CHAADAEV AND *VEKHI*

Robin Aizlewood

Anyone choosing the original landmark critique of the state of intellectual affairs in Russia in the nineteenth century would most likely identify it as Petr Chaadaev's *Lettres philosophiques/Filosoficheskie pis'ma* (*Philosophical Letters*, 1828–30), and in particular the “First Letter,” written some 80 years before *Vekhi*.¹ In the “First Letter” Chaadaev describes Russia as a lacuna in the “intellectual order” (330); Russia lacks historical consciousness and does not participate in the “wondrous connection of human ideas in the succession of generations” (323). This leads Chaadaev to the direst of conclusions: “We belong to those [peoples] which do not as it were form a component part of the human race and exist only to teach a great lesson to the world” (326). The contemporary reception of both *Vekhi* and Chaadaev’s “First Letter,” when it was eventually published due to a censor’s error in 1836, has marked them as “scandals.”² In both cases the intemperate nature of contemporary responses was not without a certain provocation, and in this respect, while none of the *Vekhi* authors pull their punches, Mikhail Gershenzon—the original instigator and compiler of the *Vekhi* collection, as well as the publisher of Chaadaev’s *Philosophical Letters* at the same time—may in particular be thought to have taken on the mantle of what Chaadaev called his “exaggeration” and Viazemskii called his “splendid and masterly satire.”³

The publication history of Chaadaev’s work was marked by severe disruption, at the time and subsequently (disruption in the case of *Vekhi* took place only subsequently). Yet *Vekhi* and Chaadaev come together in the period 1904–09, through the republication of Chaadaev’s work made possible at long last in 1905 (though the *Philosophical Letters* in its entirety still remained unpublished), and especially, of course, through Gershenzon,

who was at the center of this republication, as he was of *Vekhi*. He began work on Chaadaev in 1904, publishing him in *Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii* (*Questions of Philosophy and Psychology*) in 1906 and again as an appendix to his own 1908 study *P. Ia. Chaadaev. Zhizn' i myshlenie* (*P. Ia. Chaadaev: Life and Thought*).⁴ The supposition that Chaadaev has a presence which informs the *Vekhi* project, first of all in Gershenzon but to a greater or lesser extent throughout, can be taken, I would suggest, as granted.⁵ There may be archival material of interest here, although there is no mention of Chaadaev in the “Commentary” to the 1991 edition of *Vekhi*, which traces in some detail the background formation of the project, or in the letters from the participants to Gershenzon published in *Minuvshee* (*The Past*), also in 1991.⁶ He is, however, prominently there in Gershenzon’s “Preface,” in the final paragraph: “Our warnings are not new: all of our most profound thinkers, from Chaadaev to Solov’ev and Tolstoi, said the same things again and again.”⁷

Indeed, the connection in Gershenzon’s thinking between Chaadaev and *Vekhi* is clearly apparent from the opening sentences of the “Preface” to his 1908 book, in which he exposes the widespread “misconception” of what Chaadaev stands for:

A lot has been written about Chaadaev and his name is familiar to almost every educated Russian; but it is only now that we are learning how to go about understanding his thought. For various reasons, in part of a general kind, in part personal, his name has become the preserve of legend: despite being someone who was an unambiguous critic of all that our vanguard intelligentsia held most dear about itself—its exclusively positivist orientation and its revolutionary politics—he was enlisted in the synod of Russian liberalism as one of the glorious figures of our liberation movement. This misconception began already in his own lifetime...⁸

In the second paragraph, Gershenzon goes on to speak of the “eternal truth” to be found in Chaadaev concerning “that internal freedom, for which external and hence political freedom is only the footstool,” and of Chaadaev’s focus on the “highest tasks of the spirit.”⁹ Consider the following sentence from the “Preface” to *Vekhi*: “Their [the authors’] common platform is a recognition of the theoretical and practical primacy of spiritual life over the external forms of community. They mean by this that the individual’s

inner life is the sole creative force of human existence, and that this inner life, not the self-sufficient principles of the political realm, constitutes the only solid basis on which a society can be built" (xxxvii). The fourth and final paragraph of Gershenzon's "Preface" to his book on Chaadaev begins with the question, "Is now the time to remind Russian society of Chaadaev? I think it is—indeed more so than ever." The reason for this is not so much Chaadaev's particular opinions, such as his "negative attitude to revolutions," but the "general spirit of his teaching": "Through the entirety of his thought he tells us that the political life of peoples, directed towards temporary and material aims, in reality is only realizing in part an eternal moral idea, i.e., that any social cause is in essence no less religious than the ardent prayer of the believer. He tells us the following about the life of society: enter in, and God is here: but he adds: and remember that God is here and that you serve *Him*."¹⁰

All in all, then, this "Preface" of 1908 reads like something of a blueprint for *Vekhi*, and it is apparent that Chaadaev, through Gershenzon, has served as a catalyst in its conception. It is a curious turn of events that this is a reprise of his role in stimulating philosophical enquiry and intellectual debate in his own time, which was memorably described by Herzen as having the awakening effect of a "shot ringing out in the dark of night."¹¹ At the same time it is one of the paradoxes of Chaadaev that, despite this role, his philosophical project itself is in a way a "failure" in its immediate context. Or, to put it another way, its impact lay less in its content, which was not taken up, than in its meta-content, its formulation of key questions and problematics, including the very problem of philosophy; and in longer perspective, as in *Vekhi*, Chaadaev's project has an enduring resonance through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with reverberations thereafter.¹²

Thus, in exploring the presence of Chaadaev in *Vekhi*, I do not mean only to assert a direct influence, although in the case of Gershenzon there clearly is one. The aim of my study is to trace continuities and tropes, as well as genealogies, in Russian intellectual history. In this respect, parallels—whether they are typological similarities, common themes, or direct affinities—between Chaadaev and *Vekhi* provide an interesting perspective on some of the overarching problematics in the tradition of Russian

philosophical thought, as well as on the individual thinkers concerned. In addition, approaching *Vekhi* through the prism of Chaadaev, and vice versa, can pose questions for how we conceptualize that tradition. In what follows I will concentrate on two main lines of enquiry: first, an analysis of how we may juxtapose or transpose the framework of the Chaadaevan critique to *Vekhi*; and second, an exploration of the conception of the person in both Chaadaev and *Vekhi* that illuminates tensions and divergences as well as continuities in Russian thought. A key aspect of Chaadaev's resonance in Russian culture, which comes to the fore in the second part of my study and its conclusion, lies precisely in the Chaadaevan image, championed by Gershenzon, of the person of moral intellect.

I

Typically, the transposition of Chaadaev's framework to *Vekhi* involves a shift in the object/address of the critique from Russia/Russians as a whole in Chaadaev to the intelligentsia in particular in *Vekhi*. However, such a shift immediately begs the question—pertinently asked in contemporary responses to *Vekhi*—of whether and how the contributors to *Vekhi* may themselves display at least some of the characteristics they criticize in the intelligentsia. In the same way, the response to Chaadaev of the Slavophiles and others—including Dostoevskii—was to shift the address of his critique from Russia/Russians in general to the small part of society that was the alienated, westernized elite (which on a rather partial, limited understanding could include Chaadaev himself and which, with appropriate qualification, may offer a closer parallel to the object of the *Vekhi* critique).¹³ In this connection, by way of a prelude, it is worth briefly noting a couple of distinctive tropes in Russian culture which receive a protean formulation in Chaadaev and have lost none of their currency in the *Vekhi* critique. Two such tropes are the alienation of Russians/the intelligentsia, and the juvenility of Russians/the intelligentsia. In Chaadaev, these two features are in effect aspects of the lack of historical consciousness and lack of continuity of ideas among Russians, which will be considered in greater detail below. This is why Russia has never progressed beyond its youth (324–25) and why “we are as it were alien to ourselves” (326). The juvenility of Russia and/

or of the intelligentsia had acquired considerable cultural baggage by the time of *Vekhi*, where it concentrated around the image of the “student” (in Sergei Bulgakov, Semen Frank, and Aleksandr Izgoev’s contributions, for example). The same applies even more, of course, to alienation—from the incorporation of Hegelian (and later Marxian) ideas, on the one hand, to the Dostoevskian notion of the educated elite’s alienation from the Russian “soil,” on the other. A variation on Hegelian/Marxian alienation may be found in Petr Struve’s central diagnosis of the intelligentsia’s “alienation” or “dissociation” (*otschchepenstvo*) from state and religion (118), while a reiteration of Dostoevskii’s motif is found in Bulgakov’s and Gershenzon’s essays (27, 52), identically worded in the original as being “torn from the soil” (an echo of this may conceivably be seen in Struve as well).¹⁴

The central question in the transposition of Chaadaev’s critique to *Vekhi* concerns not these tropes, important as they are, but the intelligentsia’s “attitude to philosophy,” as highlighted by Nikolai Berdiaev in the opening sentence of the collection’s opening essay (1). At the outset, it is worth reiterating the fundamental ground that Chaadaev and *Vekhi* have in common: the insistence throughout *Vekhi* by all the contributors on absolute values, on consciousness, and on the link between the absolute and consciousness is in essence fully shared—and equally emphasized—by Chaadaev. That said, for the most part the Chaadaev-*Vekhi* intertext can be traced more especially through Berdiaev, Bulgakov, Frank, and Gershenzon, with the latter—as has already been demonstrated—taken as something of a special case. Gershenzon, as we shall see throughout, may indeed be interpreted in certain respects (though not wholly and solely) as not only reproducing but even ventriloquizing the Chaadaevan critique. Nor is it surprising that the main connections are otherwise to be explored through Berdiaev, Bulgakov, and Frank, since it is these three thinkers who primarily occupy the same religious-philosophical disciplinary territory as Chaadaev.

There are three main, closely related Chaadaevan themes that can be traced in the critique of the intelligentsia’s “attitude to philosophy” in *Vekhi*: these are the truth, philosophical culture, and the borrowing of ideas. At the centre of Chaadaev’s philosophy lies the idea that the truth resides in the unity and historical continuity of thought in human,

Christian consciousness, that “wondrous connection of human ideas in the succession of generations” (323), as he calls it. Russia, however, lies “as it were outside time” (323) and has not contributed “a single thought to the mass of human ideas” (330). In rhetorical affirmation, the “First Letter” plays out continuous variations on the theme, such as, for example, in the following passage:

As we move forwards in time, our past experience disappears without return. This is the natural consequence of a culture which is entirely borrowed and imitative. We have absolutely no internal development, no natural progress; former ideas are swept away by new ones because the latter do not arise out of the former, they just appear from nowhere. We only take in ideas that are completely ready-made, therefore those ineradicable traces which are laid down in the mind through the consecutive development of thought, and which create intellectual strength, do not leave furrows in our consciousness. (326)

Alongside the lack of continuity of ideas, therefore, comes a weak philosophical culture, the absence of rigorous method or “consecutive [logical] development” (*posledovatel’noe razvitie*) in the process of thinking. The same point, lamenting both the “blind, superficial, very often senseless borrowing” of ideas and the corresponding lack of “some kind of stability and rigor [*posledovatel’nost’*] in the mind, some kind of logic” is reiterated a page later (327–28). Throughout the *Philosophical Letters*, Chaadaev’s essential point of reference is the higher, absolute truth—*istina*—of Providence. Indeed, while he changes to a more optimistic assessment of Russia’s future in the “Apology of a Madman” (a shift already apparent in letters written in 1833–35), he still proceeds from an assertion of the primacy of “love for the truth” over “love for one’s country,” “fine thing” though that may be (523): “The way to heaven is via the truth [*istina*], not via one’s country,” he states, and then adds: “It’s true [*pravda*] that we Russians have always been little interested in what’s true [*istinno*] and what’s false” (523–24).

So let us now move on to the critique of the intelligentsia’s “attitude to philosophy” in *Vekhi*, concentrated as it is—just as it is in Chaadaev—around the priority of truth as an absolute value, the need for a strong philosophical culture and rigor in the exposition of thought, and the borrowing and continuity of ideas. The affinities with Chaadaev will

become readily apparent, and indeed it may be assumed that the essays of Berdiaev, Bulgakov, and Frank (as well as Gershenzon) are at least to some extent directly or indirectly informed by Chaadaev's thought. A reasonable supposition would be that the affinity is more direct in the case of Berdiaev than in those of Bulgakov and Frank: in the paragraph in which Berdiaev introduces his account of "original Russian philosophy" and the "philosophical content" of Russian literature, the first person he mentions is Chaadaev, followed by Solov'ev, Dostoevskii, and Tolstoi (12). Neither Bulgakov nor Frank foregrounds Chaadaev in this way.

The title of Berdiaev's essay, "*Filosofskaia istina i intelligentskaia pravda*" ("Philosophical Verity and Intelligentsia Truth"), draws on the distinction in Russian between higher truth (*istina*) and truth as justice (*pravda*) and so, as one might expect, the priority of truth—*istina*—is a major theme of his essay. In a formulation that echoes Chaadaev's as noted above, he notes that "the intelligentsia does not care whether Mach's theory of knowledge, to take one example, is true or false," and laments a "feeble awareness of the unconditional value of the truth" (4–5). He goes on to emphasize, again echoing Chaadaev—this time, I would say, explicitly—that "love for egalitarian justice, for social good, for the people's welfare, paralyzed love for the truth and almost destroyed any interest in truth" (6). Chaadaev's love for one's country has here mutated into a populist love for the people. The theme of truth—"love for the truth" as an "absolute value" (6), "love of objective, ecumenical truth" (7), the intelligentsia as "unreceptive to objective truth" (12), "humility before the truth" (15) and so on—continues through the rest of his essay. As a corollary, there is the related theme of philosophical thinking. At the outset, Berdiaev laments a "very low level of philosophical culture" and a "temperament" and "values" antipathetic to philosophy (1); he comments that "our intelligentsia was always interested in questions of a philosophical nature, though not in their philosophical formulation" (3). He notes a "weak appreciation of intellectual life as an autonomous value" (7), indifference to a scientific, scholarly approach (20), "hostility to philosophical endeavor" (14; in the original, "hostility to the philosophical work of thought").¹⁵ He finds this weakness in the new mysticism (which Berdiaev identifies with Ivanov, Merezhkovskii, and Rozanov) as much as in the thought of the radical

intelligentsia, and calls for such mysticism, with its “dionysian principle,” to combine with the “apollonian principle of philosophy” (14–15). Bearing in mind Berdiaev’s later self-confessed or even self-proclaimed antipathy to systematic exposition,¹⁶ it is interesting to find such a strand in his critique, but also to note that it is couched in the rather general terms of “philosophical culture” and “apollonian principle.” Indeed, compared with the attention to methodological rigor in some subsequent contributions, particularly those of Bogdan Kistiakovskii and Frank, Berdiaev’s essay is easier on itself in this respect.

While Gershenzon, Bulgakov, and Frank all take up the themes of the intelligentsia’s indifference to the truth and lack of philosophical culture, there are some interesting differences of emphasis. In Gershenzon, for example, the theme of the truth is presented in terms very close to those of Chaadaev: it is described as the “one and indivisible Divine truth” which “out of the millennia of its life experience mankind is slowly assembling” (53); he talks of “mankind’s universal consciousness” (53) and of “supra-personal ideas” (55), and of the “content of thought-truth” directing the will (58). It is this understanding of the truth that can redirect the crippled consciousness of the individual *intelligent*; the corollary need for rigorous philosophical thinking is nowhere stated, although it may perhaps be inferred. Bulgakov’s main theme is the intelligentsia’s attitude to religion, but to this he adds their “suspicious attitude toward philosophy” (22). It is interesting that Bulgakov, whose thought at this time was turning more to the theme of history, is the one author to stress the breaking of “intellectual” and “historical” “continuity” in Russia (25, 26)—echoing Chaadaev—which manifests itself in the intelligentsia’s “historical impatience” instead of the proper “feeling of connection with and gratitude to the past” (39). Frank, whose topic is the intelligentsia’s nihilistic moralism, adopts an approach that seeks to clarify the “foundations of the prevailing ideas in morality and religious philosophy” of this outlook (154). He notes that the intelligentsia’s mind-set has no place for “ideals of truth, beauty and Divinity,” “theoretical, aesthetic and religious values,” and “theoretical, scientific truth, rigorous and pure knowledge for its own sake” (133). When he states that “perhaps the most remarkable trait of the recent Russian social movement ... is its *lack of philosophical reflection and understanding*” (154;

in the original, perhaps more precisely, “how poorly thought through and articulated it is in philosophical terms [*ego filosofskaia neprodumannost’ i nedogovorennost’*]”),¹⁷ Frank shows himself to be the author who most keenly feels the need for rigorous philosophical thinking, some 80 years after Chaadaev.

The third “Chaadaevian” theme covered by all four authors is the problem of the superficial borrowing of European ideas, and on this they all write in similarly eloquent and pained terms. Gershenzon is dismayed that the periodization of Russian thought is not defined by its own “internal development” but by the dominance of “one or another foreign doctrine.” He decries the fact that “our collective consciousness failed to work out its own life values,” that it did not have its “own national evolution of thought,” but “simply seized on what Western thought had created for itself” until a “gift” that was “new and better” came along; on the other hand, “we did not value the truth that *our* best minds—Chaadaev, the Slavophiles, Dostoevskii—had attained” (59). Compared with Chaadaev, there is more emphasis on the distortion that marks such borrowing. Berdiaev spends several pages on the topic (7–12), covering, for example, positivism, Marxism, and empiriocriticism before ending on the “especially sad fate” of Nietzsche (11), which leads him to exclaim: “Poor Nietzsche, and poor Russian thought!” (12) Neo-Kantianism, on the other hand, suffered less distortion, and he commends the way that an interest in Kant and Fichte, for example, has “raised our philosophical level” (10). Bearing in mind the broadly or more narrowly Kantian framework to which the *Vekhi* authors have subscribed or do subscribe, there is a touch of self-appraisal here—Berdiaev is never shy in this respect. In similar terms, Bulgakov writes that the intelligentsia “did not go beyond external appropriation” of Western ideas, and Frank’s penultimate paragraph (already quoted from above) offers an extended critique linking the absence of “independent intellectual activity” to the “philosophical mindlessness” that comes from superficial borrowing (154). It is notable too that all four writers, like Chaadaev before them, present European thought and culture, for all its competing trends, as, in Bulgakov’s words, an “organic whole” (25).

The continuities with Chaadaev that we have seen are, I would suggest, striking in both range and depth; and they are important—whether as

influence, affinity or typological similarity—for our understanding of the larger narrative of Russian intellectual history as well as the particular places of Chaadaev and *Vekhi* in that narrative. It is significant for a reading of *Vekhi* that Chaadaev is not located in the distant intellectual background—as is more or less the case for other Russian thinkers from before the 1860s—but, through the publication of his work in the few years leading up to *Vekhi*, is present in the synchronic foreground, less prominently than Dostoevskii and Solov'ev, for sure, but there all the same. To this must be added his role, via Gershenzon, as a catalyst in the very conception of the collection, and his highlighted presence in the text. One might even interpret the state of affairs 80 years on as worse than that described by Chaadaev. Certainly it seems more than likely that, with Chaadaev's work newly republished, a recognition by the *Vekhi* authors that they were repeating his words about the borrowing of ideas—and about attitudes to truth and to philosophy—can only have heightened the sense of dismay in their critique of the intelligentsia.

II

Having explored the convergence of *Vekhi* and Chaadaev, I would now like to turn to the conception of the person, a thematic field in which the picture that emerges is more complex (and where, as noted earlier, the image of the Chaadaevan persona has a striking—and contested—resonance). Russian thought has often been characterized as being especially concerned with the person, for example in Zen'kovskii's formulation that it is “anthropocentric,”¹⁸ and recent scholarly attention and analysis have continued to advance the investigation of this aspect of Russian philosophy.¹⁹

I will begin by bringing another of the iconic texts of nineteenth-century Russian culture into the frame, namely Dostoevskii's 1880 “Pushkin Speech” (delivered on the occasion of the unveiling of the monument to Pushkin in Moscow). Dostoevskii has an overtly influential presence in *Vekhi*, especially in the first three essays, those of Berdiaev, Bulgakov, and Gershenzon. Dostoevskii's exploration of mangelhood and Godmanhood, his portrayal of intelligentsia types in Raskol'nikov, Verkhovenskii, Stavrogin, Ivan Karamazov, et al., his call for personal

moral responsibility and repentance—all this has a weight informing *Vekhi* which for Berdiaev, Bulgakov, and Gershenzon, at any rate, would be hard to exaggerate. Dostoevskii clearly informs Frank’s searching analysis of the intelligentsia’s atheism and moral nihilism too (and, covering a whole range of themes from the intelligentsia’s mores to the Russian state, one might also construct a dialogue between Dostoevskii and Izgoev, Kistiakovskii and Struve).

Dostoevskii’s “Pushkin Speech” distills a portrait of the intellectual type—proud, rootless, destructive but truth-seeking—from the presentations of Pushkin’s characters Aleko and Onegin as initial archetypes of the “superfluous man.” Bulgakov in fact twice draws on the “Speech” in support of his critique of the intelligentsia, first to quote Dostoevskii’s rewording of Pushkin on the need for the proud intellectual to “humble” himself (35) and then to refer to the rootless “wanderer” type identified by Dostoevskii in Pushkin’s heroes (43). However, while Chaadaev, as we have seen, has been lined up by Gershenzon and Berdiaev on the side of the *Vekhi* critique (and so far we can say the same, at least implicitly, for the other authors), the Dostoevskian perspective places him on the other side. This is because the figure of Chaadaev is for Dostoevskii none other than the epitome of the “European Russian,” the proud intellectual “torn from his native soil,”²⁰ which is exactly how Bulgakov and Gershenzon, following Dostoevskii, describe the intelligentsia, as we have seen. Chaadaev is indeed one of the sources of the “superfluous man,” in the particular case of Pushkin’s Onegin (referred to in the novel as “a second Chaadaev”) and more generally, though this does not of course mean that Dostoevskii’s interpretation of Chaadaev is the only valid one. That said, while the interpretation may be contested or qualified, it is not a wholesale mis-representation. Certainly, in respect to pride and humility as integral to such conceptions of the person, Chaadaev is a key figure, both in his own construction of his persona based on aristocratic pride of the intellect and in the image of him that is projected in Russian culture.²¹

The presence of Chaadaev in *Vekhi* is thus a problematic one, notwithstanding Gershenzon’s wished-for triumvirate of “*our* best minds—Chaadaev, the Slavophiles, Dostoevskii” (59). It serves as a prism through which to illuminate not only complexities and competing lines in the

intellectual origins or genealogy of *Vekhi*, but also underlying tensions and differences in the *Vekhi* authors' conception of the person. This may be gathered around the notion of the primacy of the "inner life of the person," but, as has been apparent from the moment of the collection's appearance, if one looks past the (more or less) converged application of this notion when directed against a common object of critique, divergences emerge, whether fully-fledged, implied, or nascent. At a more general level, this has to do with what happens when an attempt to elaborate and embed in Russian culture a liberal, Kantian conception of the autonomous value of the person—one of the primary goals of *Vekhi*'s predecessor volume, *Problemy idealizma* (*Problems of Idealism*, 1902)²²—interacts with the rich and diverse thinking on the person that had developed in Russian thought over the nineteenth century and continues into the twentieth century. The Russian scholar Nikolai Plotnikov has recently observed that Russian thought concentrates on the conception of a person's distinctive individuality, much more so than on the Kantian autonomous person or the Lockean conception of the person as locus of an identity formed over time.²³ Such an overarching framework nevertheless has to accommodate radical conceptual differences between, say, an Orthodox-oriented conception of the integral person in Slavophilism, on the one hand, and Herzen's free individual, with an admixture of the autonomous person, on the other. Similarly, any account of the person in Russian thought will focus, for example, on the concept of Godmanhood as elaborated upon by Solov'ev and a pleiad of subsequent thinkers; it will dwell on the interpersonal, dialogic conceptualization of the person in Bakhtin; and it will engage with Dostoevskii's extraordinary exploration of consciousness and the subject, intuitively informed by philosophy from Descartes onwards, in texts such as *Zapiski iz podpol'ia* (*Notes from Underground*, 1863) and "Son smeshnogo cheloveka" ("Dream of a Ridiculous Man," 1876).²⁴

Within this large area of thought, the image or conception of the person that can be associated with Chaadaev—the aristocratic person of the intellect, of religious/moral intellect—has a specific interest, in the contexts of *Vekhi*, Chaadaev's own thought, and Russian philosophy and culture more generally.²⁵ There are two related but distinct phenomena here: the image of Chaadaev as a person or persona, in—as already noted—his own

construction and its construction in Russian culture; and the conception of the person in Chaadaev's thought. The emphasis in Chaadaev's thought is on the supra-personal and the role of special thinkers or prophets as being the media between Providence and people; he also stresses the subordination of the individual person to the higher principle. His concern for continuity of ideas and memory, at the supra-personal level and also in terms of the individual, has implications for a conception of the person in Lockean terms of identity. It is interesting to consider how one aspect of the "failure" of Chaadaev's philosophical project may be the marginalization of this conception in the Russian tradition.

While Chaadaev's persona may have aspired to the role of special thinker, it is important to recognize that this vision is grounded in a conception of the individual life of the person, down to the level of daily routine. In this connection, the concentration in *Vekhi* on the individual life of the person also draws us retrospectively to consider the generally ignored passages in the *Philosophical Letters* in which Chaadaev talks to his female addressee about just this. The passages concerned are found in the first three Letters: in the opening of the "First Letter" (320–23), at some length in the "Second Letter" (339–46) and, very briefly, at the start of the "Third Letter" (355–56) (of these only the first was known and published at the time of *Vekhi*). Moreover, these passages, though more or less discrete, contain sentences that articulate key aspects of his overall philosophy, and the passages as a whole reinforce—and are reinforced by—that overall philosophy. They constitute a particular, but not extraneous, strand in the work.

In comparing the conception of the person in Chaadaev and *Vekhi*, the reader finds generic Christian elements as well as more specific points of similarity and contrast. Among the former we could note, for example, Chaadaev's assertion of the need for the "regeneration of our being" following Christ at the start of the "Third Letter" (356) and his prescription in the "Sixth Letter" for both peoples and individuals to "know and evaluate themselves" and to "repent of their mistakes" as a condition for moving forward on the path of perfection (398). Regeneration and repentance are much more insistent themes in *Vekhi*, perhaps because of the sheer urgency of the national predicament and/or because of the intelligentsia's

nihilistic and destructive atheism, whereas atheism is not a concern in Chaadaev's work, and the trauma of the Decembrist uprising is deep but not threatening in the same way as the revolution of 1905 and its aftermath were. More specific parallels—though they are still at a level of generality of idea—could include, for example, Struve's statement that "human goodness depends entirely on a person's free submission to a higher principle" (120), where the emphasis on "free submission" echoes Chaadaev, or Gershenzon's closely Chaadaevian formulation of the personality's active transformation in accordance with "supra-personal ideas" (55).

A more revealing and multi-faceted comparison can be explored through the question of the inner and the external life of the person (which was invoked at the outset when juxtaposing Gershenzon's "Prefaces" to his book on Chaadaev and to *Vekhi*). Chaadaev, in keeping with his overall philosophy, does not see the individual person as isolated from society and the outside world. Indeed, his ultimate aim is the transformation of society. However, in a formulation that accords with *Vekhi*, the first obligation placed on the individual is to live a "concentrated life dedicated in the main to a religious mind-set and exercises," although, as this "First Letter" notes with a gendered interpretation, "what could be more natural for a woman?" (322). In a further parallel with *Vekhi*, the dire state of Russian society makes attention to this bedrock of the individual life even more crucial. Chaadaev elaborates on this at some length in the "Second Letter" (which was not known to the *Vekhi* authors). Here he moves from the need to redirect ourselves at the level of ideas to the arrangement of the individual's personal life, including attention to the aesthetic aspect of oneself, one's home and one's surroundings (339–41); indeed, Chaadaev was legendary in his attention to dress. Overall he calls for a "methodical way of life" since, in words that directly echo what he has to say about intellectual life, "we all lack the spirit of order and method" (341). Such a way of life—implicitly aristocratic, as far as Chaadaev was concerned—extends to the organization of the day, in which it is important to set aside hours for oneself to allow for "concentrated thought"; all this will train one in resisting the allure of superficial "novelties" (345), a strain familiar from his general critique that appears in *Vekhi* as well. It is interesting to compare this with what Gershenzon and Bulgakov have to say about

the intelligentsia's life-style, which they link to an overall inadequacy in attention to the person. Bulgakov notes the absence of "disciplined work habits and a measured pace of life" and a "lack of principle in everyday life" (20, 33). Gershenzon, twice using a notion favored, as we have seen, in Chaadaev—*(ne)posledovatel'nost'*: "logic/order/consistency" or the lack thereof (52, 58)²⁶—decries this lifestyle as "horrible," and comments that for the intelligentsia "a day passes, and who knows why; today things are one way, and tomorrow a sudden fancy will turn everything upside down" (58). Izgoev's whole article carries a critique of the intelligentsia's woeful lifestyle, in the family, sexual, educational, and professional arenas. In this context, it is striking to return to Chaadaev's conclusion that "the closer you tie the external with the internal, the visible with the invisible, the more pleasant will the path ahead of you be," which is followed in the same paragraph by a familiar rhetorical lament, culminating: "Has anyone here dedicated themselves to the cult of the truth?" (345–46). As for Chaadaev himself, not only does this conception of the life of the individual fit directly into his overall philosophy, as already noted, but the biographical evidence also suggests that he practised what he preached in the performance of his persona.²⁷ Moreover, his model is grounded in both religious practice and everyday reality in a way that demonstrates its superiority to the fragile basis of calls in *Vekhi* for a spiritual reorientation of lifestyle. On the other hand, his aristocratic nature undoubtedly relates to a similar undercurrent in *Vekhi* (especially, but not only, in Berdiaev).

It has long been argued that the differences among the *Vekhi* authors concerning the "common platform" of "primacy of the inner life of the person" may be construed not just as a matter of emphasis but as differences of a fundamental order. Such arguments relate, for example, to Kistiakovskii's notion that the external reality of a law-governed society will serve to cultivate the inner life, not the other way round, and they may also relate—perhaps as a matter of emphasis, but significantly nevertheless—to Struve's call for political education and Frank's concern for cultural creativity and positive evaluation of wealth-creation, in the broadest sense. Here, one has to say that Chaadaev's unequivocal concern for the external forms of life, from the individual to society, could draw him toward Kistiakovskii and Struve, as well as Frank. That is, in addition to the specific parallels

to Gershenzon and Bulgakov that have been noted, there are grounds for a qualified linking of Chaadaev with the *Vekhi* authors whom we have had less reason to consider so far, while the one author who does not figure in this comparison (except in terms of his aristocratic nature) is the one who, apart from Gershenzon, has otherwise shown the closest affinity to Chaadaev: Berdiaev.

In summary, then, starting from the problematic juxtaposition of Chaadaev and Dostoevskii in the genealogy of *Vekhi* and continuing to a detailed comparison of conceptions of the person, the Chaadaevian perspective casts an interesting and revealing light across the complex strands that constitute *Vekhi*, both synchronically and diachronically. In addition, it highlights important aspects for study—Lockean identity, aristocratism, the external as well as the inner, and the intellect, among others—in the conceptualization and representation of the person across the Russian philosophical tradition and Russian culture.

In conclusion, I would like to return to the particular, definitive image of Chaadaev as a person of the intellect. Indeed, the person of the intellect is one of the underlying themes of *Vekhi*. As such, it constitutes an aspect of the ongoing consideration—by Russian thinkers and scholars of Russian thought alike—of the pursuit of reason in the Russian philosophical tradition, which ranges from the advocacy of a reductionist scientific reason in Chernyshevskii through the apogee of attempted integration of reason and faith in Solov'ev to Shestov's life-long assault on the pretensions of rationalist philosophy. As we have seen, the call to acquire a proper philosophical culture and rigorous intellectual method is a call to become a person of the intellect, to reorient the intelligentsia toward the root notion of the "intellect." As we have also seen, the Chaadaevian presence in *Vekhi* has revolved around his conception of thought and idea in the life of mankind and the individual person. Gershenzon's description of the kind of person that Russia has needed, which none of the *Vekhi* authors would disown even if they might phrase it differently, comes close to a portrait of Chaadaev as an aristocratic person of the intellect—of religious/moral intellect: "Had there been a handful of whole, fully conscious people in Russia, people whose high intellectual level [*vysokii stroi myslei*] was organically rooted in their personality, despotism would have been inconceivable" (57). This is

remarkably close to the portrait put forward by Osip Mandel'shtam in his 1913 essay "Petr Chaadaev." Mandel'shtam writes:

The trace left by Chaadaev in the consciousness of Russian society is so deep and ineradicable that the question involuntarily arises: is this not the trace left by a diamond passing over glass? [...]

All those qualities, of which Russian life was deprived, about which it did not even have a suspicion, came together as if deliberately in the personality of Chaadaev: huge inner discipline, lofty intellectualism, moral architectonics. [...]

What is the famed "mind" of Chaadaev, that "proud" mind, respectfully sung by Pushkin, denigrated by the tiresome Iazykov, other than a fusion of the moral and intellectual principles—a fusion which is so characteristic for Chaadaev and which directed the growth of his personality towards perfection?²⁸

Mandel'shtam's words provide an eloquent statement as to how the image of Chaadaev, as constructed by both himself and Russian culture, has a resonance in the Russian Silver Age and beyond, and *Vekhi*—as I hope to have shown—is one of the texts that conveys and refracts that resonance.

NOTES

- 1 All references to Chaadaev are taken from P. Ia. Chaadaev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i izbrannye pis'ma*, ed. Z. A. Kamenskii et al. (Moscow: Pravda, 1991), 2 vols, and are given in the text, citing page number (all quotations are from the first volume). Translations of Chaadaev and other Russian texts are my own, except where the reference is to a translated source; translations of Chaadaev are from the Russian version of the *Philosophical Letters* in this edition, with consultation of the original French.
- 2 Sapov, in the opening paragraph of his Introduction to the collection *Vekhi: pro et contra*, makes just this comparison: "Neither before nor after *Vekhi* did a book in Russia provoke such a storm of reaction in society and in such a short space of time.... Perhaps only Chaadaev's "Philosophical Letter," which appeared more than 70 years before *Vekhi*, had stirred up such a 'heated discussion' in Russian society." See V. V. Sapov, "Vokrug 'Vekh.' (Polemika 1909–1910 godov)," in *Vekhi: pro et contra*.

Antologiya, ed. V. V. Sapov (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Russkogo Khristianskogo gumanitarnogo instituta, 1998), 7–22 (7).

- 3 In “Apologie d’un fou”/“Apologiya sumasshedshego” (“Apology of a Madman,” 1837), Chaadaev admits somewhat archly, in an extended rhetorical sentence, that there was “exaggeration” (four times repeated) in his “idiosyncratic accusatory act” (536–37). The clever characterization of the “First Letter” as “satire” comes in a letter from Viazemskii to A. I. Turgenev (28 October 1836), quoted in V. A. Mil'china and A. L. Ospovat, “O Chaadaeve i ego filosofii istorii,” introductory article in P. Ia. Chaadaev, *Sochineniia*, ed. V. Iu. Proskurina (Moscow: Pravda, 1989), 3–12 (9).
- 4 M. Gershenzon, *P. Ia. Chaadaev. Zhizn' i myshlenie* (1908; reprint: The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1968). Concerning the publication history of Chaadaev, including Gershenzon's role in it, see Z. A. Kamenskii and M. I. Lepekhin, “Sud'ba literaturnogo nasledstva,” in Chaadaev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 678–81.
- 5 The juxtaposition of Chaadaev and *Vekhi* is found as a passing mention in the scholarship, with a rare headlining by Sapov (see Note 2 above), but, as far as I am aware, the closer connection between them has not been explored in detail before.
- 6 Concerning the pre-history and publication history of *Vekhi*, see M. A. Kolerov and N. S. Plotnikov, “Primechaniia,” in *Vekhi. Iz glubiny*, ed. A. A. Iakovlev (Moscow: Pravda, 1991), 500–48 (500–08). See also V. Proskurina and V. Alloi, “K istorii sozdaniia ‘Vekh,’” *Minuvshee. Istoricheskii al'manakh* 11 (1991): 249–91.
- 7 Mikhail Gershenzon, “Preface to the First Edition,” in *Vekhi/Landmarks: A Collection of Articles about the Russian Intelligentsia*, trans. and ed. Marshall S. Shatz and Judith E. Zimmerman (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), xxxvii–xxxviii (xxxviii). Subsequent references are given in parentheses in the main text. References to the Russian text are taken from *Vekhi. Iz glubiny* (see Note 6 above). Gershenzon originally listed just Chaadaev and Solov'ev, Tolstoi was added at the suggestion of Struve. See Kolerov and Plotnikov, “Primechaniia,” 508.
- 8 Gershenzon, *Chaadaev*, iii.
- 9 *Ibid.*, iii–iv.
- 10 *Ibid.*, iv.
- 11 A. I. Gertsen, *Byloe i dumy* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1967), parts 4–5, 103. Sapov continues his comparison of *Vekhi* and Chaadaev (see Note 2 above) by suggesting the appropriateness of Herzen's words to *Vekhi* (“Vokrug ‘Vekh,’” 7). In connection to Herzen's words, it is worth noting that Chaadaev and *Vekhi* share an analogous historical context, namely writing in the shadow of a national political trauma—the Decembrist uprising of 1825 and the 1905 revolution, respectively. Sergei Bulgakov's description at the start of his essay in *Vekhi*—“Russian society ... is in a state of torpor, apathy, spiritual malaise, and despondency” (17)—could equally well apply to the mood in Russia after 1825, as evoked *inter alia* by Chaadaev's designation of his place of writing as “Necropolis” (339). While both the *Philosophical Letters* and *Vekhi* are revisited some 10 years later in, respectively, Chaadaev's “Apology of a Madman” (1837) and *Iz glubiny* (*Out of the Depths*, 1918), in this case we see more

divergence than parallel, or perhaps an inverted parallel: Chaadaev's "Apology" carries a changed, more optimistic prognosis for Russia, while *Out of the Depths* contemplates in horror the worst outcome possible from the malaise analyzed in *Vekhi*.

- 12 It is interesting to note that Chaadaev's oeuvre and *Vekhi* are interwoven, whether explicitly or not, in the context that informs later ponderings on the intelligentsia and Russia, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, and again in the heady days of mass republication of Russian thinkers at the end of the Soviet period. Concerning the reading and interpretation of Chaadaev's thought in the later Soviet period, see Julia Brun-Zejmis, "Messianic Consciousness as an Expression of National Inferiority: Chaadaev and Some Samizdat Writings of the 1970s," *Slavic Review* 50 (1991): 646–58. For a narrative of the wider phenomenon, see Stanislav Bemovich Dzhimbinov, "The Return of Russian Philosophy," in *Russian Thought after Communism: The Recovery of a Philosophical Heritage*, ed. James Scanlan (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), 11–22; for an analytical commentary on trends in the philosophical scene over the Soviet period, see Galin Tihanov, "Continuities in the Soviet period," in *A History of Russian Thought*, ed. William Leatherbarrow and Derek Offord (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 311–39.
- 13 In this connection, it is worth commenting that both the writings of Chaadaev and *Vekhi* reveal an ambiguity in respect of reflexivity or auto-reflexivity in the rhetoric of critique: this relates to the scope and rhetorical use of the first person plural pronoun and possessive, "we" and "our." Chaadaev uses these throughout the "First Letter," taking in the whole of Russian society and history in the broad sweep of his critique. While, on the one hand, he no doubt has himself in mind in ready answer to his rhetorical question "where are our wise men, where are our thinkers? Who of us has ever thought, who thinks for us today?" (329) and so implicitly distinguishes himself from the object of his critique, he does not, on the other hand, differentiate himself in his discourse from the "we" that is Russia. While one might conclude that Chaadaev dissembles in his use of "we," there are no other indications to this effect; there is thus a tension in his rhetoric that intimates a consciously ambivalent self-awareness. In *Vekhi*, meanwhile, there is no common discursive strategy in this respect and, one is inclined to think, less self-awareness. Gershenzon, whether at times imitating Chaadaev, or out of a peculiar sense of belonging to the intelligentsia, or out of uncertainty, is variable in his use of the first person "we." Having introduced the pronoun as it were from a perspective outside the intelligentsia ("The one thing we can and must tell the Russian *intelligent* is: try to become a human being"), he then carries on to say, "We are not people, but cripples" (51). But Gershenzon is not subsequently consistent: at times he uses the neutral phrasing "our intelligentsia," as do other authors; at times he refers to the intelligentsia in the third person; at times "we" returns. Curiously, the other author who may have a closer affinity to Chaadaev, Berdiaev, occasionally also adopts a more inclusive and ambiguous first person plural reference, as in his very opening sentence, when he refers to "our attitude to philosophy," or in the rhetorical flourish of his finale: "We will be freed from external oppression only when we are freed from internal bondage" (1, 16). The remaining authors, however, avoid any first person plural alignment with the object of their critique. When considering both Chaadaev's writings and *Vekhi*, therefore, it transpires—as one might expect—that auto-reflexivity of critique, its acceptance or denial, is a complicated affair.

- 14 Iakovlev, *Vekhi*, 44, 74.
- 15 Ibid., 28.
- 16 For an extended disquisition on his philosophical “creativity” and aversion to system and logic, see Nikolai Berdiaev, *Sobranie sochinenii*, ed. N. A. Struve, vol. 1, *Samopoznanie (opyt filosofskoi avtobiografii)* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1989), 253–59. For a fascinating encounter between Berdiaev and a highly trained logical mind, see Frederick C. Copleston, *Philosophy in Russia: From Herzen to Lenin and Berdyaev* (Tunbridge Wells: Search Press and University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 371–89.
- 17 Iakovlev, *Vekhi*, 197.
- 18 V. V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, trans. George L. Kline (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), 6.
- 19 See, for example, *Studies in East European Thought* 61, 2–3 (2009), “Special Issue: The Discourse of Personality in the Russian Intellectual Tradition,” ed. Nikolaj Plotnikov. See also many of the articles in G. M. Hamburg and Randall A. Poole, eds., *A History of Russian Philosophy 1830–1930: Faith, Reason, and the Defense of Human Dignity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
- 20 For an overview of Chaadaev in Dostoevskii’s thought and work, see A. S. Dolinin, *Poslednie romany Dostoevskogo. Kak sozdavalis’ “Podrostok” i “Brat’ia Karamazovy”* (Moscow-Leningrad: Nauka, 1963), 112–24; A. S. Dolinin, “F. M. Dostoevskii v rabote nad romanom ‘Podrostok.’ Kommentarii,” *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* 77 (1965): 435–507 (455–60).
- 21 Chaadaev’s persona as an aspect of the study of his thought is an underlying theme I have traced in three previous articles (the third of which concerns Chaadaev and Dostoevskii): see my “Revisiting Russian Identity in Russian Thought: From Chaadaev to the Early Twentieth Century,” *Slavonic and East European Review* 78 (2000): 20–43; “Berdiaev and Chaadaev, Russia and Feminine Passivity,” in *Gender and Sexuality in Russian Civilisation*, ed. Peter I. Barta (London: Routledge, 2001), 121–39; “To Europe and Back: Chaadaev and Dostoevskii,” in *Convergence and Divergence: Russia and Eastern Europe into the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Peter J. S. Duncan (London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, UCL, 2007), 121–37.
- 22 For a thorough introduction to *Problems of Idealism*, including its neo-Kantian foundations, see Randall A. Poole, “Editor’s Introduction: Philosophy and Politics in the Russian Liberation Movement,” in *Problems of Idealism: Essays in Russian Social Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Randall A. Poole (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 1–78.
- 23 Nikolaj Plotnikov, “Preface,” *Studies in East European Thought* 61 (2009): 71–75 (72–73).
- 24 Among studies in the two collections mentioned in Note 19 above, see, for example, Derek Offord, “Alexander Herzen,” in Hamburg and Poole, *A History of Russian Philosophy 1830–1930*, 52–68; A. Alyoshin, “The Slavophile Lexicon of Personality,” *Studies in East European Thought* 61 (2009): 77–88; Randall A. Poole, “Vladimir Solov’ev’s Philosophical Anthropology: Autonomy, Dignity, Perfectibility,” in Hamburg and Poole, *A History of Russian Philosophy 1830–1930*, 131–49; see also G. M. Hamburg

- and Randall A. Poole, "Introduction: The Humanist Tradition in Russian Philosophy," and Caryl Emerson, "Afterword: On Persons as Open-Ended Ends-in-Themselves (The View from Two Novelists and Two Critics)," in Hamburg and Poole, *A History of Russian Philosophy 1830–1930*, 1–23, and 381–89 (Emerson's novelists are Dostoevskii and Tolstoi, her critics are Bakhtin and Lidiia Ginzburg). For a philosophical approach to Dostoevskii, important methodologically and conceptually, see James P. Scanlan, *Dostoevsky the Thinker* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).
- 25 Two illuminating approaches to Chaadaev, which address his persona, his philosophy, and questions of Russian philosophy and culture, are K. G. Isupov, "Pushkinskii analiz istoricheskogo protsessa i sinteticheskaiia istoriosofia P. Ia. Chaadaeva," *Pushkin: Issledovaniia i materialy* 15 (1995): 5–24, and P. V. Kuznetsov, "Metafizicheskii nartsiss i russkoe molchanie: P. Ia. Chaadaev i sud'ba filosofii," in *P. Ia. Chaadaev: pro et contra. Lichnost' i tvorchestvo Petra Chaadaeva v otsenke russkikh myslitelei i issledovatelei. Antologiia*, comp. A. A. Ermichev and A. A. Zlatopol'skaia (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Russkogo Khristianskogo gumanitarnogo instituta, 1998), 731–52.
- 26 Iakovlev, *Vekhi*, 74, 82.
- 27 For accounts of Chaadaev's life, in addition to Gershenzon's study of Chaadaev (see Note 4 above), see also Boris Tarasov, *Chaadaev*, 2nd edition (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1990), and the still valuable Charles Quénet, *Tchaadaev et les Lettres philosophiques: contribution à l'étude du mouvement des idées en Russie* (Paris: Librairie ancienne Honoré Champion, 1931).
- 28 Osip Mandel'shtam, "Petr Chaadaev," in Mandel'shtam, *Sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, ed. S. S. Averintsev and P. M. Nerler (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1990), vol. 2, 151–56 (151–52); on Mandel'shtam and Chaadaev, see Clare Cavanagh, "Synthetic Nationality: Mandel'shtam and Chaadaev," *Slavic Review* 49 (1990): 597–610.