

BOOK REVIEWS

Andrzej de Lazari. ed. *Ideas in Russia. Polish-Russian-English Lexicon*, ed., vol. 1-5, Warsaw: Semper, 1999-2003. Reviewed by Mikhail Sergeev.

The first five volumes of a projected six-volume lexicon of *Ideas in Russia* edited by prof. A. de Lazari came out in print in 1999-2003. The sixth volume is expected to come out in 2006. The core idea of the lexicon is expressed in its title and suggests “a diversity of Russian tradition [which is] much richer than the stereotype of the ‘Russian idea’” (Preface, v. 1, p. 6). The entries of the lexicon--their number will total 600--are devoted to various thinkers as well as concepts and problems of Russian philosophical, religious and social-political thought developed in and outside the motherland.

The creators of the lexicon had no plan to encompass the entire cultural heritage of Russia from the Middle Ages to contemporary times. The idea was to produce not an orthodox, but rather an experimental encyclopedia. Biographical data is reduced in the lexicon to a minimum and the articles themselves, written by scholars from various countries, and of different professions and worldviews, are filled with the spirit of debate. The reader will find here alternative articles on the same or closely related topics. Such a radical pluralism is stimulating and praiseworthy unless, of course, these differing interpretations do not overshadow--as they occasionally do--the very subject of discussion.

Separate articles of the lexicon are devoted to such prominent 20th century Russian thinkers as Amal'rik, Averintsev, Bibler, Golosovker, Men', Zinov'ev, Shafarevich, Yanov, and others. A variety of religious themes is covered, including, for instance: Moscow – New Jerusalem, ecumenism, eschatology of Rus', theosophy, atheism, Buddhism as well as Protestant and Orthodox Christian theology in Russia. In philosophy special articles discuss the reception of Aristotle, Plato and Wolff in Russia, the movements of neo-Platonism, immanent subjectivism, the categories of free will, reason, and many others.

Each volume of the lexicon contains articles in Polish, Russian, and English languages placed in a Russian alphabetical order with the addition of extensive bibliographical material. The trilingual format of publication makes it accessible to the Western as well as to the Russian scholars and general readers who “would like to better understand Russian mental categories on the basis of a possibly broad historic and cultural background” (v. 1, p. 8). The price of the lexicon is quite accessible as well. The best deal on *Ideas in Russia* is \$13.00 per volume plus shipping and handling at Yan Zabrodsky's bookstore in Warsaw (tel.: 48-22-651-3966). For additional

information regarding this lexicon please contact its editor prof. A. de Lazari at: alazari@kryisia.uni.lodz.pl.

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Vladimir I. Kurashov, *Philosophy and Russian Mentality: Philosophical Thought in Russia on the Edge of the 21st Century*, Kazan': Kazan' State Technological University, 1999. Reviewed by Mikhail Sergeev.

The book that is brought to the reader's attention is the work by doctor of philosophy, prof. Vladimir I. Kurashov who is a recipient of the Russian Academy of Sciences Award for distinguished Russian philosophers. Kurashov's book discusses the general problems of theoretical and practical philosophy. In his own view, the "specificity of the present work is that based on the analysis of the theoretical problems of philosophy (first of all, ontology and epistemology) it clarifies the limits of philosophical-scientific knowledge" (p. 9). As for Kurashov's style of philosophizing, it focuses on "what he experienced and thought about thoroughly without caring the least for following any particular tradition." (p. 8).

The book consists of five parts; the first is devoted to the discussion of the first principles of theoretical philosophy. The definition and the goals of philosophical discourse, the problems of being and consciousness belong here. The second part focuses on the limits and possibilities of philosophical-scientific knowledge. A special attention is paid to the multifaceted analysis of the concept of truth and its application in scientific, philosophical and religious spheres. The last three parts of the monograph transfer the reader from the domain of theoretical to practical philosophy. The third section investigates the most important existential human problems: love, happiness, the meaning of life and human ecology. The next part of the book discusses the category of nation in its universal and local (Russian) dimensions. Finally, the concluding fifth section sums up the previous reflections by addressing the fundamental philosophical question: what does a man live by?

Kurashov's monograph is filled with a great deal of material from the history of philosophy, contemporary philosophy of science, as well as ideas and observations of the author himself. This is one of those books that are not based just on one innovative thought, but display rather an encyclopedic approach. One cannot read it fast but should get acquainted with its content slowly, chapter by chapter. A special attention paid to the metaphysical questions and to the absolute values produces both intellectual and moral stimulation.

Let me point to some of these metaphysical objects of investigation about which, as Kurashov argues, "we can only know that [they] are and not know what [they are] in substance" (p. 35). First of all, this is our "soul which is beyond consciousness but can manifest itself in it through certain thoughts and feelings" (p. 31). The concept of the soul is tied with the notion of love, and

“our conviction in the existence of both ‘I’ and ‘Thou’ in the fullest degree is confirmed in the state of love” (p. 50). As a “[s]upreme metaphysical feeling of world harmony, the feeling of Absolute being through the harmony of two human beings” (p. 127) love is analyzed in a separate chapter inspired by Solov’evian philosophy of love.

Another metaphysical object which is discussed in the book is Russia. Kurashov defines Russia’s national identity as the “national substance in general ‘minus’ the attributes of the all-human substance” (p. 204). In his opinion, it is best reflected in the traditions of the Russian nation. Here the reader comes across quite paradoxical and highly debatable statements concerning the “essence of Russianness. “ One learns, for instance, that a person “who never drunk vodka [is] not quite Russian” (p. 227), and that individuals can be Russians “by genes, but not Russian in spirit” (p. 254). Such theses, in my view, have not been supported by sound argumentation. The same objection refers to the author’s understanding of orthodox religiosity and its relation to other confessions (pp. 248-249). In spite of these shortcomings, however, VI. Kurashov’s monograph overall represents an original contribution to Russian religious philosophy and to its creative transformation in post-Soviet times.

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Leonid N. Stolovich, *Pluralism v filosofii i filosofii pluralizma*, [Pluralism in Philosophy and Philosophy of Pluralism], Tallinn: Ingri, 2005, 336 pp.

Leonid N. Stolovich, *Istoriia russkoi filosofii: Ocherki*, [History of Russian Philosophy: Essays], Moscow: Respublika, 2005, 495 pp. Reviewed by Mikhail Sergeev.

Professor Emeritus of Tartu University, Estonia, Dr. Leonid N. Stolovich is a specialist in aesthetics, theory of value and history of philosophy. He authored more than forty books and five hundred scholarly articles which appeared in twenty languages. *Pluralism in Philosophy* and *History of Russian Philosophy* are his two latest works. In my view, they are related to each other with respect to their central theme.

The first book, *Pluralism in Philosophy and Philosophy of Pluralism* makes a case for, and methodically develops the notion of “systemic pluralism” in philosophy. Prof. Stolovich writes here “about conceptual pluralism and not about ontological pluralism of being.” (p. 19) It may seem that in this context “systemic pluralism” is a contradiction in terms since, as the author points out, “*systematicity* presupposes a certain kind of *monism* which is opposed to pluralism by definition! On the other hand, isn’t it [true] that *any system* is the system [composed] of various elements?” (p. 19)

Prof. Stolovich resolves the apparent contradiction by presenting his definition of “systemic pluralism.” In his view, “if the elements which are encompassed by the system, are

heterogeneous and seemingly... incompatible with each other, then the system of such elements forms a *systemic pluralism*.” (p. 19)

In the first section of his book prof. Stolovich discusses the notion of “systemic pluralism” in relation to other ideas such as, eclecticism, tolerance, wisdom and others.

In the second part of the book he lays the foundation of his approach to philosophy and religion. In a chapter called “Pluralism of theological agnosticism,” (pp. 125-138), for instance, prof. Stolovich applies the notion of “systemic pluralism” to religion. Here he claims that “theological agnosticism conducts an uneasy dialogue with religion and atheism and represents a certain kind of conceptual pluralism.” (p. 127) According to prof. Stolovich,

Theological agnosticism... is based on the impossibility to prove rationally the existence of [a personal] God... and [it] has two manifestations. One of them is doubt in the existence of God, the affirmation of the impossibility to settle the very question of his existence. The second type of theological agnosticism presupposes, on the other hand, faith in the reality of God, but develops a thought of him being unknowable, unfathomable. (p. 128)

Overall, Prof. Stolovich concludes:

Being situated somewhat between theism and atheism, theological agnosticism possesses tolerance which is based on the appropriateness of pluralistic worldview. It defends freedom of conscience of a person who is free to profess any religion or not to be religious at all. Theological agnosticism is not the lack of faith. Without believing in the supreme power which stands above the world, it is filled with faith in universal human values, including [those in] the moral sphere. (p. 138)

In the last section of his book prof. Stolovich applies the notion of “systemic pluralism” to the history of philosophy by analyzing a variety of philosophical systems in its light. Here one reads, for instance, about kantianism and marxism, personalism and pragmatism, scientism and postmodernism. A separate chapter of this third section is devoted to Russian philosophy. (ch. 2, pp. 214-66)

The second book by prof. Stolovich, *History of Russian Philosophy* continues this theme. It represents a broader, already a book-length overview of Russian thought from the perspective of “systemic pluralism.” A famous two-volume classic *A History of Russian Philosophy* which was written by a Russian émigré and an Orthodox priest Vassilii Zenkovskii in 1940s, emphasized Christian influences, spirit and character of Russian philosophical speculation. Soviet textbooks on the subject, on the contrary, focused on the secular and anti-religious trends in Russian thought – seeing the evolution of Russian intellectual tradition as moving inevitably and progressively toward

atheism. In contrast to those two polarizing perspectives, the book by prof. Stolovich, written already in post-Soviet times, postulates the impossibility in principle to reduce Russian philosophy to its either religious or secular sources, Orthodoxy or atheism. According to prof. Stolovich, modern Russian thought displays a considerable variety of trends, schools and approaches which cannot be reduced to any one underlying theme, principle or intuition.

Such a pluralistic standpoint finds its proper manifestation in the way the book itself is structured. There are chapters here on such traditional topics as: philosophical thought in medieval Russia (11-17th c.) and philosophy in the century of the Enlightenment (18th c. – Lomonosov, Novikov, Radishchev, Skovoroda); Westerners and Slavophiles (Chaadaev, Stankevich, Belinskii, Gertsen, Kireevskii, Khomiakov, Aksakov, Samarin). Other 19th century topics include: anthropological principle and social radicalism (Chernyshevskii, Dobroliubov, Pisarev, Lavrov); in search of idealism (Dostoevskii, Fiodorov, Leontiev, Tolstoy); philosophy of total-unity in the works of Vl. Soloviev and his followers (S. N. and E. N. Trubetskie, Bulgakov, Florenskii, Ern, Karsavin); philosophy of ideal-realism (Lopatin, Losskii, Frank). One also finds in the book chapters on 20th century thought: existentialist philosophy (Berdiaev, Shestov); neo-kantianism (Vvedenskii, Lapshin, Stepun, Gessen, Iakovenko); phenomenology (Shpet); religion, philosophy and politics (Il'in, Fedotov); as well as marxism (Plekhanov, Bogdanov, Lunacharskii). Separate chapters are devoted to philosophy and aesthetics (Bakhtin, Losev) and the thought of Russian artists, poets and writers (philosophical thought of the first half of the 19th century – Karamzin, Pushkin, Baratynskii, Tiutchev, Venevitinov, Odoevskii; philosophy and artistic creativity – Rozanov, Merezhkovskii, Vyach. Ivanov, Andrei Belyi, akmeism, futurism, formal school).

Overall, this new pluralistic approach to the study of Russian thought seems to be more in tune with the spirit of the new democratic – post-tsarist and post-Soviet – Russia. As prof. Stolovich himself points out in the first book *Pluralism in Philosophy*:

Pluralistic philosophy contains the possibility to provide a theoretical ground for human freedom and political democracy... Pluralism which presupposes tolerance, and tolerance which does not lead to the cessation of pluralism, can be considered as a social ideal of the highest value. (p. 317)

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