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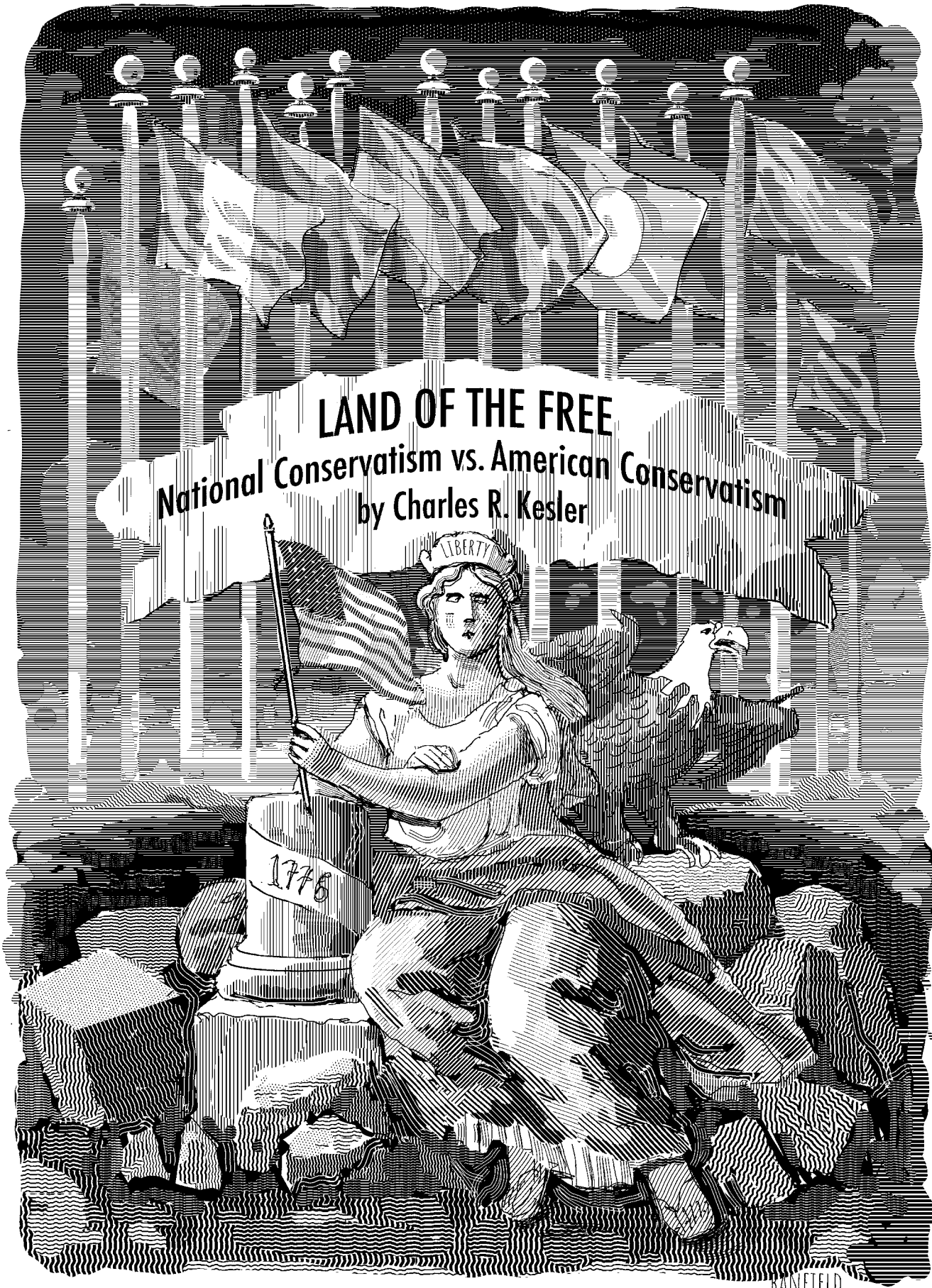
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Book Review by Daniel J. Mahoney

UP FROM BOLSHEVISM

Russian Conservatism, by Paul Robinson.
Northern Illinois University Press, 300 pages, \$41.95 (cloth) \$21.95 (paper)

Russian Liberalism, by Paul Robinson.
Northern Illinois University Press, 300 pages, \$125 (cloth) \$26.95 (paper)



Engraving by Gustave Doré

RUSSIAN CONSERVATISM (2019) AND ITS new companion volume *Russian Liberalism*, by University of Ottawa intellectual historian Paul Robinson, will remain the authoritative books on their subjects for the foreseeable future. Robinson pairs erudition with admirably calibrated judgment; he manages to resist the terrible simplifications that too often dominate punditry, and even scholarship, on all things Russian. His books do justice to the variegated currents of Russian political theory and practice, past and present. *Russian Conservatism* is especially impressive. It demonstrates a wonderfully fine-grained understanding of those commendable hybrids of liberalism and conservatism that offer the most promise for a distinctively Russian path toward political liberty, informed by national traditions and ancestral faith.

Conservatism in today's Russia is a far more vibrant tradition than liberalism, which remains rather anemic. Yet, as Robinson convincingly demonstrates, 20th-century Western scholarship on Russia largely dismissed pre-revolutionary conservative thought. The Bolshevik revolution of 1917 was supposed to have tossed conservatism into "the dustbin of history," in Leon Trotsky's memorable phrase. And perhaps Western analysts, Left-liberals themselves, could only think to seek a viable Russian alternative to Communism in the realms of liberalism and socialism. Even a dis-

tinguished scholar such as the late Marc Raeff of Columbia, whose *Russia Abroad* (1990) is the classic book on Russia's post-revolutionary intellectual diaspora, was afflicted by a sizeable blind spot when it came to conservatives. Raeff had *nothing* to say about the philosopher Ivan Ilyin, the most important conservative theorist in the Russian diaspora between the wars. Western scholars almost exclusively identified with "Westernizers," who placed their hopes for Russia's future in uncritically adopting Western modes of thought (usually in its most secular, scientific, utilitarian, and progressive forms). Sometimes "Westernization" even meant turning Russia into the avant-garde of modernity itself, an outcome that would have appealed mightily to America's fellow-traveling Left. When not simply ignored, Russian conservative thought was crudely identified with reaction, purblind resistance to rational modernization, and support for autocracy or even cruel despotism.

BUT LEFT-WING EXTREMISTS, THOUGH powerful and visible, did not represent the sentiments of most educated Russians, who were not completely alienated from the tsarist system before 1917. Only the revolutionary Left, and the prerevolutionary intelligentsia who indulged them, were adamantly devoted to the wholesale destruction of Russia's Old Regime. Far too many Rus-

sian liberals refused to condemn revolutionary terrorism or even acknowledge the threat posed by the Left, but that does not mean the majority of Russians endorsed violent insurrection. As Robinson puts it, "[a] history of Russia that fails to acknowledge conservative thought is necessarily an incomplete and inaccurate one." And since there has been a notable "conservative turn" in Russian politics and political thought during the ascendancy of Vladimir Putin, fair-minded engagement with the Russian conservative tradition is a prerequisite for understanding contemporary Russian politics as well. Robinson's excellent book is a much-needed guide.

The question at hand at the turn of the 20th century was how Russia, traditionally an autocratic empire, should respond to the surge of democratic sentiment that had prompted revolutions and reforms across the rest of Europe. Both socially and politically, Russia's top-down society—with its impoverished class of dependent serfs at the mercy of its gentry—seemed destined by the spirit of the age for transformation. But should change be welcomed, and how should it be managed? Despite the considerable differences among them, Russian conservatives were always united in their desire to pursue a Russian *Sonderweg*, a "special route" into modernity. For most of them, however, a distinctively Russian path of national development

need not mean rejecting Western liberties or representative politics *tout court*. Around 1830, Count Sergei Uvarov identified three pillars of Russian identity in his official slogan for the state: “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality.” But even those who endorsed “autocracy” were careful to distinguish it from tyranny (however difficult that distinction may be to maintain in practice).

MANY RUSSIAN CONSERVATIVES DESIRED a “system designed to protect the people’s freedoms against the oppressive actions of state officials,” Robinson explains. Some feared that a parliamentary system based on limited suffrage (as was typical in 19th-century Europe) would facilitate unchecked political dominance by the propertied classes. The result would be an oligarchy that oppressed the people, discarded their traditions, and modernized at the expense of the nation’s soul. These concerns were not unfounded, yet even the strictest of Russian conservatives understood the need for reforms to modernize state and society. Timeserving reactionaries abounded in the tsarist bureaucracy, as any student of Russian history or reader of the Russian classics knows. But they hardly represented the more serious strains of conservative *thought*.

The true wellsprings of that thought are to be found in the movement known as “Slavophilism.” In the Western vulgate, “Slavophile” is a term of opprobrium, used to designate and denigrate those who resisted the full-scale modernization and Westernization of the Russian empire. In fact, however, the real Slavophiles—mid- to late-19th-century figures such as Aleksei Khomiakov, Ivan Kireevsky, Konstantin Aksakov, Iury Samarin, and others—were deeply influenced by Western philosophy. These were cultivated men, informed by German idealism and Romanticism as much as by their native Orthodox beliefs. Robinson rightly insists that “Slavophilism defies simple classification.” Although they had “a profound impact on...Russian conservatism,” in important respects they remained liberals. They were champions of free speech and “openness” (*glasnost*), supporters of emancipation for the serfs, and opponents of the death penalty (which was used far more sparingly in tsarist than in Soviet Russia). To be sure, they placed great emphasis on tradition and the continuity of Russian civilization. They were perhaps unduly critical of Western constitutionalism, and they feared (certainly not without reason) that unfettered free trade would fuel an excessively rapid social transformation at home. They also romanticized the Russian agricultural commune (the *mir*),

tending to wave away the hardships and injustices suffered by the peasants who labored on them. Later liberal conservatives such as Pyotr Stolypin and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn would forcefully resist this kind of wishful pastoralism.

BUT, AS ROBINSON MAKES CLEAR, THE Slavophiles adamantly denied that they were opposed to change or wanted “to go backward.” In the words of the writer and critic Konstantin Aksakov, “The Slavophiles desire not to turn back, but to go again forward on the old path, not because it is old but because it is true.” He pointedly added: “Thus, there can be no talk of turning back.” The Slavophiles wished to combine elements of conservative-minded liberalism with a quasi-Romantic emphasis on the “wholeness of spirit” nourished by the rich spiritual traditions of Orthodoxy. They dreamed of limited government within an essentially “harmonious society”—admittedly a distant hope. They differed from classical liberals in decisive respects, most notably in their suspicion of parliamentary institutions. But that hardly made them illiberal or reactionary by comparative historical standards. In brief, the leading Slavophiles were men of faith and learning, fundamentally humane in their political orientation.

Similarly difficult to categorize were the “*pochvenniki*,” writers and thinkers who wished to overcome the chasm between Russia’s ruling elite and its ordinary people. Their greatest representative was the masterly novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky. They loathed utilitarianism, atheism, and scientism, but they wished nevertheless to reconcile East and West. They envisioned a sublime and, alas, a utopian Christian fraternity, initiated by Holy Mother Russia and extending throughout the world. Repudiating the revolutionary illusions of his youth, the mature Dostoevsky became a strong supporter of autocracy and the Orthodox Church. He urged salutary social reforms, but he was a devastating critic of revolutionary socialists who “inspire” men with “bread” rather than “the idea of Beauty.” “[G]ive them bread and from boredom they will become enemies of one another,” he insightfully observed in one letter to a reader. As even the atheist Friedrich Nietzsche acknowledged in *Twilight of the Idols* (1889), Dostoevsky was an unsurpassed psychologist—a student of the human soul. He unerringly predicted in his 1872 novel *Demons* that if the program of the revolutionary intelligentsia was ever implemented in practice, human excellence would be strangled to death and untold millions would perish. He was the first to foresee

the full extent of the approaching totalitarian nightmare. This alone commends him to our consideration.

AT THE SAME TIME, DOSTOEVSKY COMBINED a quasi-messianic faith in Russia’s “universal mission” with a zealous adherence to Pan-Slavism, the view that Russia had a sacred mission to protect oppressed Slavic peoples from external domination. This danger came chiefly from the Ottoman Empire (in fact, Dostoevsky dreamed of a Constantinople in Russian hands). In his 1995 book, *The Russian Question at the End of the Twentieth Century*, the famous Russian writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn lamented that for all his insights about the coming dangers of the late modern world, Dostoevsky more than occasionally succumbed to “Russian messianic national exclusiveness.” In his novelistic writings, Dostoevsky managed to resist the temptation of the character Ivan Pavlovich Shatov from *Demons*, who passionately defends Christian Orthodoxy but ultimately subordinates religious truth to the national idea. The same restraint is sadly not evident in Dostoevsky’s polemical writings, especially in *The Writer’s Diary*. He remains a marvelously insightful thinker and writer *malgré lui*, rather more an uneven prophet than a measured political philosopher.

Liberal conservatives like the Slavophiles and the *pochvenniki* struggled nobly against the temptations of hidebound traditionalism, seeking instead a route to moderate reform. Unfortunately, the vast majority of Russia’s intellectuals were nowhere near as stalwart in resisting the corresponding temptations to extremism that arose on the Left. Though the reign of Tsar Alexander II (1855–1881) brought significant reforms, the ever-radicalizing Left remained unsatisfied, demanding more—including the removal of the dynasty, root and branch. But the stated position of conservative liberals such as the jurist Boris Chicherin was that modernization could come *from* the tsar, not in spite of him. The end of serfdom in 1861 was followed by the liberalization of Russian universities, the establishment of trial by jury, and the creation of self-governing provincial and rural assemblies known as *Zemstva*. In a series of impressive writings, Chicherin declared that “the essence of conservative liberalism” lay “in reconciling the principle of freedom with the principle of power and law.” But this idea of a “strong system of power...preserving order [and] strictly watching over the fulfilment of the law” was anathema to those with the loudest and most influential voices in what the Russians called “educated

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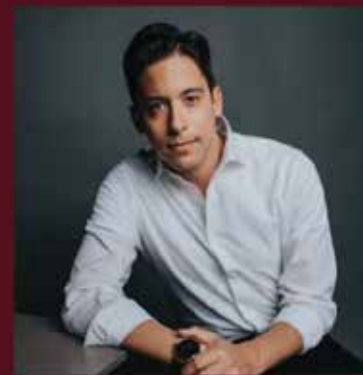
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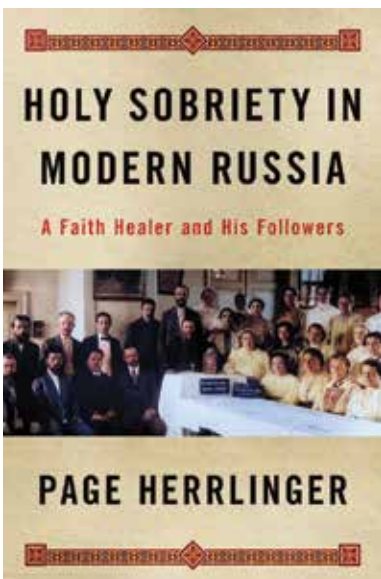
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society.” These leftists were in truth more radical than liberal, addicted to utopia and dreamland at the expense of responsible governance and piecemeal reform. In practice this meant impatience with compromise and unyielding hostility to Russia’s patrimonial inheritance. In his recent *Wonder Confronts Certainty* (2023), Northwestern University literary critic Gary Saul Morson ably illustrates how the uncompromising idealism of the intelligentsia translated into a politics of unbounded destruction and iconoclasm.

ALEKSANDR II, THE “TSAR LIBERATOR,” was murdered in March 1881 by The People’s Will, a cruel and single-minded terrorist organization whose members included Vladimir Lenin’s brother. A period of genuine “reaction” followed under Tsar Aleksandr III and the Procurator of the Orthodox Church, Konstantin Pobedonostsev. Tsar Aleksandr II was blown up by terrorists precisely when he was on the brink of adopting a plan to establish rudimentary representative institutions (building on the *Zemstva*) and a State Council that would truly share in governing Russia. As this example illustrates, the revolutionary impulse in Russia has *always* been an obstacle to real, if gradual, reform. The revolutionaries knew only how to destroy.

After the Revolution of 1905, which followed Russia’s humiliating defeat in the Russo-Japanese War, Tsar Nicholas II reluctantly accepted the October Manifesto, which outlined the first steps toward a constitutional order. But as Robinson shows in both *Russian Conservatism* and *Russian Liberalism*, Russian liberals remained fundamentally “oppositional.” Russia’s leading liberal party, the Constitutional Democrats or “Kadets,” refused to condemn the terrorism that would take more than 10,000 lives by 1909. They saw “no enemies on the Left,” a willful blindness that would come to haunt them when they themselves fell victim to Bolshevik terror after 1917.

The faux liberals of the Left adamantly refused to cooperate with Russia’s new prime minister Pyotr Stolypin. As Robinson details, Stolypin “sought to stabilize the country through a two-pronged strategy of repression and reform” beginning in 1906. The “repression,” much bewailed by the intelligentsia, was directed against the most unsavory elements: terrorists and violent revolutionaries. Stolypin set up a legal system of field courts martial to try “people whose guilt had supposedly already been determined beyond all doubt.” Three thousand terrorists were ultimately sentenced to death. Given the scope of the ongoing national upheaval that was tak-

ing place, this was a significant but relatively minor episode. Stolypin’s real importance in Russia’s history lies elsewhere.

BOTH RICHARD PIPES AND ALEKSANDR Solzhenitsyn, respectively Russia’s historian-critic par excellence and her greatest patriot, agreed that Stolypin was a world-class statesman and a true conservative liberal. He was committed to freeing the more industrious peasants from the tutelage, backwardness, and penury of the *miri*, raising them up to become sturdy, prosperous citizens and farmers. He was in the process of healing the divide between the few and the many (Dostoevsky’s great goal) and building representative institutions. Russia’s legislative assembly (or *Duma*), reformed by Stolypin, used a weighted system of suffrage that represented civil society while keeping the revolutionary spirit at bay. Stolypin’s efforts began to bear fruit in just a few short years. But, explains Robinson, the profoundly mediocre Tsar Nicholas II grew tired of his prime minister’s patient efforts, and “liberals turned down repeated offers to cooperate with the government.” For all that autocracy was gradually transforming to become more like constitutional monarchy, liberals could only see what one oppositionist called a “decrepit Polizei Staat.”

In the fall of 1911, Stolypin was assassinated by a double-agent of the tsarist secret police, the *Okhrana*, and the Socialist Revolutionaries. Reactionaries and revolutionaries united in marking for death Russia’s wisest and most formidable statesman, who had masterfully combined reformist zeal with Burkean prudence. More than Robinson himself does, I agree with Frankfurt University’s Victor Leontovitsch in his seminal *History of Liberalism in Russia* (1957): Stolypin’s conservative liberalism represented the *only* form of Russian liberalism that could have hoped to resist both leftist absurdities and reactionary nostalgia, managing thereby to remain truly liberal. As Solzhenitsyn powerfully demonstrated in eight crucial chapters of the enhanced version of *August 1914* (published in English in 1989), Stolypin did more for ordered liberty than anyone in Russian history. With wisdom and steely determination, he “steer[ed] Russia along this strange middle channel.” He was opposed by “right extremists” who wished to “return to irresponsible government” and false liberals “who were as immoderate as only Russian liberals can be, and who wished not to see the state make headway.” Yet despite his excellent treatments of Stolypin and Solzhenitsyn in both his books, it is a shame that Robinson never makes the crucial connection between them:

it was Solzhenitsyn who restored Stolypin to a central place in the Russian political tradition.

OF COURSE, THE INDUSTRIOUS PEASANTS unleashed by Stolypin's reforms would be murdered and sent to the Gulag *en masse* during the Soviet collectivization of agriculture between 1929 and 1934. They would make up the bulk of the so-called kulaks. Serfdom was thus restored in all but name and enforced with a savage cruelty unimaginable under the Old Regime. Still worse, the new serfs were denied the consolation of their religious faith by an atheist state that set out to destroy Russian Orthodoxy once and for all. This is perhaps the most fearsome indictment possible of the leftists who tore apart the Russia they inherited, and the liberals who stood by and watched them do it. Instead of taking up the challenge of moderating the existing state's cruelties and excesses, they swept the whole thing away in the foolish expectation of erecting something flawlessly modern in its place. But they only redoubled the primitive abuses and monstrosities inherent in despotism.

In both volumes Robinson highlights the powerful blow dealt to the intellectual class by the 1909 collection of essays titled *Vekhi* (*Landmarks* or *Signposts*). Its nine authors, four of them Jewish and the rest philosophical idealists or Orthodox Christians, exposed the intellectual and spiritual irresponsibility of the Russian intelligentsia. One contributor, the "Marxist-turned-Orthodox theologian" Sergei Bulgakov, offered a particularly scathing portrait of the faddish intellectual cliques that superficially aped Western ideas, compulsively pushing theoretical abstractions to inhuman extremes. A few years earlier, Bulgakov had written an equally devastating essay on "Karl Marx as a Religious Type," which highlighted the deadly consequences of Marx's abstract love for (revolutionary) Humanity at the expense of real human beings. Another *Vekhi* essayist, the ex-Marxist Pyotr Struve, attacked the "moral frivolity and political incompetence" of Russian intellectuals who severed politics from a balanced conception of spiritual life. Like Western progressives, they were obsessed by "the external organization of social life" while ignoring "man's inner perfection" and the proper ordering of the soul. The philosopher Semyon Frank pointedly emphasized the intelligentsia's deadly combination of "nihilistic utilitarianism" with a "mechanical-rationalistic theory of happiness," a sort of "religion of socialism" which was at once sentimental, cruel, and coercive. Robinson quotes one of Frank's keenest insights: behind the Russian intellectual's supposedly

"selfless" dedication to scientism, utopianism, and modern "progress" lurked an assessment of the human person just as low, debased, and reductive as that of "robbers, mercenary murderers, hooligans, and unbridled lovers of sexual depravity." One still sees this—the latter in particular—among the members of today's intellectual class.

THE AUTHORS OF *VEKHI*, UNCLASSIFIABLE politically but hardly leftists of any sort by 1909, keenly saw what was on the horizon: crude, spiteful, and deadly revolution, to be followed by a truly unprecedented form of ideological totalitarianism. Liberals such as Pavel Miliukov, leader of the Kadets, got their wish: the overthrow of the tsarist regime in February 1917, right in the middle of a war in which Russia was fighting for her life. The Kadets were part of the feckless descent into chaos and anarchy that occasioned the brief "rule," or lack thereof, of the so-called Provisional Government of 1917. In the West the pathetic liberals and socialists of the Provisional Government are still celebrated as "democratic heroes."

In the deadly civil war that followed and the subsequent consolidation of absolute power in what became the Soviet Union, the remnant of Russian political thought was banished to foreign lands. It was carried by the millions of émigrés who fled to eastern, central, and western Europe. Paris, Prague, Belgrade, and Berlin now became the centers of Russian intellectual life. Liberals such as Miliukov were chastened and discredited. But though they deplored the horrors of Bolshevism, most stubbornly insisted on holding onto their quasi-progressive ideas and ideology.

One of the most welcome features of Robinson's work is the way it draws attention to the legal theorist Ivan Ilyin (1883–1954), the most influential thinker associated with the "White" movement. ("Whites" were an ideologically varied group of anti-Bolsheviks who resisted the "Reds" in the Russian Civil War and later from abroad.) Yale historian Timothy Snyder has proposed indefensibly that Ilyin advanced a "metaphysical and moral justification for political totalitarianism" and that he defended lawlessness in the name of patriotism. This view is now frequently recirculated in the pages of *The New York Review of Books* and other *bien-pensant* venues. But contra Snyder, Robinson shows that Ilyin was a right-Hegelian who firmly defended the rule of law, exhibiting a healthy and balanced legal consciousness. While expressing support for some authoritarian (but anti-totalitarian) governments, such as that of Engelbert Doll-

fuss in Vienna, he despised the oppressive methods and anti-Semitic policies of Nazi Germany and fled Berlin for Switzerland in 1938. He was a monarchist and constitutionalist, advocating the use of force to dislodge the despotic regime that had taken hold of his beloved Russia. Robinson points out that Ilyin's 1925 masterpiece, *On Resistance to Evil By Force*, "argued that the use of force against evil was not only justifiable but on occasion mandatory" when dealing with an intrinsically evil regime. Like Solzhenitsyn after him, Ilyin viewed Leo Tolstoy's equation of Christianity with pacifism and passivity as an invitation to disaster.

WERE THERE LIBERALS AND CONSERVATIVES under Soviet rule at its height? Yes and no. Only in the most attenuated senses of the words could we call hardcore Leninist-Stalinists "conservative" by comparison to putatively "liberal" economic reformers, who accepted the main contours of the planned economy while proposing to tinker at the margins. But Robinson usefully highlights the so-called "village authors," such as Valentin Rasputin, who had enough leeway from the 1970s onward to lament the Soviet destruction of the village and countryside (without openly attacking the Communist system they despised). And after Nikita Khrushchev shut down 12,000 of the 20,000 Orthodox churches between 1955 and 1964, 14 million Soviet citizens eventually joined the officially sanctioned All-Russian Society for the Preservation of Historical and Cultural Movements. Conservative winds were blowing through the decayed and shambolic Soviet edifice, where Marxist-Leninism was rapidly losing its moral and political legitimacy.

At the beginning of the post-Communist era, liberals, as dogmatic as ever, had their moment in the sun. But unlike their predecessors under the Russian Old Regime, they were almost exclusively concerned with radical economic reform, a preoccupation that led many of their critics to call them Market Bolsheviks. Figures such as Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar, the architect of an ill-conceived "shock therapy" intended to jolt the economy forcibly into action, tended in their zealotry to look down on workaday Russians. They did not particularly care that as a result of their efforts many ordinary people were impoverished, and unscrupulous insider "oligarchs" enriched. The latter, men such as the late Boris Berezovsky and Mikhail Khodorkovsky (who is still at large, having recently reinvented himself as a liberal "human rights" crusader), exhibited a positively legendary degree of corruption.



More broadly, Russian liberals were largely incapable of reconciling their abstract defense of “liberty” with the concrete requirements of patriotism, piety, and pre-Soviet traditions. Today, the only admirers of Boris Yeltsin, the president who presided over the calamities of the Russian 1990s, are in the West. That is quite telling indeed.

RUSSIAN LIBERALS HAVE NOW BEEN widely discredited by their calamitous “reforms” and their blind acquiescence to Western foreign policy. This is fraught territory, but it must be traversed in order to complete the story of Russian political development to date. As early as 1997, NATO sent out new invitations for Poland, Hungary, and Czechia to join the alliance. This, along with American military intervention in Serbia in 1998, made Russians (including many Russian liberals) deeply suspicious of Western intentions regarding a still largely prostrate Russia. Today, efforts to include Ukraine in NATO are strongly opposed by almost all Russians, including liberals.

On the other hand, conservatism in post-Communist Russia remains a diverse and variegated phenomenon. There are nasty elements: ultranationalists and National Bolsheviks, who at their extremity embody a fusion of Red Guard and Brownshirt symbolism and ideology. This is a dangerous and ill-advised combination, though largely ineffective politically. In his 1998 book, *Russia in Collapse* (excerpts of which can be found in the 2006 *Solzhenitsyn Reader* that I co-edited), Solzhenitsyn defended “a clean, loving, constructive Russian patriotism.” He contrasted this with the “radical nationalist” quest for “a small-minded alliance with our communist destroyers.” Unfortunately, the radical nationalist hard-liners, not Russia’s enervated liberals, are the likely political alternative to Putin.

To his great credit, Robinson faithfully conveys Solzhenitsyn’s efforts to harmonize a range of complementary concerns. He valued

not only “external freedom” (political liberty) and the rule of law, but also and above all the “inner freedom” that the human soul needs to flourish. Robinson emphasizes Solzhenitsyn’s insistence on “national repentance and self-limitation,” especially for the crimes of Communism. He refused to identify love of country with a support for great power politics and limitless expansion abroad. “Solzhenitsyn’s ideal was decidedly anti-imperial and involved a much smaller Russia than had existed therefore,” writes Robinson. This is in welcome and stark contrast to the lazy Western caricature of Solzhenitsyn as a dangerous “nationalist,” if not a quasi-fascist to boot. There is a whole cottage industry of pseudo-experts and ill-informed commentators who specialize in getting Solzhenitsyn wrong. Paul Robinson provides the antidote, presenting him as the humane and patriotic liberal conservative that he was.

BUT THERE REMAINS THE ELEPHANT in the room: Vladimir Putin. Contrary to the regnant presumption, he is hardly a Bolshevik or an aspiring Stalin. He values Russian statehood and territorial integrity, but he loathes Lenin and all his works. He has even encouraged the mandatory teaching of Solzhenitsyn’s *Gulag Archipelago* in Russian public schools. Until recently, writes Robinson, he “combined his desire for a strong state with repeated rejections of authoritarianism and totalitarianism.” The Russian president has repeatedly quoted Ilyin; he is generally sympathetic to a moderately statist version of market economics, and thus to some liberal attitudes. At a deeper level, he regularly defends what in 2014 he called “fundamental conservative values” such as “patriotism and respect for the history, traditions, and culture of one’s country.” He is not committed to restoring the Soviet Union, nor is that a motive behind his disastrous war with Ukraine. If anything it is more germane to observe that Putin is deeply suspicious of the woke regime in the

West and the LGBTQ+ ideology that informs it.

But things are changing for the worse. Putin has stayed in power for a long time—too long. His domineering presence has crowded out real political life. His rule has become more authoritarian and heavy-handed, less “autocratic” in the traditional Russian sense. (Russian conservatives never identified autocracy with arbitrariness and despotism.) Some of his most fevered supporters want “nothing bad said about Russia,” and that does mean about the Soviet Union, too. For example, *The Gulag Archipelago* is under increasing assault in schools from both Communists and “ultra-patriots” in Putin’s party, even if it still has Putin’s support. Putin is fast forgetting that civic freedom is an integral element of a healthy national and public life. A vicious circle ensues: the West grows ever more anti-Russian, sometimes stupidly and hysterically, even as “official” Russia throws dirt at everything Western. There is blame for this sad situation to be cast on all parties.

As Solzhenitsyn amply chronicled in *Between Two Millstones* (2018-20, in the English translation), his memoir of 20 years in forced exile to the West between 1974 and 1994, the West has many weaknesses. These have deepened in recent years. As he put it, Russia has every right to be “different in terms of faith, traditions, and way of life.” But, Solzhenitsyn added, Russia could learn a great deal from the Western world at its best about civic openness and salutary self-criticism. The 19th-century tsars “had their head in the clouds” and often lost sight of what the West had to offer. Putin is fast losing sight of it, too.

Russia’s liberal conservatives never did. In that recognition lies hope that Russia will again find *her own* path toward civilized liberty.

Daniel J. Mahoney is professor emeritus at Assumption University and a senior fellow of the Claremont Institute. He is completing a book titled The Persistence of the Ideological Lie, to be published by Encounter Books.

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