuous people have not been lenient enough when they revealed their weaknesses. Aristotle rightly said that it was harmful to elevate a human being above the human capacity to reach perfectibility. Pliny however, was only flattering when he said that, gods could not be more kindly to mortals than Trajan. A moralising treatise which is not based on human actions is useless as well as one written by young or reclusive moralisers who have gained their knowledge of mores solely by studying themselves or in the schools run by people who, due to their circumstances, cannot know any secular sciences.[631]

With some important differences, Lopukhin accepted the above critique of attempting to apply other-worldly aspirations as a standard measure of being in the fallen world. Apart from the highly negative attitude to expectations that morality was deificatory, what was particularly relevant for Lopukhin, was the nuanced rejection of solitary and monastic gestures towards the 'flight from the world' motif as the cornerstone of ethical life. In the absence of secular discourses geared towards survival in social and natural settings, the intellect was firstly, deluded into believing that it was itself a sufficient source of moral truth and secondly, that this truth was realisable separately from human commonwealth. Arguably, this enduring concern with the social, was sourced in Lopukhin's youthful

[631] 'O dobrodeteli' in Malyshev, I.V. ed. *Novikov i ego sovremenniki*, pp. 192-5.

interest in French freethinking.[632] The monastic manner of secluding select individuals from worldly concerns and of subsequently, promoting this seclusion as ethical because it was necessary to approximate divine likeness, resulted in the emergence of doctrines inapplicable to realities outside of the monastery. A lay individual solely concerned with self-experience was as unreliable a moral guide as a monk solely concerned with the salvation of his soul because the mundane was *a priori*, condemned as unworthy of attention.

The question of worth was critical for Lopukhin because, one of the key challenges arising out of the spread of mystical re-engagement with selfhood, was a tendency towards a trivialisation of the immensely potent corporeal sense of enworldedness. Thus, a focus on separation as ethical in itself was wrong because it failed to actually have a proper object of ethical concern other than the soul of the human subject wilfully effecting the separation. The need for a more worldly type of asceticism was apparent in light of the strength of exterior reality which needed to be mediated and rarefied as an object of care. Pre-modern monastic movements were alert to the affirmative implications enfolded within a specifically ascetic kind of renunciation of corporeality.[633] In ascetic terms, a particular object was renounced primarily for that object's own good and not only to create discursive conditions capable bringing the divine into the orbit of regular personal experience.[634] Except for some notable Hesychast exceptions emphasising a 'monastery within the world' which Lopukhin admired, Russian monastic culture was no longer seen as an integral aspect of reality it has renounced and was therefore, no longer capable of acting as a guide within it. The exclusivity associated with Rosicrucian activity and the concomitant temptation of spiritual autonomy it incurred, could lead it to fall into the same predicament as monasticism, if it was deemed to offer a superior way of being solely on account of its disregard for extrinsic reality.

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[632] A.G. Surovtsev, *Ivan Vladimirovich Lopukhin*, p. 12.
[633] G.G. Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism*, pp. 19-8.
[634] S.S. Khoruzhii, *K fenomenologii askezy*, pp. 80-1.

As with the utility of external religion in curbing enthusiastic projections, worldly existence in its purely negative significance, functioned as a disciplining agent preventing the wandering of the imagination in inexperienced minds. The often content-less and simple activities constituting the social sphere were of ascetic significance because, like the instituted ascesis in the monastery, they were able to distract, sublimate and to subdue individual desire in preparation for a de-individuated disclosure of the divine. In a letter to one of his associates, Lopukhin suggested that, the question of whether the highest virtue was achievable in isolation or in society was too simplistic in light of the self-referentiality of imagination and of the intellect:

> I think that often, the most trivial worldly activities can be useful by distracting from premature exercise in intellection undertaken by an uncleansed mind which can be even more harmful than these activities. During the din of the crowd, the most dangerous enemies to do not make their appearance as they do in the course of external quietude and attack uncleansed heart girt by waves of the inner sea. If matter which is inflamed by human desires is not annihilated in the person, then even in the desert it can alight itself with the creatures dwelling in that person's imagination.[635]

If the monotonous labour of monastic life cushioned the monk's experience of his own intellective capacity, then society was similarly responsible for marginalising experiences of the phantoms of the imagination. In this very specific purpose, social participation was likened to quietude: an exteriorised domain relatively free from the violent inner upheavals, whose absence would turn the real inner spiritual desert into an unbearable spectacle of conjured imagery. Paradoxically, desire was

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[635] I.V. Lopukhin, '39. I.V. Lopukhin – A.M. Kutuzovu' in Barsov, Ia..L. ed. *Perepiska moskovskyh masonov XVIII-go veka. 1780-1792* (Petrograd: Izdanie Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk, 1915), p. 34. Lopukhin's letters could be construed to place Masonic doctrines and activities in the best possible light, in full knowledge that the authorities have secretly read them, the more theoretical notions were sincere because they were in consonance with previously published material and because they were too complex to be solely intended for the eyes of officialdom. It is more practical to approach these letters as practical expressions of opinion given by individuals versed in early-modern Western mystical literature. Thus, Lopukhin's insistence in one of his letters that the works of Volataire, Diderot and Helvetius were directly responsible for the French Revolution has simultaneously, expressed political loyalty to Catherinian regime and a genuine mystically-derived distaste for reform of external authority, evincing just how different in aims a mystical Enlightenment was in comparison to its Western European counterparts, '25. I.V. Lopukhin – A.M. Kutuzovu' in *Ibid.* p. 16.

assumed to be less dangerous within a worldly setting where, it had less opportunity to stimulate theurgic inclinations due to the intransigence of social norms. Lopukhin feared that, a weakening of the person's exterior obligations could precipitate a futile repressive campaign against the symptoms rather than the origin of imaginative projections, resulting in the latter's proliferation in much freer solitary environment which was much less resistant to delusional beliefs. For this reason, Lopukhin's addressee concurred with this assessment by replying that the absolute dividing line was not between worldliness and solitude, but the replication of these respective modes of being within the human subject, irrespective of whether these modes are correlated with outward conditions, or not.[636]

In its ethical sense, the *vita activa* was firstly of a preventative value, insulating personhood from its own delusions and minimising the possibility of the latter's incursions into the historical order of things. Arguably, what made life active in this case, was the element of submissive participation. The fact that, an inexperienced mind which has not yet grasped the depths of its transcendent self-relation was tied to a predictable and ritualised existence, signified a condition of its freedom from the much more dangerous submission to products of its own individual productivity. Here, Lopukhin went beyond his earlier insistence on the imperative to remain loyal to Orthodox repertoire in order to prevent an easy identification between the imagination and its products. Rather, Lopukhin gestured towards the possibility of a complete loss of autonomy in circumstances when the intellect and the imagination were seemingly, most free to actualise themselves entirely through their own efforts. Hence, if the immutability of earthly authority was symptomatic of the absence of freedom when compared to the groundless and imageless disclosure of truth within a pneumatic community, it was simultaneously symptomatic of the presence of freedom from the degenerative belief in the overriding supremacy of private intellection and imagination. Not only then, did the *vita activa* guarantee the promise of transcendence, as was the case

[636] A.M. Kutuzov, '56. A.M. Kutuzov – I.V. Lopukhinu' in *Ibid.* p. 60.

with involvement in external religious forms, but, in Arendt's apt description, safeguarded the integrity of the temporal and of the ontological processes underlying personhood's attempts to overcome its fallen state.[637]

Apart from providing a basic distraction of the more corporeal activities, worldly existence served as an ongoing reminder of human imperfection and of the concomitant sense of modesty regarding aspirations to leave it in the present life-time. Notwithstanding the certainty of a future disembodied state of being, a wilful decision to remain apart from the mundane concerns until that kind of being was attained, was representative of aloofness which jeopardized the increasingly selfless progress towards an inward encounter with the divine. Even if undue dependence on the material constitution of personhood was minimised and mystical praxis rarefied to the point of an almost complete displacement of creaturely needs by divine wisdom, a retreat into a hermitage was still questionable because a person enjoying such a superior state would not have too much difficulty in enacting virtue in all predicaments. In the already-quoted letter, Lopukhin has drawn attention to the almost complete impossibility of a hermetic life, especially if the person has progressed from the creaturely love of the body to divine-like love of goodness:

> Even if, love of absolute goodness will be birthed in him, then he will everywhere, in all and through all, have this aim in sight, like the arrogant person seeking honour, the covetous one seeking gain and the miser seeking profit everywhere. To such a person, any object and any action can act towards the attainment of the highest virtue. However, I think that, the only one who cannot be faulted for leaving society altogether, is someone who in doing so, has not reneged any of his obligations towards it. And I completely agree with you that, someone who has become an anchorite purely on the basis of his own intention to do so, is actually being indolent.[638]

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[637] H. Arendt, *The Human Condition* Second Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 14-16.
[638] I.V. Lopukhin, '39. I.V. Lopukhin – A.M. Kutuzovu' in Barsov, Ia.L. ed. *Perepiska moskovskyh masonov*, pp. 34-5.

There was a clear tension between the desire to remain in the presence of divine otherness without succumbing to mundane activity and the ethical implications of attempting a forceful self-extraction from the earthly context. Lopukhin's response to this dilemma was to gesture towards the worldly significance of the beatific vision itself. Whilst it was natural to desire the constancy of the state of love of absolute goodness, the illuminative results of that state were not inimical to the relativity of worldly life and have in fact, formed the very means of effectively navigating within it. Indeed, the sense of discontent with living in the absence of a transcendental relationship with personhood and with the objective divine limit of existence was only an initial state, intending to stimulate a spiritual becoming. Presumably then, the greater the intellective engagement with these horizons, the easier it was to remain in temporality because, dissatisfaction with it was ameliorated within the increasingly rich interiority of the human subject. Success in escaping the confines of conventional values, was counteracted with the onus of having to confront the conditions which have prompted the desire to undertake an existential exodus.

These conclusions have alluded to Lopukhin's reversal of the typical process of ascetic withdrawal. Rather than seeking a clear and external demarcation line between the sacred and the profane with the intention of initiating an uncompromising movement towards the former at the expense of the latter, the emphasis here was on the much more complex distinction between being in the world without being of the world. It seemed as though, with some exceptions, the contemporary Russian monastic establishment has failed to properly express this contrariety without at the same time, undermining its innate dialectic. By either embracing the Petrine *Polizeistaat* ideal focusing on practical utility or, retreating into the wilderness, Orthodoxy was ignoring asceticism's capacity to remain in a particular reality from which the soul was nevertheless, consciously alienated. Thus, the empowering and the critical dimensions to asceticism were weakened in favour of its institutional and ritualistic

significance.[639] Lopukhin thought it was possible to reintroduce a sense of separation from the immediacy, stemming from the belief in its inconclusive and man-made character, as a basic attitude amongst the lay social elite through which, action in the world could find its justification. The Augustinian likening of a human life oriented towards the divine to a state of exile was operable here and, its strong otherworldly aspirations were moderated by the desire to make this banishment more bearable and more reflective of the soul's spiritual homeland.[640]

The impulse to exercise some leverage upon the transient state of earthly life was suggestive of an inherently ethical result of ascetic disbelief in the truth of the world, which has anchored the soul seeking refuge in the good, into temporal concerns. That is why, the imperative to improve social reality was presupposed by an explicit modesty regarding personhood's ability to exist as though it has reached such a state that, any activity other than contemplation was spurious. As a warning to such moral complacency, Lopukhin argued for the need to maintain obligations towards the social, regardless of the lure of the transcendent. To state that an exit from society was permissible only if none of the obligations towards it were broken, may seem like a contradiction. Yet, the paradox inhering in such reasoning was one of the most important features differentiating an ascetic worldview from competing approaches to enworldedness. If an ascetic denial of the world was undertaken in such a way that brought immense attention on the denied reality, then Lopukhin's injunction to remain obliged to the latter without being of the latter represented a return to a founding premise of ascetic sentiment.[641] Enfolded within this return, was the need for an ongoing confrontation with the rejected object serving as a reminder of firstly, the intermittent transcendental capacity of the soul in comparison to the stability of the world contextualising it and secondly, of a necessary outlet of the goodness derived in the course of brief breakthroughs into the divine. In both cases,

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[639] W.S. Blanchard, 'Petrarch and the Genealogy of Asceticism' in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62, 3 (2001), p. 403.
[640] *Ibid.* p. 418.
[641] E. Wyschogrod, 'The Howl of Oedipus, the Cry of Héloïse: From Asceticism to Postmodern Ethics' in Wimbush, V.L. and Valantasis, R. eds. *Asceticism*, p. 23.

personhood was positioned to limit itself by virtue of being oriented towards domains stimulating its openness to otherness represented by the divine and its charity to otherness represented by the mundane.[642]

The unprecedented Rosicrucian philanthropic activity in Russia was to a large extent, based upon the desire of individuals highly sympathetic to a Pietist-like compromise with the fallen world, to "create a culture based on participation."[643] It is important not to forget that one of the reasons behind Catherine the Great's campaign against freemasonry in general and Lopukhin specifically, was to do with her jealous dislike of the success of masonic philanthropy.[644] Lopukhin provided a theoretical explanation of how asceticism became a natural mode of being for a person who was able to utilise a keen awareness of inner personal weakness and outer worldly vanity, towards an exceptionally resilient sense of martyrdom in the face of elusive divine wisdom and the seemingly intractable social ills.[645] The latter domain, together with the world of nature, Lopukhin called a 'country of trials' through which the lover of wisdom transited, sustaining his or her intellective soul with the divine logos and his elemental body with the gifts of nature.[646] The ethical implication of the perceived rootedness into a tragic state of physical and spiritual privation, whilst simultaneously enjoying the immaterial results of a spiritual becoming, foregrounded the urgency of easing the agonistic enforcement into materiality, especially for people not yet capable of ameliorating it through mystical praxis. Thus, in his instructions on how to organise a lodge in the *Spiritual Knight*, Lopukhin prioritised charity as an expression of cosmopolitan-like Rosicrucian solidarity with everyone living in the country of trials:

> The master of the lodge exclaims: Dear brothers! In order to enact the sacred law of love, which demands us to love our neighbours as ourselves, let us give alms to some of our poor brothers who together with us, are located in the country of

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[642] *Ibid.* p.27.
[643] R. Faggionato, *A Rosicrucian Utopia in Eighteenth-Century Russia*, p. 51.
[644] E.E. Prikazschikova, 'Kul'turnaiia mifologiia masonstva,' p. 26.
[645] R. Faggionato, A Rosicrucian Utopia in Eighteenth-Century Russia, p. 146.
[646] I.V. Lopukhin, 'Duhovnyi rytsar'', p. 45.

> trials, labour and illness, having been imprisoned into a material body and are consequently, experiencing need of material things. Master of ceremonies then collects alms from the brothers in any amount the latter want to give and passes them on to the treasurer who in turn, hands them on to the master of the lodge.[647]

Importantly, this invocation to assist those who were caught up in the material flux of the body which was in turn, subsumed within the elemental dynamic of nature, was meant to have been enunciated after members of the lodge had partaken of ceremonial and literal sustenance. When taken metaphorically, Lopukhin's version of an ideal earthly community of wisdom seekers implied the notion of an active mediation of goodness without which, the very notion of an existential plight conditioning a select group of individuals committed to inner transfiguration, would be lost.[648]

A *vita activa* re-emergent along these ascetic lines was not necessarily intended to function specifically within a political context centred on institutions, especially given the limited scope for public action in an absolutist regime. Instead, its active nature, apart from its distractive capacity, was sourced in an attitudinal imperative to simultaneously, maintain a degree of distance and a degree of involvement in the world composed of individual people predominantly existing historically and bound by an unreformed realm of nature. The extent to which, such a seemingly peripheral stance was actually quite dynamic, can be gleaned from Lopukhin's comparison of conventional view of ascetic practice as a cessation of action, to indolence. This misunderstanding resulted in indolence not merely because it was bent on quietude to the point of overriding all responsibility, but because it failed to attend to the ongoing rift between the creaturely and divine needs which had to be experienced and ultimately, mediated rather than passively observed. Where the lay mystic succeeded and the monk usually did not, was in being capable of accepting worldliness as a challenge without setting up a completely alternative structure outside of it and in doing so, exposing historicity's

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[647] *Ibid.* pp. 45-6.
[648] M.C. Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment*, pp. 153-5.

errors which marked progress within it, but towards a superior telos extrinsic to its mode of operation. For Lopukhin, these eschatological aspirations did not automatically come into conflict with established obligations of the service nobility as in his definition, the aims of an authentic Rosicrucian organisation, notwithstanding its approximation to monastic exclusivity, were synonymous with those of "Christian morality and its enactment" in the social world.[649]

There was thus, an inherent continuity between the ideal of the disembodied 'interior church' transcending temporal reality, a somewhat less transcending self-reflexive personhood accommodated to a plurality of spiritual discourses via an earthly community of wisdom lovers and the brute material relations to which all human beings were subjected. What Lopukhin advocated, was the need for a renewal of an active human effort to mediate divine love through all of the aforementioned stages until the humblest element of nature.[650] The solidarity the brothers in Lopukhin's model lodge exhibited for their fellow human beings primarily on the basis of a commonly shared materiality, had a much wider and a much less arbitrary dimension. This solidarity was premised on the birth of *agape* which was autonomous from all man-made settings yet, served as a condition of ethical conduct within them. Prior to the development of any systematic ethical theories with which most Eighteenth-century Russian thinkers were not overly concerned, there had to be already in place, an irreducible sense of worth in regards to the future object of concrete ethical relation. At this stage, the most crucial task was to recover human beings, taken individually and collectively, as entities open to abstract value in themselves, without recourse to their significance as temporal agents. In an explicitly moralising *Masonic Magazine* (1784) which Lopukhin edited and wherein, he may have penned some of the anonymous articles, a clear connection was made between love of humanity and subsequent virtues:

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[649] I.V. Lopukhin, '32. I.V. Lopukhin – A.M. Kutuzovu' in Barsov, Ia.L. ed. *Perepiska moskovskyh masonov XVIII-go veka*, p. 25.
[650] G.V. Vernadskii, *Russkoe masonstvo v tsarstvovanie Ekatiriny II*, pp. 210-6.

> Love of humanity is the mother of all social virtues and we must especially strive towards it because its offspring are: mercy, friendliness and love towards one's neighbour. It is the source from which flow out rivers of good works towards the benefit of mankind. A friend of mankind unceasingly helps those in need and with pleasure, sacrifices his personal happiness for the happiness of society… With sincere sadness he looks upon mankind's tribulations, seeks to lighten the load of its unhappiness and is rewarded by satisfaction he derives upon felicitous conclusions to his labours.[651]

Apart from the now conventional birth simile which in this instance, indicated a temporal reproduction of transcendental births occurring within personhood, of particular note was the nuanced injunction to reproject personhood's dispossession in relation to the divine, into the social sphere, in relation to humanity.[652] Yet, far from privileging a utilitarian enforcement of private agency into the machinery of the state spuriously presumed to be capable of meeting individual spiritual needs, the emphasis on the priority of the common good was indicative of an attempt to re-enact temporally, some of the transcendental processes proceeding intellectively.

If the task of external religion was to limit private theurgic capacity and to orient the intellect inwards through an immutable ceremonial envisioning of belief, the task of an ethical worldview was to ultimately, foreshadow a future state of contentment experienced in a transfigured intellective body, upon the feeling of satisfaction resulting from doing a good deed in an equally immutable social world.[653] In this very specific aspect, a *vita activa* anchored in universal love was implicitly superior to received religious creed, insofar as it was largely dependent on meaningful, rather than symbolic action for its currency and as a consequence, did not require as strong an emphasis on obedience. Lopukhin stressed the exceptionally motivating influence of the exhilarating pleasure he felt when he gave alms, but he conditioned the self-congratulatory implications of this action by

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[651] *Ibid.* p. 235.
[652] C.J. Coleman, 'The Value of Dispossession: Rethinking of Discourses of Selfhood in Eighteenth-Century France', p. 324.
[653] "VII. Rassuzhdenie o doverennosti, kotoruiu dolzhno imet' k Masteram svoim", *Magazin Svobodno-Kamen'schicheskoi* Tom I, Chast' II (1784), p. 120.

consciously reminding himself that it was always undertaken for the sake of expressing universal love and the latter's divine source.[654] In religious terms, to be satisfied with the imagined architecture of Orthodoxy as fundamentally true or, to undertake an individual imaginative reconstruction thereof was indicative of credulity and enthusiasm respectively whereas, a wilful openness to be pleasured by an ethical involvement in the world was construed to imply a natural inclination to goodness.[655] Thus, the practicality of exterior religion, by its very mode of operation, was incapable of fully including personhood's worldly initiative within itself and was therefore, incapable of revealing the active dimension to existence in proximity to God, without recourse to a relatively autonomous ethical worldview which demanded an acceptance of corporeality.

Such an acceptance of embodied condition and its immersion into the earthly 'country of trials' has foregrounded ethics as an ascetic praxis. On the one hand, Lopukhin has gone some way towards emancipating material relations within society by subordinating them to charity but on the other, any success derived from these relations strengthened their otherworldly teleology. As a result, whilst acting materially upon the social has become the cornerstone of participatory stance within the mundane, this major concession to innate corporeality of individuals and their context was of a disciplining importance, shaping personhood into an agent of salvation. A monk concentrated his corporeal and spiritual activities into a mutually supporting web of activities, from the most pedestrian to the most transcendent, without leaving any aspect of his self unrepresented in the larger process of his becoming. Similarly, a lay mystic was required to integrate all of his or her pluralised means of action into a salvific strategy. In an ideal *Polizistaat*, the temporal horizon of the state would enfold within itself the concern with the citizens' souls on a par with its concern for their bodies, positioning the individuals to lessen their private anxieties over these matters and dedicate themselves to the flourishing of institutions, once eschatological fears were rationalised into a progressive ethos. Lopukhin has

[654] I.V. Lopukhin, *Zapiski*, p. 45.
[655] *Ibid.*

undercut this kind of thinking by reconceiving love of goodness as fundamentally world-denying precisely when it eventuated in good-works performed in, and for the benefit of, the public realm. That is, an intimate presence in the workings of social life intending towards a practical enactment of *agape* served as an alienating revelation of the absence of absolute goodness in the world.[656]

An undertaking to do good was therefore, instrumental in maintaining a critical distance from the world and of a privileged acceptance of the latter's earthly course of development. As evident by the scope of Rosicrucian philanthropic activity, a complex attitude combining submission to external authority, disbelief in the vain pretensions of worldly values and a commitment to exercise charity has coalesced into one of the most systematic attempts to reform social institutions and practices since the Petrine Revolution. Lopukhin's understanding of the role of goodness in effecting an alienated involvement in the mundane has evinced the mechanics of how, an otherworldly action was integrated into the workings of temporality primarily through human effort.[657] In one of his letters, Lopukhin gestured towards resistance to temptation of outer seclusion and to the work in reshaping personhood's interiority as aspects of that effort:

> You, my dear friend, I am told, are forlorn and that you desire solitude as I can see from your letters. Often, feelings of the same desire are aroused in me also. However, I think that, for a harmless and worthy enjoyment of solitude one needs to firstly, institute a desert in the heart and to then secure it in the One.[658]

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[656] H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 75-8.

[657] L. Krieger, "The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Historians", *Church History* 47, 3 (1978), p. 291. What I mean by human effort here does not imply a displacement of divine teleology with purely human concerns. Rather, an overwhelming emphasis on human initiative in the realisation of good on earth which in turn, formed an aspect of providential order of things. That is, whilst a millenarian reform was out of the question, social action was a duty. Thus, to enact *agape* in the way Lopukhin intended, meant a free human choice to do so "under the conditions of the Kingdom of God" perceived eschatologically and entirely conditioned by a prior surrender to God. Earthly action then, was underpinned by a transcendental submission and loss of will in relation to the divine, see J.P. Reeder, Jr. "Assenting to Agape", *The Journal of Religion* 60, 1 (1980), p. 26.

[658] I.V. Lopukhin, '22. I.V. Lopukhin – A.M. Kutuzovu' in Barsov, Ia.L. ed. *Perepiska moskovskyh masonov XVIII-go veka. 1780-1792*, p. 14.

The social world then, was enriched through becoming an ascesis. Its ascetic function was to serve as an object of temptation of either its complete acceptance or rejection and, to provide a limit on undue emphasis on individual betterment by counterbalancing the inclination towards self-mortification with the necessity to enact *agape*. Hence, rather than being denied outright, the mundane was utilised towards its own transfiguration and of the personhood passing through it.[659] It has already been mentioned that, even in the event of a major improvement of the inner life, outward duties did not automatically cease. This theme was further complicated by the inherently creative tension between the love of self and love of all. Even though, Lopukhin believed in the imperative to anchor personhood's identity in the transcendental oneness of God, there was nevertheless, an unavoidable uncertainty of whether the inner desert was sufficiently developed to allow for a solitary existence based upon a reciprocal relationship between a single intellect and a single divine being. As a result, in the absence of a calculable grasp of the process of interiorisation of wisdom, personhood was forced to simultaneously, intend towards an inner quietude where intermingling with the divine was possible and to maintain an active stance in regards to the social, where its good deeds compensated it for its subjective anxiety. In conceiving of the utility of the mundane world as an aspect of becoming, Lopukhin reflected a Platonic kind of asceticism which privileged earthly reality as a location of unceasing work in temporal and transcendental terms.[660]

Lopukhin's interpretation of human earthly life as transitory, yet tasked with challenging activities reflective of the pluralised structure of personhood, was extended far beyond its occurrence within society and included its transition through the realm of nature as well. In the later instance, a similar ethical demand not to separate personhood from the creation and to exercise charity was imposed, albeit more rigorously and possessing a more ambitious telos. Lopukhin's reference to the 'country of trials' was followed closely by another reference to

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[659] J.M. Dillon, 'Rejecting the Body, Refining the Body: Some Remarks on the Development of Platonic Asceticism' in Wimbush, V.L. and Valantasis, R. eds. *Asceticism*, p. 82.
[660] *Ibid.* pp. 83-5.

bountiful nature giving sustenance to material bodies in the course of their sojourn, implicitly likening personhood as not merely engaged in a traversal of its social habitude, but in a much more expansive Hermetic traversal of the creation itself.[661] Whilst Lopukhin largely moderated the typical refusal to value material immediacy associated with such a postulation, he did gesture towards the sense of foreignness associated with nature and of separation from human intellective activity. Unlike exterior religious norms, nature was deemed to be capable of mediating the divine and therefore, as an object of inquiry and as an object of charity, was *a priori* invested with greater significance than any realities subsisting through human artifice. An ascetic articulation of nature as a domain which should neither be allowed to completely subsume nor to completely alienate personhood, brought to the fore the hitherto absent issue of how ought human intellect participate in a reality perceived to be of divine import, yet located outside of the human interiority and possessing a visible architecture.

Initially, human confrontation with nature was based on dependency upon a seemingly inexhaustible and an unknown source of basic necessities sustaining temporal life. For Lopukhin, the extent to which, a completely alien but a readily perceivable reality was nevertheless, a provider and a maintainer of earthly existence, was an example of natural charity, needing replication in a human context. The aforementioned insistence on caring for materiality in an ideal lodge, was deliberately positioned to closely mirror the same kind of care unconsciously provided by nature given that, the distribution of alms for the poor was immediately integrated into a moralising discussion on how the brothers were integrated into nature's productivity. In his *Spiritual Knight*, Lopukhin indicated this connection between giving charity to another human being and receiving charity from nature, presupposing a unified moral plane straddling human and natural orders, by having the master of the model lodge inquire:

> Dear Brothers! What is nature, this faithful servant of the Lord and a generous provider from whose fruits our mortal body

[661] G. Quispel, "Hermes Trismegistus and the Origins of Gnosticism", *Vigiliae Christianae* 46, 1 (1992), p. 6.

> derives sustenance? One of the brothers replies: nature is a fleeting spirit, invisible but is visibly working in our bodies and existing in the Divine Will. What then is the symbol used to describe nature? Freemasons have seen it as a fiery star, which was venerated by their old masters and conceived as Divine Breath, a universal and essential fire which vitalises everything which has been created, maintains and destroys it.[662]

Of particular interest here was the definition of nature as a continuous act of giving of vitality, to the elemental forces constituting material life.[663] Indeed, the mildly alchemical language privileging the creative and destructive power of the very same substance has invoked the presence of a natural theurgy which, in comparison to its human counterpart, was neither as inimical to the divine purposiveness nor as grounded in the imagination. What the brothers attempted to achieve, through a correlation of their charitable acts with that of nature, was a demonstration of the possibility of single a *vita activa* circulating throughout the creation as a whole. Contrary the egocentric theurgy exercised in a post-Fall environment intending to reconstruct prelapsarian bliss through human labour alone and conjuring into being some divine qualities, the theurgy detected in nature was one of an outpouring of gifts proceeding in a similar manner to God's descent into human interiority via fertilizing wisdom. In both cases, giving rather than merely constructing was prioritised, minimising the possibility of the emergence of a separatist organisational locus deriving its identity from its sense of ownership.

Arguably, such a vitalistic conceptualisation of nature as a domain of ongoing, multiplication of its own essence to all beings contained in it, has

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[662] I.V. Lopukhin, 'Duhovnyi rytsar'', p. 45.

[663] The kind of vitalism discussed here is a cosmic rather than immanent, presupposed by a "universal spirit permeating and enlivening all things in the geocosmos." Apart from its obviously retrograde grasp of the workings of nature, this much-delayed alchemical turn in Russian thought had a more positive function of prioritising and distinguishing life from its phenomenal manifestations which could be easily imposed upon and misread as inherently predictable, controllable and ultimately, mundane. Impractical as alchemical reasoning was in strictly scientific terms, its appearance in Russia in the Eighteenth-century as part of its prolonged process of Westernisation, signified an attempt to retain nature and personhood within the larger creation and to wrest their respective essences from utilitarian demands, see K. Chang, "Alchemy as Studies of Life and Matter: Reconsidering the Place of Vitalism in Early-Modern Chymistry", *Isis* 102, 2 (2011), p. 324.

approximated it to a *natura naturans* engaged in a constant process of creation. Lopukhin was quite careful in his disaggregation of this kind of exceptionally fluid creativity irreducible to any static object open to ownership, as his reference to nature's loyalty to the divine will suggests. Thus, behind the seemingly banal literality of enjoining personhood to awareness of the forces responsible for its functioning, lied a much deeper perception of a fundamental ignorance of the overall dynamic which produced the 'fruits' necessary for a constant enlivening of the material body. Whilst human beings were beneficiaries of nature, they did not know nature in its "eternal self-generation" as distinct from its generated results and therefore, could not properly grasp the full genesis of its benefits as the latter surfaced as *natura naturata* and became statically present to the vision of the intellect.[664] This distinction was presupposed by an ascetic reception of nature which privileged its creative outbursts, but with a deliberate refusal to approach creativity as anything resembling human imagination. That is, Lopukhin's foregrounding of the need to abstractly experience nature's vitality unrestrained by the latter's outcomes and unrestricted by any laws derived from its concrete temporal manifestations, in order to gain a de-individualised foothold firmly within the bounds of creation.

The kind of language Lopukhin applied to nature, in conventional Orthodox terms, was more appropriate to describing the significance of the ecclesia in the creation. However, it may be recalled that, the monastic underlay to established religion was criticised by the mystically-inclined laity on account of its reclusive disregard for the workings of the mundane world and of the concomitant inability to impart meaningful ethics.[665] The recourse to secular science could in part, be interpreted as a recourse to nature which was thought to be more reflective of the divine in its specifically enlivening sense, than any external religious institutions.[666] By locating nature in the divine will as well as,

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[664] A. Weeks, *German Mysticism from Hildegard of Bingen to Ludwig Wittgenstein*, p. 180.
[665] 'O dobrodeteli', p. 193.
[666] Such privileging of nature's status on the basis of its capacity to reflect the divine occurred in contrast to Saint-Martin's far more negative assessment of nature as a domain of privation and, in A.E. Waite's words, a "splendid habitation of the evil principle." Lopukhin has agreed to concede that nature formed a continuous emanation of the divine, but checked the pantheistic overtone to this

likening it to divine breath responsible for the perceived creativity in the universe, Lopukhin opened up an alternative type of enworldedness without entirely depending on historical religion which was redundant as a conduit of grace or, on the transcendent community of the 'interior church' which was yet to fully unfold. Hence, if the social world provided a context for ethical action, nature was a kind of action in itself, infinitely occurring in temporality by way of its charitable reproduction of its own essence, supporting personhood in its intellective becoming.

Conventional monastic praxis failed to include the contemplation of nature as an aspect of the becoming process because it did not understand that the latter was closer to its divine source than any historically-derived religious forms. If ideal existence within the purview of Orthodoxy implied a selfless ceremonial participation and a relatively passive expectation of grace, ideal existence within the purview of nature implied a selfless inquiry into the latter's mystery and a highly controlled utilization of some of the resulting knowledge for the common good. Lopukhin had to a degree, correlated his expectation of an inner redevelopment and enrichment of personhood by means of a gradually disclosing divine wisdom with an outer unfolding of wisdom through nature. This duality located at the heart of an explicitly religious conception of nature was crucial in shaping a specifically mystical belief in progress bound up with mutually supporting penetrations into equally novel experiences of the soul and of the creation.[667] The study of nature was thus a secular activity insofar as, it was absent from contemporary religious life and unsupported by historical faith. In the *Interior Church*, Lopukhin has endorsed the conventional study of physical nature on account of its potential to allow for a greater enactment of *agape* and also, called for a speculative insight into the operation of wisdom within *natura naturans*:

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reasoning by agreeing with Saint-Martin that, humankind was nevertheless, responsible to elevate nature to a higher reflection of and interaction with, the divinity than it was exhibiting presently. In Eighteenth-century Russia, concomitant with the more mechanistic and corpuscular academic study of nature, the latter's mystical reading was important insofar as it was far more explicit in foregrounding the need to think of nature in speculative terms tied to human consciousness and to understand it as a process open to modification, see A.E. Waite, *The Unknown Philosopher*, p. 185.

[667] M. Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, pp. 280-5.

> The all-creating Wisdom has revealed to her chosen lovers the secret of her creation, showing its interior constitution and various effects of the deeply hidden spirit of nature, moved by Divine Spirit in its primal substance, in that immortal material from which everything is created and which after the fall of the creature, has clothed itself into a rough attire of the elements until the end of times, when a new heaven and a new earth will shine forth from it.[668]

Of note here was the allusion to nature, rather than historical ecclesia as a domain which directly prefigured eschatological future and has in fact, contained the eternal ingredient out of which, the latter will emerge. A contemplative existence predominantly undertaken within an ecclesia could not provide the same degree of proximity to the divine object of contemplation and therefore, was incapable of entirely fulfilling its stated purpose of narrowing the gap between creature and God. To reduce nature solely to the level of a visible proof of Adamic fall or, to an unconscious reality witnessing the operation of divinely-inspired mechanic laws, meant to further denigrate personhood into a state of privation by separating it from the only exterior domain which did not depend on subjective human fabrication. Lopukhin's certainty of an enduring process of ceaseless giving enlivening the creation, when analysed in tandem with his nuanced statement regarding the immortality of matter, has brought to the fore the search for a *prisca sapientia* well outside of the imposed theological frameworks. This has contributed to the emancipation of nature and of personhood's place within it, from historical institutions.[669]

To think of nature as a dynamic domain wherein, it was possible to detect analogically, how God was involved in a constant process of unfolding, implied the possibility of conceiving a morally reciprocal system possessing an irreducible and a pre-existing worth.[670] Yet, even though Lopukhin's relocation of the logos from ecclesiastical to natural contexts might have presupposed that the latter was a

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[668] I.V. Lopukhin, 'Nekotorye cherty', pp. 127-8.
[669] M. Mulsow, "Ambiguities of the Prisca Sapientia in Late Renaissance Humanism", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 65, 1 (2004), p. 2.
[670] E.R. Wasserman, "Nature Moralized: The Divine Analogy in the Eighteenth Century", *English Literary History* 20, 1 (1953), p. 44.

deified reality, this conclusion was qualified by the concomitant postulation of nature's retreat into the gross materiality of fallen elements. Thus, if nature was foregrounded as an ascesis forming a privileged repertoire from which the divine was accessible, it was also an object to be improved by being restored to its pristine state through human inquiry. That is why, existence within nature was not only reflective of a *vita activa* geared towards a conscious replication of its charitable mode of operation, but also of the implicit moral imperative to reform its ontological status. It is in this sense that, the alchemical overtones present in Lopukhin's thought, could be interpreted as reflective of an attempt to locate a non-reductive and a non-mechanical leverage upon nature for its own sake and for the material bodies deriving sustenance from it. Resistance to the "static and tightly patterned universe" through recourse to alchemical discourse was not as anachronistic as it may have seemed because, one of the premises to such a move, was the desire to establish a correlation between the "moral and the physical" on the basis of de-individualised imagination.[671]

The creativity exhibited by nature, with its embodiment of the logos, was not unlike human imagination in terms of its dynamic character. However, the key difference was that whilst the former did not fabricate, the latter did. What Lopukhin was interested in, was in foregrounding the possibility of human participation in nature's creativity without depending on the ontologically uncommitted results of a purely human artifice. This new kind of theurgy, undertaken in consonance with processes perceived to operate in nature for the common good of all creatures, reflected a predominantly theoretical reception of alchemical fascination with the basic substance of life. Unlike the more mechanical and rationalistic approaches to this search, a mystical insight into the ultimate indivisibility of forces responsible for the propagation of life, was much more certain of the moral benefits of such an inquiry in light of its emphasis on the isomorphic relationship between a human being and the universe.[672] In his *Interior*

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[671] *Ibid.* pp. 47, 58.
[672] K. Chang, 'Alchemy as Studies of Life and Matter: Reconsidering the Place of Vitalism in Early-Modern Chymistry', p. 329.

Church, Lopukhin has alluded to the illuminative effects resulting from a cognizance of the operation of the logos in nature and gestured towards the need to contemplate it, if the Gospels were to have any positive salvific meaning apart from their quite limited historical sense:

> How beneficial should insight be in these instances, one that is capable of revealing in the simplest creature, in the most mortal plant, the image of the embodied Word and everything which it has created for the benefit of our salvation. The image of the Word's mysteries, its conception in the womb of the Immaculate Maiden, its birth and its traversal of the world until the completion of its redemptive descent upon the earth – an image expressing all of these things![673]

Lopukhin was quite straightforward here regarding the impression of the logos in the creation as a whole and in all of its separate parts. Importantly, the indirect conflation of wisdom with the logos-birthing maiden was undertaken in such a way that, these transcendentally derived categories were nevertheless, presumed to be capable of informing the mundane operations of nature. Whilst the logos was given expressivity via its image diffused throughout the creation, it was clearly not perceived to have been engineered and therefore, completely separate from its prototype. Rather, the metaphorical recourse to the birth of the logos in terms reminiscent of an inner birth of wisdom, suggested that the salvific process proceeded by way of a gradual progression of the logos by means of its image.

The deliberate avoidance of nature was thus unjustified because, even though it depended on imagery, it was not inherently of a deceiving kind and consequently, not as prone to becoming an object of enthusiastic reception by the intellect. Lopukhin's preparedness to locate the image of the logos in the simplest of entities meant that, through an inquiry into the composition of substances, it was possible to recover the original impression of the logos and draw nature out of its post-Fall exile. An active participation in, and an unqualified subscription to, the historically developed imaginative reproduction of the divine truth was presupposed by the idea that, a temporally evolving ecclesia coincided with the

[673] I.V. Lopukhin, 'Nekotorye Cherty', pp. 129-30.

transcendent opposite it sought to represent. For Lopukhin, this mystical 'coincidence of opposites' could not occur in established human institutions and was instead, to be found in nature where, the image could operate immaterially and independently.[674] It is this relocation of the pristine reflection of divine creativity into the realm of nature which, necessitated a reconsideration of how ought the intellect involve itself in it and to what end. The intellect could undertake an active stance in regards to nature on the condition that, "true imagination does not fabricate" for the purpose of discovering "similitudes of the moral and the physical" inhering in the totality of the creation.[675]

The location of that similitude, by means of an alchemical investigation of the divine imprint in matter, was the key activity constituting a *vita activa.* On the one hand, the intellect was given a permanent object of inquiry accessible from within the temporal facticity of objective external reality but on the other hand, the intellect was clearly positioned to conceive of its actions as reflective of a promethean desire to reintroduce selfless creativity into the mundane. To what extent, Lopukhin understood the latter sentiment in moral terms, can be gleaned from his suggestion made in the *Interior Church* that, human attempts to reveal and reproduce natural processes were meant to serve the common good:

> How beneficial is that art through which, the illuminated ones unite, separate and take apart substances, reproduce the latter's make-up and return it to its original elements. Whilst this is happening, the illuminated ones, with their own yes, contemplate the mysteries of Jesus Christ, the results of his suffering and, once condensed into chemical effects, are then able to see the course of his embodiment. Such are the fruits of knowledge, revealed by true theosophy and an illuminating contemplation of nature.[676]

Lopukhin meant more by benefit than just the emergence of faith, resulting from a close scrutiny of the structure of matter as understood by physico-theology. In conjunction with the rather radical admission that it was only through a

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[674] K. Emery, Jr. "Mysticism and the Coincidence of Opposites in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century France", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45, 1 (1984), p. 15.
[675] E.R. Wasserman, 'Nature Moralized: The Divine Analogy in the Eighteenth Century', p. 47.
[676] I.V. Lopukhin, 'Nekotorye cherty', p. 130.

conscientious manipulation of substances that it was possible to witness the logos' assumption of human form, was the more complex suggestion that, it was possible to achieve a largely experimental insight into the core mystery of Christian faith. What this thinking in turn presupposed, was a belief in the solution of much more practical problems afflicting earthly life, as was evident by the immense financial, organisational and intellectual efforts on the part of the Russian Rosicrucians, to acquire alchemical knowledge in order to "operate in the world" ethically for the latter's good.[677] That is, apart from the imperative to provide a natural foundation for belief, there was also the aspiration to utilise the almost limitless possibilities of ameliorating human subjection to mundane necessity. It is in this sense that, a pragmatic desire to inquire into nature's content to ease illness and labour, was conditioned by Lopukhin's alchemical faith in the efficacy of replicating and contemplating the impression the divine has made upon the dynamic architecture of the external world.

The implications for reconceiving the *vita activa* along ascetic lines as an ethical praxis stemming from such an attitude to nature are apparent if it is presumed that, a speculative inquiry into the charity sustaining the creation was meant to enrich the already evident need to maintain personhood within its social context. As with his preference for being over knowledge in the confines of the 'interior church,' in the realm of nature, Lopukhin was also interpreting inquiry into material processes in contemplative terms resulting in a new being in, and not merely knowledge of, Christ. Thus, in the absence of truly mediating religious structures and in the presence of irrefutable temporal authority, the most radical form activism available to the intellect in present earthly life was one which held nature as its object. That is why, Lopukhin's belief in the need for personhood to maintain itself within social and natural orders, can be presumed to imply that, a purely interior grasp of the divine and of human identity was an ethical mistake, when pursued without the concomitant focus on "outward action."[678] Arguably,

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[677] R. Faggionato, *A Rosicrucian Utopia in Eighteenth-Century Russia*, p. 159.
[678] O.C. Thomas, "Interiority and Christian Spirituality", *The Journal of Religion* 80, 1 (2000), p. 154.

the projection of action was dependant upon the certainty that, when it was directed at the corporeality of the person and at the corporeality of nature, it was reflective of the ascetic struggle to bring out the underlying unity between these entities and not, their systematic repression.[679] In both of these cases, attempts to restore some aspects of the integration supposedly enjoyed by human beings in Paradise were conceived in strictly speculative terms which sustained the *vita activa*, albeit with considerable scope for practical outcomes.

One such practical outcome, of crucial importance for subsequent development of Russian intellectual history, was the acceptance of worldliness as an irreducible fact and the resulting imperative to act within it. Orthodox institutions, on their own, were not perceived to function as agents of transformation within the mundane in a way which also fostered an ascetic alienation from it, suitable for lay intelligentsia. As a way of supplementing the necessary, yet imperfect historical faith in its capacity to allow for a spiritual flourishing of personhood and of the dignity of the latter's social and natural environments, the Russian Rosicrucian establishment has made explicit recourse to a literal enactment of wisdom derived from nature and spiritual praxis. When seen from the standpoint of Lopukhin's idealistic understanding of the charitable dynamic inhering in the creation, the concern felt by the brethren for the welfare of human beings tragically caught up in their own corporeality, can be reconceived as an expression of a new, this-worldly, form of asceticism. It is from these speculative assumptions which, whilst ultimately tending towards a wholly transcendent community of transfigured personhoods were nevertheless, realised within a concrete gathering of sympathetic individuals who have imagined themselves to be embedded within yet qualitatively distinct from, the temporal conditions they sought to improve.[680] Lopukhin gave a unique status to temporal life because it was simultaneously, approached as one of the contexts needing

[679] R. Faggionato, *A Rosicrucian Utopia in Eighteenth-Century Russia*, p. 152.
[680] D. von Mücke, 'Experience, Impartiality, and Authenticity in Confessional Discourse' in *New German Critique* 79 (2000), p. 20.

improvement and was also seen to contain the very means to effect that improvement.

Far from distracting the intellect from its exterior surroundings by the promise of a sustained mystical contemplation of purely intellective entities, Lopukhin's thought presupposed the need to "unify Word with Action" in terms which did justice to the innate transcendent intentions of the intellect.[681] That is, a brief and a fragmented vision of a metaphysically derived truth, conditioned as it was by a deep inward negation of conventional belief, formed the ultimate motive of their qualified reacceptance, together with the external reality in which they functioned. The exceptionally wide scope of Rosicrucian activity, can be interpreted as a practical expression of an attempted return to the mundane with a strong ethical commitment, if not to restore it ontologically, then at the very least to make it a more dignified habitué.[682] Educated late Eighteenth-century Russians were thus presented with a mystical worldview which upheld the Petrine service ethic, extended the monastic concern with charity well beyond its ecclesial confines and exemplified how metaphysical thinking must always be in a position to positively reappraise aspects of reality it negated to facilitate the process of becoming. In order to re-justify the mundane, Lopukhin turned to ascetic reception of earthliness which subsequently, required an insight into de-individuated creativity evident in nature and open to human replication needed for the common good. The desire to utilise the divinity within nature for progress within the mundane, has prepared the ground for later Russian reception of much more philosophically responsible idealistic treatments of this topos.[683] Indeed, such sublimation of nature has foreshadowed future Russian concern with incorporating speculative understanding of nature and an ascetic understanding of personhood's location in the creation, as key preconditions without which, reforms

[681] T.V. Artem'eva, *Istoriia metafiziki v Rossii XVIII veka*, pp. 87-8.
[682] J.T. McNeill, "Asceticism Versus Militarism in the Middle Ages", *Church History* 5, 1 (1936), p. 19.
[683] A. Walicki, *A History of Russian Thought From the Enlightenment to Marxism*, pp. 22-3.

undertaken in the mundane would be deemed to lack substance and risk an immoral atomisation of individual life.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how, on the basis of foreign and native religious discourses, Lopukhin was able to rethink the conventional meaning and teleology of ecclesia, personhood and the ascetic ethic. Whilst all of these terms were reinterpreted mystically, they did not necessarily function only as transcendent entities, entirely divorced from their historical significance. In fact, Lopukhin seemed to have accepted the dualistic tenor of his thought and was not only against any tampering with established authority, but argued why that authority formed a crucial aspect of a transcendent becoming. In comparison to the preceding thinkers covered in this thesis, Lopukhin's major contribution to the development of Mystical Enlightenment in Russia was in his insistence on the need to correlate inward freedom with outward responsibility and concrete action. Emancipation from the purported truth of historical faith was counter-balanced by the duty of subjecting private imagination to Orthodoxy's rich repertoire, notwithstanding its obvious falseness. Similarly, a personhood disengaged from its individuality and subservience to utility was forewarned against turning into a predominantly self-referential self, deluded into thinking that it owned its knowledge as its property. These difficult positions which seemed to impart some hesitancy to the intellect, as it was straddled between progress it could make in the realm of self-conscious thought and an earthly status quo to which it nevertheless adhered, were mediated by Lopukhin's dependence on ascetic enworldedness, capable of circumventing existing power structures. The tension resulting from the seemingly unbridgeable dualism between present immersion in corporeality and future life of pure intellection, has been greatly lessened by the specifically ascetic kind of alienation which played a critical ethical function in integrating personhood into society and of integrating nature into personhood's moral development.

CONCLUSION

This thesis sought to foreground the emancipatory and the critical use of mystical discourses in Eighteenth-century Russia. To that end, it was necessary to postulate the existence of a distinct Mystical Enlightenment. The consistency with which some mystics in Russia addressed problems in ecclesial, personal and ethical organisational forms was reflective of not only a shared concern for the fate of the spiritual but also, a shared commitment to reinterpreting its overriding significance. It was argued that a renewed Russian interest in mysticism was a response to a very problematic trajectory of Russia's Westernisation. Not all aspects of mysticism could be considered Enlightened. That is why, this thesis detailed how mystical thought was applied toward the rethinking of a very narrow range of concepts and practices. Whilst participation in these concepts and practices could potentially, influence the bulk of individual life-experience and the

more formal philosophical aspects thereof, the latter was not restricted to them. Because of this, it might be counterargued that except for a few exceptional cases, mystical insight rarely led to emancipation in a straightforward socio-political sense, thus casting doubt regarding the possibility of the Mystical Enlightenment as such.

When applied to ideas, the presence of emancipation cannot be entirely judged on the basis of practical utility or even on the basis of influence on the minds of contemporaries. On both of these counts, the eclectic worldview informing Russian Rosicrucians such as Kheraskov and Lopukhin could certainly be admitted as progressive, whilst at the same time, isolating Skovoroda as an eccentric curiosity who failed to make an immediate impact. The problem is that even if there is a strong causal link between thought and action, ideas cannot, by their very nature, fully reveal themselves by means of their embodiment in society and the mores underpinning it. Important as instances of reforms are as markers of the cogency of the ideas which have inspired them, they cannot stand in for the inner structure of these ideas and the manner in which they have come into being. The life of the mind cannot be limited by its exteriorised products, important as they are in indicating the course of human progress. Especially when dealing with eschatological or utopian mindsets, it is important to remember that the latter are often of such dynamic character that they cannot rest content with their worldly actualisations. For that reason, this thesis undertook to focus on concepts rather than on their context on the assumption that, as Reinhart Koselleck put it in regards to *Begriffsgeschichte*, "on occasion, it is conceptuality that outpaces the reality, and sometimes, the other way around."[684] In the course of the volatile and contradictory Russian Eighteenth-century, there were certainly moments when what was thought and written could not be properly accounted for through recourse to existing socio-political processes.

Emancipation then, implied not only freedom of expression and a widening scope of non-state sponsored activity. Decisive as some of Catherine's

[684] R. Koselleck in J.W. Müller, 'On Conceptual History' in D. McMahon and S. Moyn, eds. *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 83.

liberalising policies were in allowing Russian intellectuals to feel that through their creative labour, they could contribute to the common good, close analysis of these policies cannot canvass the texture of intellectual life they helped to bring about. For the same reason, accounts of implied audience and its reception of ideas could only go so far in determining the intrinsic value of the very notions that audience was meant to absorb or respond to. Consequently, this thesis approached emancipation not in its socio-political sense, but as an overcoming of an overly restrictive definition of otherwise enduring concepts. That is, the capacity to theorise is in itself symptomatic of a loosening attachment to established forms of thinking. Ernst Cassirer may have had something like this in mind he spoke of a "philosophic spirit" attaining "clarity and depth in its understanding of its own nature and destiny, and of its own fundamental character and mission."[685] In their respective ways, Russian mystics have consciously sought to reach the limits of their discourse at the same time as they have also sought to explain it. Whilst mysticism could not be completely equated with philosophy, it did fulfil a critical function and its practitioners were aware of the fact that they were pursuing a very distinct mode of inquiry. It was precisely mysticism's relative independence from religious institutions and its orientation towards erotic wonder associated with being and knowledge which allowed it to stand against certain features of the Russian *Polizeistaat*.

For exactly the same reason, mysticism could also resist the spread of very superficial receptions of predominantly French freethinking in ways which did not necessarily make it a conservative force. It is true that Lopukhin and Kheraskov and to a limited extent, Skovoroda supported Enlightened absolutism and condemned the irreligiousness of the French Revolution. Yet, contrasting with such views favouring political passivity was a very progressive stance regarding the possibility of individual self-fashioning. Indeed, if religion is considered to be one of the cornerstones of any European *Ancien Régime*, then the manner in which the Mystical Enlightenment correlated personal belief with metaphysical truth was especially conducive to personal autonomy, albeit predominantly in an

[685] E. Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, p. vi.

intellectual sense. The particular configuration that religious certainty could take and the role of established ecclesial arrangements within that configuration depended on individual critical capacity. This thesis made a point of explicating just how far some mystics in Russia could go in rethinking the substance of spirituality. When applied towards theoretical deconstruction of established notions, mysticism could give rise to genuinely radical standpoints, especially in regards to individual responsibility for how the intellect conformed itself to living an authentic life. By redirecting the centre of gravity of human activity inward into a predominantly mental repertoire, mysticism was able to safeguard the humanistic component of the Enlightenment without getting bogged down either into the minutiae of necessary but largely technical reform of society, or into outright relativism.

The fact that Russia's entry-way into European modernity was undertaken at the behest of the state, rather than relatively autonomous and self-interested social groups, the danger that technological progress would overshadow humanistic values was quite real. Given Russia's overall backwardness in most areas compared to Western European powers, it may have been relatively easy for Peter the Great and his followers to ignore the threat to the integrity of the person posed by their etatism. Of course, in many ways, Petrine reforms were representative of genuine emancipation. However, the fact that the state took upon itself to mould a certain type of citizen for its own largely temporal needs, meant that there was not much room for self-directed development of the person. Partly due to its inherently intimate character and partly on account of its independence of institutionally-established forms of knowledge, mysticism provided the means trough which, Eighteenth-century Russians could ameliorate their spiritual anxieties. In other words, mystical praxis allowed personal *bildung* to be no longer primarily judged on the basis of whether the individual has attained certain skills and character traits needed by the *Polizeistaat*. Perhaps without directly realising this, the mystics covered in this thesis broached an enduring trope in Russian political history. Namely, irrespective of its incarnation, the Russian state routinely justified its cruelty by referring to the overriding

importance of socio-economic reforms in order to catch up with the West. Supporters and functionaries of whichever regime was in power would often sideline, ignore or repress appeals to the human cost of Russia's modernisation. The curtailment of Rosicrucian activity that directly affected Lopukhin and Kheraskov and, to a lesser degree, Skovoroda's erratic employment history, was symptomatic of the limits of toleration of alternative pathways to progress of the individual and society.

To judge the impact of the Mystical Enlightenment is therefore quite difficult in reference to social context because the latter was subjected to frequent state interventions which put curbs on alternative approaches to social reform. Thus, due to the structural limitations of the nascent Russian reading public (or what some scholars would construe as the public sphere), this thesis prioritised the assessment of ideas at the level of their occurrence within an intellective space made possible by mysticism. The emergence of such a space which was very conducive to the development of theoretical reason is how this thesis understood the process of emancipation. Quite rightly, Zenkovskii thought that mysticism had a place in the history of Russian philosophy on account of its humanistic "affirmation of free thought."[686] All of the mystics covered in this thesis were deeply dissatisfied with the moral, intellectual and spiritual state of affairs of their society and therefore, were not prepared to rely on existing justifications of authority, especially in personal matters. Most crucially, apart from participating in pedagogical, masonic and philanthropic activities, the primary focus of these mystics was contemplative life intimately connected to the production, dissemination and experience of texts. This preoccupation with finding a language suitable to express essential features of human interiority contrasted greatly with the unrelenting drive of the Russian *Polizeistaat* in extracting as much *material* value from its citizens as possible.

Such coalescence of mysticism and defence of human dignity would find more adequate literary and philosophical nomenclature in the late Nineteenth

[686] V.V. Zenkovskii, p. 110.

century and contribute immensely to Russian intellectual culture well into the Twentieth-century – notwithstanding the catastrophic implications of the October Revolution. Irrespective of creed, most serious Russian thinkers and writers have taken as a given, an open-ended horizon of human activity and of the need to resist the conflation of reality with immediate experiences and expectations imposed by society and its institutions. There are many works dealing with a shared commitment to radical transformation and apocalyptic intuitions found amongst Russian Idealists, Russian Marxists and Russian Neo-patristic thinkers. This thesis offered Eighteenth-century case-studies of how mysticism was applied towards the articulation of pressing concerns. This subject is far from exhausted. Indeed, Russian Enlightenments, including the mystical one, offer the depth and range of sources for many studies from different perspectives not necessarily focused on ideas alone. This thesis is only one step taken in light of some excellent Russian and Anglophone scholarship on the importance of spiritual concerns in the development of Enlightened thinking in Russia and in Western Europe.

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