

DOI: 10.37240/TI.2018/9.2.5

THE SHOCKS OF HISTORY. THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF REVOLUTION AS EMERGING FROM LEV KARSAVIN'S VIEWS

By **LESZEK AUGUSTYN**

The range of issues discussed in this article oscillates around the response the Russian revolution called forth in Lev Platonovich Karsavin (1882-1952), the nature of that reaction being theoretical and, of necessity, philosophical and political as well. In his writings, not only was he concerned with the outbreak and the immediate aftermath of the revolutionary turmoil, but he also remained a keen commentator on its dramatic course and the long-term repercussions. In this paper, Karsavin's reflections, whose primary goal was to fathom the nature and pinpoint the characteristic hallmarks of the Russian revolution, have additionally been re-evaluated against the broader backdrop of this Russian thinker's philosophical views, especially those that pertain to historiosophical and religio-philosophical dimensions. It must be stressed here that the employment of thus augmented analytical approach is the only way to fully appreciate Karsavin's perspective on the phenomenon of the Russian revolution, as well as its historical paths and its anticipated future ramifications.

Key words: Lev Karsavin, Russian revolution, Eurasianism, Russian philosophy

The violent seizure of political power in Russia by the Bolshevik party could not have failed to call forth resonance amidst the current crop of Russian thinkers of that time, and even more so, given the fact that that dramatic political crescendo came to a head on the heels of a long run-up characterized by revolutionary unrest. Of course, the attitudes exhibited by those intellectuals were to a large extent inflected by the prevailing circumstances, increasing political reprisals, in particular. Par for the course, the radical and destructive character of such violently transformative developments galvanized intellectual dissent, moral outrage and a desire for counteraction. In time, the authorities chose to crack down on the particularly vocal, and henceforth inconvenient segment of the Russian intelligentsia, religious philosophers included. Such citizens were subjected to persecution and exiled outside the borders of the Bolshevik Russia, with such a forced mass exodus taking place in 1922. One of the exiles leaving the homeland was Lev Platonovitch Karsavin (1882-1952) – a distinguished medievalist, historian of philosophy, culture philosopher and a religious thinker. He had hitherto been active exclusively in academia and in the field of intellectual commentatorship, but some time following his forcible expatriation, his activity became visibly politicized. It is arguable that the stimulus for, and inception of his interest in current affairs could be attributed to his subsequent

LESZEK AUGUSTYN

exposure to Eurasian concepts, which, for a stretch of time, profoundly preoccupied his mind. That new intellectual enthusiasm led him to work on philosophical underpinnings for the Eurasian ideas; he was also impelled to elaborate the still disputed scope of the new discipline. Thus, the revolutionary transformations in Russia and the attendant concerns about the future of his homeland thrust upon him the need for taking a politically involved stand.

To address the issue of transparency, it merits a note here that both the concept of the 'phenomenology of revolution' and the exact wording of this designation, used in the subtitle of this paper have been sourced from the nomenclature proposed by this Russian thinker. In 1927, Karsavin published an extensive article bearing this very title.¹ Henceforth, assisted by the presence of the Russian thinker, we are well equipped to pit ourselves against the phenomenon of revolution as such, as well as trying to fathom 'the phenomenology of revolution.' What do these two concepts signify? What are their implications? However, before we embark upon the process of elucidation of these questions, we need to insert one caveat: notwithstanding the manifest and unquestionable merit with which we credit Karsavin's views and observations *per se*, our study is not focused on merely cataloguing them. Rather, we wish to peruse his writings with a view to extracting implicit information shedding light on the true character of the Bolshevik revolution, recounted by an eyewitness to those events keenly absorbed by this thinker's mind. Still, it almost begs the question whether the Karsavin-pioneered 'phenomenology' truly expands and enhances our perception of that revolutionary upheaval, helping us to better comprehend its unique, phenomenological parameters. We need to self-consciously bear in mind that it could very well be to the contrary: the phenomenological thinking could prove to be a distorting vantage point, begetting misunderstandings and confusion. Should the latter transpire to be the case, we will need to posit the query whether Karsavin's philosophical-political misconceptions are nonetheless redeemed by the cognitively and speculatively appealing alternative take on the reality under investigation, as well as by the practical cautionary tale reminding us of the need for further critical scrutiny and clarification.

1. THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF DISEASE

A vivid resonance of the fundamental premise of Karsavin's phenomenology of revolution can be discerned in the overarching generalization that each particular revolution bears the hallmarks of revolution as such. But what is the actual referential pattern of the above formulation? Any initial attempts to address this question

¹ Lev Platonovitch Karsavin, 'Fenomenologia revolucii', *Evraziskii vremennik*, 5/1927, p. 28-74. When readers are in need of supplementation, useful information on this conception can be found in an article 'Osnovy politiki', featured in the same issue of *The Eurasian Chronicles*.

THE SHOCKS OF HISTORY. THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF REVOLUTION AS EMERGING...

direct our attention to philosophy of history, whose framework and constructs should be in aid of analysing the existence of historical entities from the point of view of spatiotemporal manifestations of disintegration, which otherwise could be treated as the upshot of the dissolution of a fundamental harmonious state of unity. This perspective stands to reason, as every autonomous concrete element, albeit fragmentary, embedded in the historical process, should be understood as a reflection of the unity constituting the supreme form of pan-unity. Therefore, every individual constituent part must be recognized as a unity interactively integrated within a larger unified lattice; by extension, the impact of such lower-tier elements propagates itself to unities of higher orders, both directly and remotely. In other words, every segment is 'a unity reflecting the sum total of unities,' and on the empirical level it manifests itself in 'contracted' form. Likewise, historical time is subject to subsumption within the compass of the meta-historical overarching temporal pan-unity. By the same token, every cognitive consciousness – perceived both as a moment of pan-unity and its individual, 'contracted' counterpart – never abandons the habitat of its assigned place in terms of space and time. Hence, any random event is informed by and expressive of the meaning of the dynamic model of the historical entity, i.e. the ever-evolving historical process. (As a digression, it is worth reminding here that the idea of 'contraction' – Lat. *contractio*, Russ. *stiazhenie* – is a metaphysics-related word encountered in the literary output of Nicholas of Cusa.) On the strength of the above approach, the phenomenology of revolution contributes to the revelation of metaphysical premises, which in this case obviously pertain to Karsavin's version of the metaphysics of pan-unity. Plausibly, the metaphysics of pan-unity may constitute a springboard for the elaboration of the symphonic personality theory; at least, this is Karsavin's conviction.

Thus, in essence, revolution as such is one of the manifestations of the 'state' or the 'activity' of a symphonic personality. For the sake of academic integrity it must be underscored here that the concept of symphonic personality was significantly entwined, if temporarily, with Eurasian ideas; nonetheless, this ideology should solely be treated as a 'source of inspiration'² for the emergence of the notion of 'symphonic personality' and not as a fully-fledged implemented policy. Karsavin's reflections feature the term 'symphonic personality,' which is occasionally interchanged with 'communitarian personality.' Envisioned as one of the key instruments facilitating philosophical explorations, it was pioneered in 1927. There is patent coincidence of this date and the period in which Karsavin showed profound affinity with Eurasian ideas and became a dedicated advocate of the ideology they were spawning.³ There is even much to warrant the contention that

² Roman Bäcker, *Międzywojenny eurazjatyzm. Od intelektualnej kontrakulturacji do totalitaryzmu?* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 2000), p. 100.

³ The term 'communitarian' (*sobornii*) – for clarity, a nomenclatural heirloom bequeathed by A. S. Khomiakov, one of Karsavin's female-side ancestors; the range of denotations includes: the congregation of multiple elements into one, unity in multiplicity, pan-unity, concord, harmony, etc.

LESZEK AUGUSTYN

the impulse for the formulation of the notion of symphonic personality originated from the philosopher's exposure to Eurasianism.⁴ However, it must be added here that the 1929 publication of Karsavin's *On personality (O ličnosti)* discharges the term of the undesirable association with the Eurasian provenance, thus allowing for the survival of its purged, strictly philosophical pertinence.⁵ Still, from the very inception of its currency, the concept of symphonic personality was called into question by its detractors. What seemed the most indictable to it was its dubious totalitarian and impersonal profile. It may, however, have been so that this disparaging interpretation stemmed from the purely 'external,' empirical understanding of the individual-based brand of hierarchism, rather than appreciating Karsavin's unique 'dialectical' angle, prioritizing the relationship between individual parts and the integral unity, as well as between 'the higher' and 'the lower' personalities.⁶ But even though the final settlement of this dispute is still pending, and some of the aspects of the symphonic personality theory could possibly be out of sync with the precepts of Karsavin's philosophy of personalism, they could at least lend themselves as a tool for analysing the behaviour of social units, which also includes revolutionary upheavals.⁷ And since the phenomenon of revolution is part and parcel of this analysis, we will proceed along these lines.

In his text entitled *The Church, Personality and the State (Tserkov', ličnost' i gosudarstvo, 1927)* Karsavin pioneers and elaborates on these metaphysico-social considerations, and they represent a key element of his sensibilities.

Mediating between the unique, collective personality of the whole Church and individual personalities are personalities who unify the sundry entities, and, in the process, the unifying personalities become unities for the individuals. In

– the essence of *sobornii* is reflected by the German *symphonisch*, equivalent to English *symphonic*, cf. Lev Platonovitch Karsavin, 'Apologetičeskii etiud', in Lev Platonovitch Karsavin, *Malye sočinenia* (Saint Petersburg: AO Aleteia, 1994), p. 378.

⁴ Yulia Bilialovna Melich, *Personalizm L. P. Karsavina i evropejskaia filosofia* (Moscow: Progress-Tradiciia, 2003), p. 217.

⁵ Sergei Sergeevitch Khoruzhii, 'Zhyzn' i učenje Lva Karsavina', in *Lev Platonovitch Karsavin*, ed. S. S. Khoruzhii (Moscow: Rosspen, 2012), p. 57-58, 69. In the *On Personality* treatise, the holistic perspective is maintained, as the world bears out the personal dimension of its identity through humanity, with the latter representing the former's 'pan-unitarian symphonic personality' establishing 'the hierarchical unity of symphonic personalities of varied orders, individual personalities included'; cf. Lev Platonovitch Karsavin, 'O ličnosti', in Lev Platonovitch Karsavin, *Religiozno-filosofskie sočinenia*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Renessans, 1992), p. 98.

⁶ As claimed by Igor Ivanovitch Yevlampiev, in *Istoria russkoi metafiziki v XIX-XX vekach. Russkaia filosofia v poiskach Absoluta*, volume 2 (Saint Petersburg: Aleteia, 2000), p. 196.

⁷ Sergei Sergeevitch Khoruzhii, *Filosofia Karsavina v sud'bach evropeiskoi mysli o ličnosti*, in *Lev Platonovitch Karsavin*, p. 213.

THE SHOCKS OF HISTORY. THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF REVOLUTION AS EMERGING...

order to differentiate between individual personalities, the unique, collective all-encompassing personality of the Church, and the unifying agents, the last group is referred to as communitarian or symphonic personalities.⁸

It is worth emphasizing here that excerpts from *The Phenomenology of Revolution* are characterised by a heightened level of specificity in the author's speculations, narrowing the focus down to the realm of politics:

From an empirical standpoint, a symphonic personality externalizes itself through various qualitative profiles [Russ. *kačestvovania*], demonstrating varying levels of intensity and bias, be it political, economic, religious or otherwise. As regards methodological aspects, it is imperative that the analytical point of departure zoom in on the qualification dominating in a particular stage of development. In the case of a revolutionary period, what attains the most pronounced qualitative prominence is the political dimension, as matters concerning politics bear on the unity most profoundly.⁹

Therefore, when it comes to the marrow of history – conceived as both our reflections on the vicissitudes of life and as its structured exploration within the organized framework of the relevant academic discipline – it derives its salience from personality. We need to be mindful of the distinction into individual personalities and their symphonic counterparts. As regards our research objectives, the latter types of personality are exemplified most interestingly by the phenomena of nation and culture. And a symphonic personality can be defined as '[...] a system of interconnecting transactions between individuals effectively giving rise to a particular symphonic identity; it is a system that is vividly and cogently expressive of the individuals' cohesion, affording this group a profile of union impossible to replicate among other analogous associations (other «nations» or other «cultures»).' ¹⁰ Henceforth, in this very understanding, a symphonic personality is 'superior' to an individual personality.

Symphonic personalities *per se*, along with the systems channelling them, surpass both temporally and spatially empirical, individual personalities. The empirical actualization of each symphonic personality invariably incorporates both its past, in the form of tradition, and its future signified by aspirations, hopes and ambitions. Yet the full breadth and depth of a symphonic personality, its very symphonic scope or collectiveness, transcends empirical expression.¹¹

⁸ Lev Platonovitch Karsavin, 'Tserkov, ličnost' i gosudarstvo', in Karsavin, *Malye sočinenia*, p. 419.

⁹ Karsavin, 'Fenomenologia revolucii', p. 33.

¹⁰ Karsavin, 'Fenomenologia revolucii', p. 34.

¹¹ Karsavin, 'Fenomenologia revolucii', p. 34.

LESZEK AUGUSTYN

The realization of such a concrete symphonic personality presupposes 'consensual commitment from a multiplicity of individual acts.' Little wonder, then, that the virtue of 'fullness' defined here along the lines of axiological and ontological perfection, is attainable only in the Christian Orthodox Church. And when a symphonic personality is trammelled by some 'political qualification,' it is taken hostage to a series of empirical constraints. When it comes to the paradigm of empirical necessities, they are exemplified by the fact that the existence of each social organism – which conforms to the definition of an empirically expressed symphonic personality materialized by virtue of its individual, contributing agents – is contingent upon the principle of coercion and power. The ruling class constitutes an empirical expression of the will and consciousness of the symphonic personality. Thus, if dissenting sentiments start bubbling up with increasing ferocity, members of society at large invoke and act on the proverb that 'A fish always rots from the head down,' to wax a bit colloquial. Galvanized by this guideline, disaffected and politicized nations or societies, succumbing to knee-jerk radicalism, make a beeline for the abolition of the old ruling class, allegedly increasingly 'steeped in corruption,' even though the rebels as such are in the dark about the ultimate goals of the revolution.

When Karsavin sits in judgement on the nature of revolution, he blames it on a malady-stricken symphonic personality. In one of his descriptions of such a problem, this thinker presents, or, to put it more appositely, diagnoses it with a view to gauging 'the level of intensity,' which is defined by him as the distance separating a historical identity (i.e. supra-individual symphonic personality) from the absolute (i.e. pan-unity). This way of reasoning alludes to the moment of the most advanced stage of organic development in the historical dimension, which means 'the apogee of historical individuality;' therefore, this kind of reference entails the presupposition of a broader theory of historical entity. Thus, the absolute becomes the ultimate point of reference on the scale reflecting empirically-historical perfection. And were we to examine the phenomenon of revolution against the backdrop of this benchmark, such an upheaval would merit the diagnosis of declining strength. No wonder, the author of *The Philosophy of History (Filosofia istorii, 1923)*, choosing to make his text wax polemical, writes:

For example, some are inclined to look on revolution as an expression of strength. However, there is much to warrant the opposite thesis: revolution is a symptom of diminishing strength. [...] Revolutionary turmoil does not do anything constructive. Of course, it regurgitates ideas formulated previously, which nevertheless does amount to some activity. However, if we compare the accomplishments of a revolution with the legacy of more peaceful periods, the latter will prove more deserving. Thus, a realization will dawn on us that a revolutionary reaction has more to do with hysteria, and, for all I know, such

THE SHOCKS OF HISTORY. THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF REVOLUTION AS EMERGING...

behaviour demonstrates a strung-out mental disposition and an inability to seek attention or realize one's ambitions otherwise.¹²

Reading on, we find out that the author does not mince his words painting a graphic picture of the violent escalation of the 'revolutionary disease'. Revolution here is portrayed as an abscess – swelling and festering, rupturing, and finally being removed. In this instance, the medical imagery may strike us as somewhat offensive and disgusting:

The long and short of revolution can be summed up in the fact that all nourishing juices of the statehood hitherto in existence concentrate and organize as one abscess, isolating itself from the healthy tissues (*piemia saccata*) and persisting as an entrenched, old-guard regime; but the healthy tissues are deprived of any nourishing sap of statehood. As, at some point, the abscess ruptures and the pus oozes out profusely, the healthy tissues should neutralize the pus and secrete a new kind of sap; however, this ineluctably precipitates the elevation of body temperature and harrowing afflictions. A good remedy to be considered is drainage of the wound – the removal of the pus by means of emigration.¹³

The above description pertains to the anarchistic phase of a revolution, and it appears to be a period of particular intensity of the disease, hence the heightened fever.¹⁴ This rebellious stage is dominated by inordinately egoistic attitudes, which customarily come along in the wake of the debilitating dismantlement of the old order. In addition, this period sets the stage for some resolutions made on the spur of the moment, and it puts in train some mechanisms conducive towards a long-awaited recovery. Otherwise, the only alternative left would be to passively succumb to the process of degeneration, ultimately leading to death.

2. HISTORY AND REVOLUTION

Anatolii Vanieyev, a fellow political prisoner and a guardian of historical heritage, while reminiscing about Karsavin's stance on metaphysical matters, offers the following

¹² Lev Platonovitch Karsavin, *Filosofia istorii* (Saint Petersburg: AO Komplekt, 1993), p. 202.

¹³ Karsavin, 'Fenomenologia revolucii', p. 51.

¹⁴ The metaphoric application of the trope of fever to symbolize revolution appears also in Crane Brinton's *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1965), p. 16-18. (The book was first published in 1938). Obviously, in this respect the deployment of this metaphor is confined only to the conceptual template, with no insinuation of any affinity whatsoever with social organicism. For more information on this issue cf.: Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Revolucja rosyjska*, trans. J. Bożek (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2017), p. 185-186.

LESZEK AUGUSTYN

emphatic characterisation: 'Karsavin's cogitation on abstract issues is always anchored and rooted in the fabric of concrete realities. His ideas emerge from, or, to use a better expression, are the fruit of philosophical and religious meditation on his own life and the history of humankind.'¹⁵ Therefore, it is fully justified to distinguish two distinct dimensions in Karsavin's metaphysical thought: the individual (lyrical), and the universal (historical). The latter domain, not in all but in the predominant number of cases, seems to be the better framework for the exploration of the metaphysics of history. The following lines telescopically sketch out the very rudiments of the metaphysics of history.

According to Karsavin, it is humankind that takes pride of place, indeed, when it comes to any historical analysis, but he adds a twist to this commitment as for him the ultimate personality embodied in humanity is a symphonic one. Still, this ultimateness is not tantamount to humanity's perfection. He clarifies further that in his vision a historical reality should be viewed as 'humankind's dynamic, ongoing pan-unitarian evolution towards perfection through imperfection.'¹⁶ Thus the history of humanity can be pictured as a lower-tier counterpart of the ultimate pan-unity. The former stands for the consolidated multiplicity of symphonic personalities, which this Russian philosopher contextualised in relation to the absolute (i.e. God) and evaluated in terms of the sophiological level of all creation – i.e. 'the ecclesial personality'. The entirety of the reality of one entity manifests itself and instantiates itself as a distinctive specificity of this and this entity only through moments of pan-unity.

Hence, if we invoke the notion of an omnitemporal and omnispatial entity as a premise for further predication, it must be assumed that from the perspective of eternity every such 'instance,' every historical moment, or every temporary state of an entity is identical in the case of all entities. In fact, each 'one and only' entity, representing an individualization of pan-unity is a manifestation of pan-unity. This connection can be accomplished directly (as an individual personality) or indirectly (as collective personalities, social personalities, symphonic personalities...). On a historical level, all such moments of pan-unity are considered to be individualizations of higher personalities. The world is comprised of a multiplicity of personalities, whose natures are individual, social (restricted to human entities) and symphonic (concerning our relations to other people and the universe). The philosopher asserts that the replication of the same pattern is responsible for the formation of the complete structure of the quiddity of the world, i.e. of all things created.

Imperfect humanity presents itself as a system of its personalities, each of which (culture, nation, family, etc.) individualizes it in a specific way, by the same token

¹⁵ Anatolii Anatolevitch Vanieiev, 'Očerck zhyzni i idei L. P. Karsavina', *Zvezda*, 12/1990, p. 140.

¹⁶ Karsavin, *Filosofia istorii*, p. 137.

THE SHOCKS OF HISTORY. THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF REVOLUTION AS EMERGING...

self-individualizing systemically and in a hierarchically descending order down to concrete individuals, representing 'quoad nos' relatively-last personalities.¹⁷

Thus, it behoves us to acknowledge that the notion of pan-unity stands the philosopher in good stead for designating the static sense of existence, while the dynamic nature of being is alluded to by triadism – the ontic process of coming into existence. Thanks to this arrangement, the whole of manifest existence is underpinned by such a dynamically understood tripartite structure. The tri-unity of existence is legitimized by the theological doctrine of The Holy Trinity as well as by the principle of metaphysical personalism (the theory of personality). Here, the scheme of things postulates the operation of a three-stage process: 'proto-unity' – 'self-differentiation' – self-unification (*pervoedinstvo – samoraz'edinenie – samovossoedinenie*).¹⁸ In the case of every personality (as well as every historical entity realizing its development within the framework of its grand hosting matrix), it is worth noting that any instance of historical evolution towards perfection should also be assayed against the touchstone of 'the perfect personality,' which is 'the supreme crystallization of the ideal instance of personality as such, i.e. God incarnate, Jesus Christ.'¹⁹ (This concept connotes a self-sacrificing divinity, who through self-differentiation and self-unification shows the path for imitation to all creation and patiently awaits the response; let us face it, as illustrated by such love, profound existence boils down to life-through-death). Such Karsavin's quintessentially original understanding of 'development' must not be simplistically misconstrued as a version of progressivism. It must be so because every historical juncture is a 'contracted' manifestation of perfection, and henceforth it nullifies the purely historical ideal of self-actualization. Still, crisis is a perennial element of the dynamism of the historical process. Karsavin's attempt at the elaboration of his version of the history of philosophy strives to achieve an expanded time-continuum transposition of the rules underlying the metaphysics of pan-unity.²⁰ This philosophical enquiry addresses the nature of 'pan-unity-materializing-in-time.' In other words, historical investigation sets its sights on the incessant development of humanity encapsulated by empirical, 'contracted' individualizations, which usually serve as the conduit for the manifestation of the pan-unitarian dimension of humanity.²¹ Any investigative approach fixated exclusively on empirical development is doomed to incompleteness; therefore, historical examination should integrate discrete, disjointed moments by relating them to the one, and only

¹⁷ Lev Platonovitch Karsavin, *O načalah (Opyt hristianskoi metafiziki)* (Petersburg: Scriptorium, Mera, YMCA-Press, 1994), p. 194.

¹⁸ Cf. Khoruzhii, 'Zhyzn' i učenje Lva Karsavina', p. 52.

¹⁹ Karsavin, *Filosofia istorii*, p. 265.

²⁰ Cf. Sławomir Mazurek, *Rosyjski renesans religijno-filozoficzny. Próba syntezy* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Filozofii i Socjologii PAN, 2008), p. 136.

²¹ Karsavin, *Filosofia istorii*, p. 125.

LESZEK AUGUSTYN

one, ever-evolving humanity. Such an approach aims for a rendition of the historical process which is dialectical in character. That notwithstanding, the comprehension of that 'self-revealing-in-contraction' higher unity, which in our case is a collective historical personality, can be only 'imperfectly expressed as a rationalized dialectical process or a systemic unity.'²² And it was the flaw of such a dialectically rationalist take on history that constituted the besetting sin of Hegelian philosophy.²³ It was so because the denotative scope of the notion of 'proto-unity' subsumes everything from the indeterminate to the determinate, from the absolute, inaccessible sphere of what is transcendently remote from our experience to the tangible realness of that which has been revealed. All this immediately conjures up associations with *Deus absconditus* and *Deus incarnatus* (*God that remains hidden*, and *God that is incarnated*) – the two aspects of the primordial unity, the two faces of the absolute. Hegel equates both realms, in a sense circumscribing the former within the latter, with the result that his knowledge remains locked at the purely conceptual level. But the attainment of the third stage – Hegel's synthesis and Karsavin's 'self-differentiation' and 'self-unification' cannot be restricted only to the cognitive domain, needing to extend to the ontological sphere and ensuring 'realness of knowledge.'²⁴ In Hegel's version, the synthesis seems rather impoverished by dint of the preponderance of the determinate in its content.

If we turn these theoretical considerations to practical account and scrutinize a concrete revolutionary reality, at the same time aligning this vantage point with the rather debatable sensibilities of the Russian thinker, we may get the impression that whatever has been hitherto attempted in trying to understand the phenomenon of bolshevism has been rather lopsided and exceedingly restrictive. What needs acknowledging here is that the historical fabric of bolshevism was double-lined and that there were two sides to it: 'the bad' and 'the good', 'the left' and 'the right': '[on the one hand we have] the blunt, coercive rationalism, which merits refutation from the perspective of both objective and absolute points of view, [and on the other we have] moral and religious bathos along with the nation-building fervour, which are all-too-positive in the light of both objective and absolute criteria.'²⁵ No wonder that the revolutionary transformations in Russia call for a more balanced and diversified approach. The issues must be re-imagined with more scope – both horizontally and vertically – by employing Karsavin's philosophy of history. There is no point in marginalizing the holistic and specific character of the Russian revolution.

Apart from such features conditioned by the local and historical circumstances, thus being the product of a particular time and place, the Russian revolution exhibits general hallmarks shared by other similar disruptive developments and is susceptible to

²² Karsavin, *Filosofia istorii*, p. 127.

²³ Karsavin, *Filosofia istorii*, p. 271.

²⁴ Cf. Melich, *Personalizm L. P. Karsavina i evropejskaia filosofia*, p. 105.

²⁵ Karsavin, *Filosofia istorii*, p. 238.

THE SHOCKS OF HISTORY. THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF REVOLUTION AS EMERGING...

evaluation against universal patterns and assessments. The plausibility of this dimension of analysis is mandated by the significance attached by Karsavin himself to the then century-old theory, propounded by a Sabaudian thinker Joseph de Maistre. It has been noted that, with high probability, Karsavin's theory of symphonic personality is beholden to this ultra-Catholic theorist of revolution, and that the level of indebtedness for inspiration here is probably higher than that owed by Karsavin to Khomiakov.²⁶ Without risking any exaggeration concerning theoretical interpretation, it can be claimed that the approaches exhibited by De Maistre and Karsavin alike were impregnated with religious premises. The former perceived a nation as a living organism, the subject of historical developments and a representation of humanity. Does it not go without saying that Karsavin had a lot of affinity with that stance? As regards the very nature of revolution, both thinkers underscored its reflection of a 'structural' fracture: it consisted in the departure of the 'external' sphere, represented by the ruling class from the 'internal' social movement. Even though the former's members have at their disposal a theoretical programme and implement well-advised governance practices, the latter represents a dynamic revolutionary process operating at a deeper social level. Moreover, the thinkers shared a deep conviction that it was the revolutionary establishment that was swayed by the revolution, not the other way around. In the traditionalist optics espoused by de Maistre, revolutionary leaders figure large as agents of divine Providence, whereas Karsavin looks on them as historicised individual agents, who ineluctably contribute to the actualization of the higher symphonic personality. Whichever is the case, revolution as defined by de Maistre can be perceived as a punishment, either fearfully awaited or breaking out all of a sudden; in both scenarios it severely afflicts humankind, united in iniquity and deserving God's chastisement. A less severe and more local iteration of this predicament should concern a particular nation being subjected to the punishing hand of Providence.

In keeping with the above, De Maistre subscribed to the providential character of the great French Revolution, and he viewed its activists as unwitting functionaries executing God's plans. All the more so because the character of that revolution could have been construed as a punishment visited on people by the absolutely sovereign ruler, whose nature jibed with de Maistre's vision of God. This retribution lent itself exquisitely to being portrayed as vicarious suffering in the sense of humans volunteering self-sacrifice for the sake of the future; such a sentiment is borne out by some of this Russian thinker's declarations.²⁷ Provided this perspective is valid, we can judge that while France

²⁶ Sergei Sergeevitch Khoruzhii, 'Karsavin i de Mestr', *Voprosy filosofii*, 3/1989, p. 90-91.

²⁷ Cf. e.g. below fn. 45. The thinker's interpretation of the persecutions in the Soviet Union, the suppression of freedom of philosophical thought included, demonstrated a paradoxical pattern of thinking. He wrote: 'Under the circumstances, philosophy is being afforded a wonderful opportunity to thrive as its struggles are real and substantive', Lev Platonovitch Karsavin, 'Filosofia i V. K. P. Po povodu stati A. V. Kozhevnikova', *Voprosy filosofii*, 2/1992, p. 77.

LESZEK AUGUSTYN

had once been 'rescued' by the Jacobins, now, in the new circumstances, Russia could take advantage of the 'salutary' mission of the Bolsheviks. At least, there is much in evidence that this opinion is reflective of Karsavin's mindset. Yet despite a significant degree of concurrence in the opinions of the two philosophers, the Russian intellectual emphatically noted that de Maistre 'did not transcend the time he lived in' and, to add insult to injury, that he was an apologist for the papacy. Karsavin was fully entitled to such criticism, on the strength of his intimate knowledge of the specificity of that different historical period, his awareness of the volatility of religious sentiments and the political pressures besetting his French counterpart. Nevertheless, in his critique, the Russian thinker pointed out many significant redeeming factors contributing to the elaboration of the new interpretation of revolution as a watershed embedded in the past but simultaneously reaching forward to the future. This idea was later expatiated upon by Karsavin himself:

[De Maistre] demonstrated that the solution was not to be discovered in the limited character of the newly established order, but at the same time the solution could not replicate the limitations of the past order; the resolution must not completely sever connections with the past, but some synthesis of what is old and new must be worked out; it can be achieved through overcoming rationalism and Catholic submissiveness.²⁸

But before the future comes and takes concrete shape – either way, welcome or unwelcome to the philosopher – we need to grapple with the current shape of Russian history, I mean, relating the Bolshevik revolution, its direct aftermath and far-reaching ramifications.

3. WHAT IS THE NATURE OF REVOLUTION? THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

Let us take as hard and open-minded a look as possible at the problem of the Bolshevik revolution, for we need the steppingstone of the historical facts to advance a step further and philosophize about their idiosyncratic qualities from the vantage point of Karsavin's thought. As we have demonstrated, revolution is a disease afflicting historical entities. In order to neatly encapsulate such a development, the Russian philosopher employs the notion of symphonic personality, and particularly the process of its disintegration. And reverberating in his words is the tone of a cautionary tale, as if he were channelling Danilevski or Leontiev:

²⁸ Lev Platonovitch Karsavin, 'Zhosef de Mestr', *Voprosy filosofii*, 3/1989, p. 114-115.

THE SHOCKS OF HISTORY. THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF REVOLUTION AS EMERGING...

What I call a revolution is a protracted process of degeneration affecting the ruling class, the debilitation of [the country's] national and state-related vitality and the supersession of the former establishment with a new ruling class. I regard such an upheaval as a dangerous disease of the symphonic personality; rather than lead to the institution of a new form of statehood, it may bring on its demise, whereby a nation dissolves into primitive ethnographic substance.²⁹

It follows from the above that revolutions are transitional periods punctuating the continuum of human history. And given a specific set of circumstances, such milestones are inescapable. To better understand the phenomenon of revolution, we can adopt a two-pronged approach: the classic historical investigation can be coupled with metaphysical analysis; when it comes to our Russian thinker, he never neglects the metaphysical interpretation in his examination of history. The metaphysics of history seeks to 'justify a historical juncture' as a moment of pan-unity.³⁰ Such is the nature of metaphysical research that it tries to comprehend each 'unit' of reality by relating it to a broader, superior unity. And each such unit exists as an original – one and only – manifestation of the complete entity. Such a metaphysically enhanced study of history will warrant, or at least suggest the attribution of some religious or metaphysical significance to revolution, thereby expanding its meaning beyond the purely historical realm.

Let us then embark on the analysis of how the generic revolutionary process is externalized through its historical concretizations. In other words, we will be scrutinizing the ways in which 'revolution', conceived as a set of general rules and attributes, manifested itself in the concrete Russian revolution. Taking a leaf out of Karsavin's book, we will distinguish the fundamental stages of a generic revolution, highlighting the implications of each of the five watersheds. The example of the Russian revolution crystallizes a long-drawn and agonizing sequence of transformations leading to the 'metamorphosis' of the nation, which translates into the emergence of a new national entity. From a theoretical point of view, we cannot rule out the nightmare scenario of a 'deleterious' revolution, in whose wake there follows complete demise of the infected entity, be it a society, nation or a civilization. As historical entities develop in an organic way, the disease of revolution may irredeemably damage their integrity. But as Karsavin believed, that was not the case in the example of the Russian revolution. Still, even though the disease is not lethal, its course is truly severe. When Karsavin discusses the Bolshevik upheaval, he pictures it as something actually 'transitional' in the sense of it 'ushering in' the post-revolution phase. (This term designates the immediate aftermath of the revolutionary disruption, fraught with the repercussions of the recent revolutionary ferment, yet people are increasingly rising to the

²⁹ Karsavin, 'Fenomenologia revolucii', p. 41.

³⁰ Cf. Khoruzhii, 'Zhyzn' i učenje Lva Karsavina', p. 48

LESZEK AUGUSTYN

challenge of restraining and transcending the natural and violent patterns of conduct for the sake of 'conscious and unfettered self-determination'.³¹ Based on the familiar, Russian example, the thinker under discussion undertakes to retrace the complete course of the disease of revolution, which intermittently besets historical entities. Despite underscoring this generality, he never loses sight of the event's local specificity, emphasizing its originality, its 'universal exceptionality' and highlighting the historical salience of the events taking place.

The first phase of revolution is prompted by the degeneration and decline of the old ruling class. Indeed, what underpins revolution is the 'creeping' crisis of power. The first dissonance seeding revolutionary dissent is the dissolution of the old order, the alienation of the social establishment, the government included, from the populace. To defer to Karsavin for the opposite term, we can say that there is a 'self-differentiation' of the symphonic personality, which signifies a rupture and disunion at the very core of national life. The intelligentsia, both their pro- and anti-government segments, show signs of similar internal dissolution. It must be borne in mind here that, even in the new grand scheme of things, the intelligentsia represent a holdover from the pre-revolutionary era. Thus, this class retains a suspicious identity mired by the association with the old ruling establishment: 'As the philosopher emphatically opines, the revolutionary ideology of the intelligentsia is a product of the erosion of the previous state ideology, it is a stillborn of the barren soil.'³² Thus with the country's elites having lost their 'desire to rule', the government does not represent the ultimate power. This leads to the eclipse of the 'ethos of statehood'. The impairment of the desire to rule – political *abulia* – becomes a tangible token of the collapse of the government. The spreading crisis impinges on the remaining segments of society, but the impact has a different character:

The gradual decline of the old version of statehood is paralleled by the atrophy of this idea among the populace. Yet in this case, as long as it is clear that the revolution is not a fatal condition, the dream of statehood, otherwise the desire for power, is not completely extinguished. 'The nation in the throes of revolution' exhibits passive resistance primarily towards the remnants of the old order, going to any lengths to avoid subjugation (see: the scale of the problem of defection from the army). That said, the same nation actively wreaks havoc with remnants of the old system through rebellion, as well as defying the resurgence of any old elements of governance adopted by the new, self-declared authorities. The nation's repudiation of the old forms of political practice leads to the demolition of the socio-economic, religious and moral systems, and people's entire lives are snatched up by the turbulent eddy of a revolutionary torrent. The nation

³¹ Cf. Lev Platonovitch Karsavin, 'Osnovy politiki', *Evrziskii vremennik*, 5/1927, p. 239.

³² Karsavin, 'Fenomenologia revolucii', p. 42.

THE SHOCKS OF HISTORY. THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF REVOLUTION AS EMERGING...

is looking for new leaders, trying to reinvent itself through experiments full of adventurous derring-do and creativity.³³

Though the organism reacts to the disease plaguing it in such a fulminating way, in all likelihood such a response could very well be a blessing in disguise. The revolutionary malaise need not necessarily be lethal, even though it invariably wreaks genuine havoc. Furthermore, what exacerbates revolution even more is the prevailing 'atmosphere of war.' The thinker states that 'revolution feeds off a military conflict or spawns multiple wars, but sometimes both could be the case.'³⁴

At some point in Karsavin's output we encounter what makes the impression of a throwaway aside, relevant though: 'Euphemistically speaking, a revolution is an act of betrayal, which quickly morphs into an obsessive state.'³⁵ The finger of suspicion regarding the breach of trust of national interests is pointed at the ruling class, primarily the governmental circles. However, if the rulers display susceptibility to such criticism, it paradoxically bespeaks their weakness and irresoluteness as well as proneness to concessions, which further dents the authorities' autonomy. The haunting sense of betrayal, indignation and anger provoked by the very thought of such a violation ignite and stoke up the fires of revolution. Generalized distrust never ceases to loom in the minds of the populace, always impeaching the leaders for presumptive, grave disloyalty. Such resentments keep festering. All these antecedents inform and set in train further revolutionary escalation; thus our analysis proceeds to the next revolutionary milestone.

Admittedly, the arrival of the second stage of a revolution is heralded by rampant anarchy. This is a tempestuous stretch of time, witnessing the devolution of the historically instituted forms of government. There are profound social and political changes, at whose core lurks '[...] an agitated and creative process, representing a purposeful desire entertained by the elemental forces of statehood to re-assert themselves, and all this is accompanied by the ambition to install a new ruling class along with new authorities, which amounts to slow and painful birthing travails.'³⁶ But, in actual fact, revolutionary anarchy does not represent absence of government, because it does exist, albeit in dispersal. It is reasonable, therefore, to invoke the notion of panarchy to describe this period in which every social entity perceives themselves as legitimately invested with authority. This generalized perception leads to egoistic attitudes exhibited by particular social groups. In this respect, then, panarchy is a time of extensive paradigmatic confusion, leading to the atrophy of hierarchical thinking in social life.

³³ Karsavin, 'Fenomenologia revolucii', p. 45-46.

³⁴ Karsavin, 'Fenomenologia revolucii', p. 65.

³⁵ Karsavin, 'Fenomenologia revolucii', p. 47 (in the original text the sentence is spaced out).

³⁶ Karsavin, 'Fenomenologia revolucii', p. 48.

LESZEK AUGUSTYN

The inception of the third stage of a revolution is marked by the prominence of 'a class of bullies, ambitious people and fanatics' who come to the fore on the national stage. This represents the resurgence, in a distorted version, of course, of the polarization into the governing and the governed. When it comes to the membership of the class wielding top power, it is still monopolized by the pre-revolution opponents of the government, except that those best ensconced are in fact the least suitable. As they are usually devoid of any experience of officialdom and statesmanship, they cannot tailor their actions to novel ideas, for as newcomers to the world of politics they cannot develop any new policy in the first place. Therefore, doomed to regurgitate fossilized, abstract ideology, the new pretenders to power morph into previous, 'stale' doctrinaires. If there are any changes materializing in this revolutionary stage, they are always driven by the principle of radicalization. Thence stems the roller-coaster dynamism of fluctuating circumstances; however, the ever-growing political pressure, catapulting people to power, is also responsible for the same process in reverse. The only survivors at the helm of the government are its most radical elements – unscrupulous ruffians, stooping to violence, and revolutionary fanatics: 'the saints, the Jacobins and the communists.' This 'revolutionary ruling class', which must be seen as distinct from the 'new reformed ruling circles,' which the former may evolve into, fashions itself after the social profile of the intelligentsia and aspires to a very primitive statehood model. In order to consolidate their leadership role, such circles resort to powerful measures and require the assistance of 'a simple yet cruel organization or a political party.'³⁷ Of course, the party must be revolutionary in character. The institution of such an organization may even hint at gradual revitalization of the ruling class. And if that party enforces successful control over state institutions, or even the whole system of national administration, it may succeed in establishing rapport with the nation. Thus, the broadly conceived state institutions at large afford an environment conducive to the reconciliation and fusion of 'the old' and 'the new' citizen. We may also surmise that this crucible of revolution offers a platform for the formation of a completely reformed ruling class. It must be concluded, then, that the creative elaboration of rules of governance takes place, first and foremost, within the framework of the nation and only by virtue of its sentiment of contribution.

Drawing on the above, we know that the consolidation of the party's power lays the foundations for a bottom-up grassroots-engaging process, resulting in the concretization of political power in the hands of specific authorities. But should the party rigidly adhere to its ideology, the outcome is counterproductive and such an organization puts its future in jeopardy. The strengthening of the party's position gradually leads to the dwindling of the zealous fixation on struggle, the ideology shrivels down to rhetoric, and finally partisan fervour withers. The rulers are left with 'sheer power.' Thus, when the doctrinaire ruling class – epitomized by Bolshevik communists – accomplishes its task by abolishing

³⁷ Karsavin, 'Fenomenologia revolucii', p. 53.

THE SHOCKS OF HISTORY. THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF REVOLUTION AS EMERGING...

the old political system and safeguarding the nation against the resurgence of the former regime, this organization, by the same token, will have disclosed its 'merely ancillary role and conditional *raison d'être*'.³⁸ Karsavin entertains the conviction that the ideology of the ruling class negatively reflects on the revolution, whereas life, the dynamism of multifarious social phenomena, exposes and debunks abstractions and clamours for its own expression through concrete participation in shaping history.

This participatory zeal ushers in the fourth stage of the revolution, where we witness the 'emergence of individuals who have forsaken their ideology and significantly compromised their consciences.' The situation described by the philosopher induces us to formulate fundamental questions: Why, for the time being, did the Bolsheviks get the upper hand? What made the Russian nation give such overwhelming support to bolshevism? In order to find answers to such queries, it needs to be emphasized that 'the Russian nation may have embraced bolshevism, but it did not subscribe to communism'.³⁹ Instead, the Bolshevik ideology was regarded as a temporary evil. In that time of harrowing sadness and existential historic insecurity, the nation was yearning for the establishment of a strong system of governance (anything other than that is not worth having!), and at that point in time the only candidate for the role of saviour was the Bolshevik formation. The Russian nation had a straight choice: to delegate power to the ruling class or to entrust this responsibility to the army, which would become the carrier of the new statehood and embody the will of the nation. When revolution fatigue was increasingly in evidence, as a consequence, the once massive grassroots involvement in political life was slowly grinding to a halt. This abatement of political agitation, with political apathy effectively characterizing citizens' profiles of social participation, arose from the desire for the consolidation of power in the hands of a civilian government, or the army; in addition, what reinforced that trend was the reassuring sentiment that the gains of the revolution would have suitable guardians.

The last challenge, and at the same time the fifth milestone of a revolution, is the state of anticipation before the arrival of a new national government and a new ideology enshrining both nationhood and statehood. It means that the political system of the Soviet Union starts evolving towards its post-revolutionary iteration.

The nation should give shape to its new government, and this new formation, in association with the ruling class, must put a strong grip on the power slipping out of the hands of the current leaders. Likewise, the new leaders should put an end to revolutionary doctrinarism, infuse the idea of statehood with a new meaning, as well as legitimizing one's own validity on the grounds of transparent, concrete and realistic ideas. The revolution in and of itself

³⁸ Karsavin, 'Fenomenologia revolucii', p. 61.

³⁹ Karsavin, 'Fenomenologia revolucii', p. 61.

LESZEK AUGUSTYN

is incapable of bringing forth new ideas; instead, its nature is best defined as a formal process, if we may say so, whereas ideas germane to nationhood, the circumstances of life, the system of absolute values are rooted in the innards of national consciousness [...]. Therefore, the new doctrine regarding the statehood-nationhood issues resumes bonds with the past and realigns the nation with its historically established path, from which it strayed during the revolution, or on occasion even prior to its outbreak.⁴⁰

By virtue of such developments, we may witness the commencement of the long-heralded and long-anticipated organic process of moving forward and re-committing Russia to the rightful trajectory of its historical development: it looks as if after the period following the violent, precipitous 'differentiation' this country were to experience slow 'reunification'. Karsavin tries to respond to this state of affairs by advancing a proposal or even a political offer based on the basis of Eurasian ideas.

At this point of our analysis, in order to better elucidate the phenomenology of revolution, it befits to channel the Russian thinker and stress the character and significance of the ontology of such a socio-political upheaval: 'The infirmity of a symphonic personality and its atrophy is the upshot of the disruption of its personal entity in the empirical sphere. And it is in this realm that personal entities are associated with statehood, which in turn is consolidated by the ruling class and the government.'⁴¹ Yet the revolutionary transformation of a nation is marred by the labour pains inseparable from the emergence of a new ruling class, a government and a new definition of statehood. Moreover, the new order cannot take root without the footing of past traditions; in addition, it must seek out ideas 'invested with absolute significance, capable of legitimizing and validating the new scheme of things.' For this task to be accomplished, common cause must be made with the Eurasian ideology, whereby this idea itself is given an opportunity to vindicate itself. At least, this is what motivates Karsavin, who is the champion of Eurasianism.

This state of affairs proved to be a serious thorn in the side of Marxist ideologues, and it was particularly difficult for the Bolshevik government to transact with the Eurasian movement. In this context we register the need for fine-tuning the definitions of 'communism', 'bolshevism', and the 'Bolshevik communism' synthesis. Should we reckon with the presence of two dimensions in the case of these distinctions, namely the European and the Russian angles? In no way is this suspicion absurd, and in the light of such an interpretation bolshevism is deemed a very late product of the unilateral and inorganic process of the Europeanization of Russia. In the wake of the protracted process of occidentalization, the Russians transmuted Europeism (a proviso needs to be made here that the term is blighted by imprecision as the term should be treated

⁴⁰ Karsavin, 'Fenomenologia revolucii', p. 64.

⁴¹ Karsavin, 'Fenomenologia revolucii', p. 68.

THE SHOCKS OF HISTORY. THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF REVOLUTION AS EMERGING...

here as denotative rather of the Russian mindset 'watered down' with Europeanness) into a new ideo-political construct – Bolshevik communism.⁴² The trajectory of this process is bookended by the era of progressive Tsar Peter the Great and contemporary Bolshevik communists.⁴³ And if we assume that the Europeanization of Russia signified a slow process of the de-christianization of culture and the de-absolutization of the Russian ideal, it laid the groundwork for the future victory of the Bolshevik party, which is for all to see in history. The Russian revolution was, therefore, affected by domestic Russian travails with the problem of Europeanization. 'The Russian revolution – as we can read in the commentary on the Eurasian cause – may be interpreted as a popular revolt against "European subjugation".'⁴⁴

But what was the factor that effected this distortive axiological shift so unique to the Russian revolution? What was that change attempting to challenge, and in whose name was it executed? Because Bolshevism disavowed any intrinsically absolute values, it brought to the ultimate prominence the maximization of relative objectives. One could say that it marginalized ideas and supplanted them with an ideology. These contentions are expatiated on in an article *The Religious Essence of Bolshevism (Religioznaia sushchnost' bolshevizma, 1925)*, where Karsavin strives to look on the phenomenon of revolution from the vantage point of religion. The added bonus of such a religious interpretation is the investment of revolution *per se* with the rationale and a peculiar virtue of meaningfulness. According to the precepts of Karsavin's phenomenology, it must be tentatively presumed that the qualitative classification typical of revolution is governed by political criteria. In the case of the Bolshevik revolution we have to do with a kind of preponderance whose maximalist nature (where the sheer pursuit takes absolute priority over the accomplishment of one's goals) takes on secularized form of a relationship with the absolute or stems from the elevation of relative things and issues to absolute status. Underlying this historical and cultural development is the aforementioned process of the Europeanization of Russia, which saw the secularization of religious ideal and absolutization of relative values. Thus, the Europeanization of Russian culture became the Europeanization of the Russian ideal. But what is the Russian ideal? *The Russian Idea (Russkaia idea, 1925)* offers a clue allowing insight into this enigma: 'We must aspire to the ideal of the ultimate good, in terms of both goals and means, to the good surviving into the future, but it must be achievable through decent measures. So if our goals are beyond attainment because that would necessitate evil, we have to be prepared to suffer and die [...].'⁴⁵ How can we respond to this other than by means of a lofty and universal pronouncement: this is a declaration

⁴² Lev Platonovitch Karsavin, 'Evropa i Evrazia', *Sovremennye zapiski*, 15(2)/1923, p. 314.

⁴³ Lev Platonovitch Karsavin, 'Russkaia idea', *Russkaia literatura*, 1/1993, p. 142.

⁴⁴ Claire Hauchard, 'L. P. Karsavin et le mouvement eurasiens', *Revue des études slaves*, 68/1996, p. 359.

⁴⁵ Karsavin, 'Russkaia idea', p. 142.

LESZEK AUGUSTYN

worthy of a history-steeped Christian, someone who is wedded to the Christian take on the philosophy of history. However, the empirical historical practice becomes more tangled and the professed moral rectitude is vulnerable to trials and tribulations. Even though the Russian ideal refers, first and foremost, to the sphere of the absolute and prioritizes moral obligation, the historical realization of this model is inflected by the sly operations of the 'canny spirit of Russia,' and so much so that the end product is maximalist thinking. Bolshevism constitutes the last known to date form of Russian variation on the theme of the maximalist mindset. And 'the last' implies that there must have been some preceding it – the first and all those in between; indeed, Karsavin states, 'The Russian have all along been Bolsheviks, from the very inception of their history.'⁴⁶ From time immemorial they have always thirsted for something beyond the actualities of life, for a reality that allows them to defy their confinement by the empirical sphere, hence their unquenchable desire to transcend the ambient reality of the present. They have always been incorrigible maximalists. The religious criteria of cultural genealogy pertain also to the political systems of modern times. Apparently, the Bolshevik communism has so far been the last and most uncouth and uncultured form of a Russian religious ideology.'⁴⁷

Of course, our thinking about the Russian revolution should by no means gravitate towards envisioning it as the crowning glory of the historical process, but rather as a watershed ushering in new forms of historical existence. Bolshevism does exhibit a capacity for nation-building, but then again it is not free from its own limitations. There is no gainsaying (and Karsavin would have been the last to do so) that the energy exuded by this ideology is truly 'superhuman,' and that its reach spans two continents. But, in fact, these are only material and historical manifestations of some religious and cultural aspirations with their roots and nourishing sap steeped in the Russian idea.

As if confounding all the predictions of its immediate doom, bolshevism is still going strong as a genuine force for shaping history (elsewhere the philosopher acknowledged that socialism displayed an enormous 'surge of creativity'⁴⁸). However, it still cannot rid itself of the blight of the western European, rationalist, communist idea. And from a practical point of view, contemporary bolshevism perceives its agenda perfectly in synch with its original ideal, and 'in a perfectly Russian way,' to boot. To be more specific, it treasures this ideal as a boon for the whole of humanity and a history-embodied reflection of the absolute. Therefore, even though the ideal of the future wellbeing of humanity is still part of its agenda, present-day implementation of bolshevism is warped and corrupted. Translation: it is too abstract and too westernized. One may get the impression that the

⁴⁶ Lev Platonovitch Karsavin, 'Religioznaia sushčnost' bolshevizma', trans. fr. Ger. W. Kurapina, *Zvezda*, 7/1994, p. 170.

⁴⁷ Karsavin, 'Religioznaia sushčnost' bolshevizma', p. 171.

⁴⁸ Lev Platonovitch Karsavin, 'Socializm i Rossia', in *Mir Rossii. Evrazia*, ed. L. I. Novikova, I. N. Sizem-skaia (Moscow: Vysshiaia shkola, 1995), p. 294.

THE SHOCKS OF HISTORY. THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF REVOLUTION AS EMERGING...

Bolsheviks do not grasp, or simply refuse to acknowledge that 'whatever is international is only a symbol of what is national.' This blindness on their part has destructive implications: 'Communist bolshevism strives to be creative but... destroys everything that does not conform to its naive, ludicrous theories and formulas.'⁴⁹ We have every right to assert that the cardinal sin of bolshevism is its addiction to the communist doctrine. There is also another problem since this ideology deploys the wrong measures to realize its own goals. The consequences of this state of affairs must be disturbing: '[Bolshevik communism] goes to heroic lengths to ruin and ravage everything and, having no creativity, it only recycles banal patterns developed in an alien culture and an irrelevant past.'⁵⁰ Hence, Karsavin registers a sense of inquisitive intrigue stemming from such blatant inconsistency in determining the goals and choosing the means. The answer can be detected in the very ideal of communist bolshevism: the Communists endeavour to crack the code of the absolute truth, but that ambition is frustrated through the deployment of means that are abstract, rationalist and pseudo-scientific.

The adherents of communism are fixated on the idea of universal wellbeing for the whole of humankind, and they cannot stop imagining 'the future paradise on earth.' 'Nevertheless, the average Russian displays a more Bolshevik mindset than the communists themselves. He or she asks: Why is [the currently living] humanity pushed to the sidelines in the Bolshevik scheme of things? Why do the Bolsheviks set their sights only on people of the future?'⁵¹ The exemplary Russian from this quotation channels Karsavin's sensibilities: they both believe that good is an attribute of pan-unity, so if we are committed to universal amelioration of the human lot, we cannot sacrifice anyone's wellbeing. This sentiment is lucidly reflected in Ivan Karamazov's system of values, and the character himself is a very important element of Dostoyevsky's *dramatis personae*. Striving for the ultimate good, we must not make any concessions to evil. Therefore, contemporary bolshevism is not sufficiently Bolshevik, that is of Russian provenance, let alone orthodox or Christian. What is even worse, the Russian communists do not have any clarity regarding the essence of their ideal. Indeed, bolshevism is firmly rooted in the bedrock of Russian religious thought. Thus, adherents of Russian Christianity, permeated with the spirit of the Eastern Church, deem the whole cosmos the body of Christ. Thanks to this mindset, the believers feel exhorted to disseminate religious enlightenment far afield, and they feel responsible for the transformation of this world: '[...] I am not contending that the Russians will be able to shed illuminating light on everything. But if they succeed in contributing to enlightening the world in any measure, it will already constitute a miracle; if this miracle is to materialize, we must first remove the scourge of communism.'⁵² However, such a straightforward

⁴⁹ Karsavin, 'Religioznaia sushchnost' bolshevizma', p. 173.

⁵⁰ Karsavin, 'Religioznaia sushchnost' bolshevizma', p. 173.

⁵¹ Karsavin, 'Religioznaia sushchnost' bolshevizma', p. 174.

⁵² Karsavin, 'Religioznaia sushchnost' bolshevizma', p. 174.

LESZEK AUGUSTYN

transposition of religious ideas to the domain of politics is a rather rare occurrence in the realm of history. But then again, this infrequency is a blessing, as such attempts tend to be disastrous.

Even though against the backdrop of the Bolshevik tragedy Karsavin remained defiantly sanguine, as well as encouraging the same good cheer in others, the philosopher's hope turned out to be naive and outright dangerous; it amounted to wishful thinking, too weak to survive the test of the brutal, political realities. The grand finale of the dialogue between the thinker and the Russian authorities was marked by his sentencing and deportation to the labour camp of Abez, situated in the Komi Republic. Extensive scrutiny of Karsavin's stance on the historical (i.e. political) and historiosophical significance of the Russian revolution seems to prompt the conclusion that this assemblage of his forms a historical theodicy. In its entirety, it looks like a theory that accepts, and at the same time tries to look beyond, the observed realities in order to 'rationalize' the period of the Bolshevik revolution by means of addressing the full spectrum of the enormously convoluted nature of that historical situation. In other words, the philosopher wrestles to categorize that revolution as a transitional event, which, nevertheless, had its necessary mission to fulfil on the way to accomplishing higher good in historical terms. Were we to grant validity to this stance, it would be imperative that the communist ideology be repudiated, whereas bolshevism as such should be accorded the status of a transitional form of Russian rule. The aforementioned contention is justified not only on the basis of facts, but it also has sound historiosophical footing. At the same time, chief among other misgivings is the question of how to tackle the conundrum of the practical side of the above separation. Karsavin's thoughts are permeated with discernible conflicting atmospherics of both historical necessity and immediate imperatives. Therefore, the above phrase 'should be accorded' is perfectly illustrative of what is the most problematic as well as tragic in Karsavin's worldview. Little wonder he saw fit, and admittedly felt fully warranted in doing so, to pass this meaningful comment: 'We do not claim that the Bolsheviks represent the ideal power-wielding establishment, nor do we wish to assert that they form a good government. Nevertheless, all options considered, they are the best for Russia for the time being.'⁵³

4. THE EURASIAN CONTEXT

It must be remembered that the article entitled *The Phenomenology of Revolution* falls into the subsection of Karsavin's output dealing with Eurasian issues. Therefore, attention will be paid here to those ideological strands of Eurasianism that lend themselves to illuminating the topic of revolution. Since the time when the first manifesto is published –

⁵³ Karsavin, *Filosofia istorii*, p. 307.

THE SHOCKS OF HISTORY. THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF REVOLUTION AS EMERGING...

The Exit to the East (Iskhod k Vostoku, 1921) – Eurasianism has been enfeebled by a lack of philosophical underpinnings, but the 1923 explicit articulation of this shortcoming kick-starts the philosopher's contemplation of commitment to intellectual activity on this front. When it comes to the existing body of literature on Eurasianism, it is confined to disjointed, 'casual remarks and unorganized philosophical characteristics,' but remarkably thin on the ground is 'philosophical analysis, or philosophically reasoned validation.'⁵⁴ The Russian thinker will attempt to upgrade the conspicuously flawed philosophical premises, and it goes without saying that he will draw on his own conceptions. After all, he has already authored such theoretical works as the oft-quoted *The History of Philosophy* and a lecture covering the propaedeutics of Christian metaphysics *On Principles (O načalah, 1925)*. Of course, there have been numerous lesser publications as well, but the year 1925 marks the landmark moment of Karsavin's commitment to the new ideology and the commencement of his involvement with activism and publication with a view to furthering this new movement. 'The Paris years,' a dub being perfectly interchangeable with 'the Karsavin years' of the Eurasian movement, span the 1925-1929 stretch of time.⁵⁵ The philosopher will remain a card-carrying member of the movement until its split and the emergence of the two antagonistic factions: the pro-Bolshevik and the anti-Bolshevik ones. When it comes to his own political sympathies before he definitively quits his participation in the movement, the former option is markedly more up his alley. It is also worth mentioning here that the erstwhile active membership in the Eurasian movement will finally prove to be one of the first incriminating engagements he gets indicted for by the Soviet Union authorities (from 1928 to his arrest in 1949, the philosopher resides in the Lithuanian Republic), which finally leads to the apprehension and conviction of this 'Lithuanian Plato.'⁵⁶

Let us now revisit our core theoretical concern. In the mid-twenties of the 20th century Karsavin decides to abandon the role of distinguished historian and theorist of culture and exchanges it for the mantle of 'a politician' and 'a futurist,' primarily preoccupied with present-day challenges. It is worth bearing in mind that Eurasian aficionados are predominantly interested in recent historical developments, and Fyodor Stepun encapsulates that prospective slant of this ideology in the term of 'futurism.' Karsavin is captivated by this inclination towards the future, and this sensibility sets the stage for the subsequent years of his activity. Moreover, being future-oriented signifies dedication to a higher culture, commitment to a new, multiethnic, multicultural, symphonic personality,

⁵⁴ Karsavin, 'Evropa i Evraziia', p. 307.

⁵⁵ However, to pinpoint the beginnings of Karsavin's immersion in Eurasian ideas, we need to move back to 1923, when this thinker produced the previously quoted review entitled *Evropa i Evraziia* pertaining to the following two initial collections on Eurasian ideas: *Iskhod k Vostoku. Predčustva i sviershnia* (1921), *Na putiah. Utvierzhdenie evraziicev* (1922).

⁵⁶ Vladimir Sharonov, 'On vsiegda byl russkim...', *Russkaia mysl'*, 18th May 1990, p. 2.

LESZEK AUGUSTYN

along with engaging in the restoration of the Russian state, which is being envisioned as furnished with new Eurasian statehood. The philosopher cultivates the conviction that due to the Russian revolution the Eurasian issue is invested with some universally applicable, human meaning. This pronouncement turns the spotlight on and elucidates 'Russia's historical mission.'⁵⁷ Furthermore, in the light of this statement, the Bolshevik revolution should not be viewed in a particularized way as a merely localized event; instead, it should be perceived as a Russian response to the acute crisis consuming the whole of Europe.

It should not surprise anyone that Karsavin finds the surrounding reality worthy of philosophical investigation. But unfortunately there is a price tag to the pursuit of philosophy in a time of crisis. Karsavin's world of ideas, particularly his fundamentals of the metaphysics of history, is subsequently thrust into a face-to-face confrontation with a concrete reality – the world of politics. We know that the confrontation escalates into a collision and later on ends in rejection and a retreat to neutral positions. It is also speculatively possible that the elaboration of Karsavin's vision for the Eurasian movement may have been influenced by Vladimir Solovyov's ideas.⁵⁸ And yet the Russian nation's religious mission identified and elaborated on by this author of *The Three Forces* and consisting in the creation of a future synthesis of the Muslim East and the civilization of the West, gradually gives way to anti-occidental sentiments. That said, Karsavin himself never completely abandons the European perspective – there is no such option, for every symphonic personality, as a moment of pan-unity, reflects, if not contains, a higher pan-unitarian form, and it does it in its own unique way. Yet it must be remembered that in order to come to terms with the negative effects of 'the revolutionary disease,' a genuine ideology' is a must. Thanks to its expatriate-community offshoots, the Russian nation finally manages to forge such an 'organic system of ideas' in the form of the Eurasian ideology.⁵⁹ In addition, it must be noted here that this ideology fed off Karsavin's ideas.

Trying to assess the relevance of Karsavin's take on the significance of the Bolshevik revolution, one cannot help but reserve their judgement and register doubts as to whether this philosopher rashly jumped to his conclusions. It seems that this actually was the case. The Eurasian 'inclination towards the future was responsible for the premature consignment of the communist party to the past, treating it as a spent force and a 'departing' form of government. Such a perspective required this philosopher-cum-Eurasian-ideologue to designate the basis for the future political system. Thus, if the ruling class is appointed to wield power by the historical entity, the people, i.e. the entities making up one integral

⁵⁷ Karsavin, 'Osnovy politiki', p. 188.

⁵⁸ Martin Bajssvenger (M. Beissvenger), '«Eretik» sredi «eretikov»: L. P. Karsavin i Evraziistvo', in *Lev Platonovitch Karsavin*, p. 163; Vladimir Solovyov, 'Trzy siły', trans. R. Papiieski, *Przełqd Filozoficzno-Literacki*, 2(2)/2002, p. 33-43.

⁵⁹ Cf. 'Evraziistvo. Opyt sistematičeskogo izlozhenia', in *Puti Evrazii. Russkaia inteligencia i sud'by Rossii*, ed. I. A. Isaev (Moscow: Russkaia kniga, 1992), p. 352.

THE SHOCKS OF HISTORY. THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF REVOLUTION AS EMERGING...

unity, then a collective state is protected from despotism and will not follow that path. But even though the fabric of Russian society is fundamentally demotic, populace-based, Russia-Eurasia must embrace the option of a strong state. This conceptualization of government is necessary in order that the rulers give a new direction to the 'bathos of the revolution.'⁶⁰ Eurasianism, therefore, should harness the revolutionary impetus to its own goals, with the phrase 'its own goals' meaning 'with a view to benefitting the nation.' For the Russian social circles of the day, particularly the expatriate community in exile, this pronouncement sounded particularly challenging:

We really must find out and fully fathom the nature of that which is taking place here, tease out the truth residing in it, and finally act on it. Nevertheless, 'to find out and fully fathom' must not be tantamount to unequivocally «changing the signposts» [Russ. *smienit viehi*], and, having forfeited dignity, becoming lackeys to the communists.⁶¹

Since the revolution is an accomplished fact, all we have to do is acknowledge and make the best of it. We must preserve all the gains of the revolution for the future generations. The new Eurasian system – an ideocracy – could be modelled on the Russian structure of governance, combining the one-party structure with some participatory modification, based on delegation of power to councils. We must be mindful not to opt for the Marxist path but to render it religious, orthodox in character.⁶² The adoption of such an agenda lets politics, intrinsically belonging to the empirical sphere, continue the implementation of the main, ideal and absolute mission of culture, which is called upon to transform the world through the agency of religion. This ambition must, however, reckon with the constraints imposed by the imperfect empirical reality. Nevertheless, religious modification can make a difference, as even bolshevism may, to an extent, exert positive influence on the future providing it lets religion inform its political profile. This, however, cannot be said for Marxist communism, which remains a dogmatically rigid and inflexible element of the pseudo-synthesis parading as a system of governance. Bolshevism is of Russian provenance, whereas communism is the stillborn of the 'decline' of western civilization. Such sentiments can be found – expressed in no uncertain terms – in the blueprint for the Eurasian programme, crafted and drafted predominantly by Karsavin:

⁶⁰ Karsavin, 'Osnovy politiki', p. 215-216.

⁶¹ Lev Platonovitch Karsavin, 'Uroki otrečennoi very', *Evraskii vremennik*, 4/1925, p. 85. Moreover, we must take notice of the fact that the tenor of the previously quoted fragment clearly indicates Karsavin's dissonance from overtly pro-Bolshevik slogans proclaimed at that time by 'the smenovechovce' (*Smena Veh*, 1921). Was it, then, purely rhetorical subterfuge on his part? For all we know, such a state of affairs fuelled serious controversy in Eurasian circles.

⁶² Hauchard, 'L. P. Karsavin et le mouvement eurasiens', p. 364.

LESZEK AUGUSTYN

As long as the Bolsheviks have not honestly and irrevocably abjured their abstract ideology, they are no different from the communists and, therefore, continue to represent a threat. Anyway, Russia could not make do without them now and will still need them until right there someone else comes across, and, if push comes to shove, will oust them, subsequently commandeering their power; and this will be the least detrimental to Russia.⁶³

As soon as communist ideas, rendered beneficial to humanity by dint of their liberation from the tyranny of the abstract, either harmonize with the aspirations of the Russian nation or even reflect the natural and organic part of this people's worldview, they can effectively figure in the synthesis to come. As there is no returning to the past, and the current reality is deeply disappointing, Eurasianism propounds a third option for the way forward for Russia, but this solution refuses to make any concessions to a temporary alternative; therefore, as the philosopher envisioned, the future should be neither 'white' nor 'red', but brand new.⁶⁴

5. POLITICS AND METAPHYSICS

In order to achieve a better understanding of historic-political realities, it is crucial that we rise above what their literal dimension signifies and inspect them from the outside, inasmuch as this change of perspective is possible. Arguably, there is no point in arguing with such a postulate. Rising to the challenge of an unbiased stance on reality or temporary 'suspension' of one's judgement – *epoché* – could very well open up the door to 'inclination towards the future'. The following observation pertains particularly to emotions engendered by political issues:

Hatred, even that justified (if such a thing is plausible), is bad counsel. In order to adequately assay the potency and longevity of communist bolshevism, and to estimate the strength needed to challenge its ideas, we have to rise above our tendency to melodramatic oversimplifications on this issue. We must refrain from demonizing this system, always trying to discover whatever good we can find in it, even if it exists in grossly contaminated form, for the strength of this system does not lie in its evil, but in the portion of good it contains.

⁶³ 'Evraziistvo. Opyt sistematičeskogo izložhenia', p. 351. This document, published in 1926, enlightens many ideas and political convictions held by Karsavin, concerning both the years witnessing the Bolshevik revolution and the ways and means of recovering from its legacy; particularly informative is Chapter VIII *Smysl russkoi revoliucii (The meaning of the Russian revolution)*.

⁶⁴ Lev Platonovitch Karsavin, 'Armia i revoliucia. (Po povodu knigi gen. Ju. N. Danilova 'Rossia v mirovoi voinie 1914-1915 g.'; Slovo', Berlin 1924)', *Yevraziskaia hronika*, 8/1927, p. 45.

THE SHOCKS OF HISTORY. THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF REVOLUTION AS EMERGING...

Thus, beyond the nonsense and ruthlessness of the rebellion, beyond the bizarreness of communist enterprises and revolutionary rhetoric, we should discern symptoms of new life and then nurture it without compromising one's belief in the absolute values.⁶⁵

But on the other hand, is it not so that Karsavin's cognition itself is immune to yielding to adulterating subjective admixtures of both individual and collective provenance. In his phenomenology of revolution he does not balk at employing very strong language. In actual fact, his formulations do evince strong emotional colouring. Therefore, let us return to the question advanced at the beginning of our analysis: What is the new takeaway from Karsavin's 'phenomenology' with respect to our understanding of the 'phenomenon' of revolution? Without a doubt, he allows us to look at revolution from the angle established by his philosophy, to perceive revolution from Karsavin's 'prosopological' perspective rooted in the philosophy of personalism. Apparently, it also affords a very interesting historical angle, which is no mean contribution *per se*. Furthermore, Karsavin's description indicates the multi-stage sequential nature of any revolutionary upheaval and ideological ossification of the leaders. At the same time, he refuses to abandon the delusion that the present moment carries, both presumptively and empirically, seeds of the future. He also emphasizes both the endogenous and exogenous nature of revolution's chief motives, indispensable factors fuelling it, as well as outlining varied revolutionary models. Yet it is not possible to turn a blind eye to the excessive forbearance which characterizes Karsavin's attitude to nihilistic (allegedly a communist contamination) and murderous activity of the Bolsheviks. Life may emerge from death, but if the rulers demand this measure of self-immolation from the masses, it amounts to the perpetration of mass murder. Therefore, to remain mealy-mouthed in the face of Karsavin's own reticence would not be a decent act.

It still generates a measure of puzzlement why Karsavin's attitude to the atrocities of bolshevism is such, given the fact that this philosopher does not mince his words when it comes to the expression of moral indignation at revolutionary developments. It seems that this stance is informed by treating evil along the lines of transgression and retribution.⁶⁶ If punishment is the consequence of guilt, it offers, by the same token, the means to achieve redemption (which is perfectly in keeping with de Maistre's beliefs). And if a historical entity is imperfect, the guilt must be socialized and borne in solidarity by every member of the community (reading Dostoyevsky, one can see how poignantly conscious he was of this universal distribution of such a burden!). Then should it come

⁶⁵ Karsavin, 'Uroki otrečennoi veri', p. 83.

⁶⁶ To get a broader understanding of this approach towards evil cf. Adam Sawicki, *Poprzez bunt i pokorę. Zagadnienie cierpienia i śmierci w eschatologicznych koncepcjach myślicieli rosyjskich. Fiodorow – Bułgakow – Niesmielow – Karsawin – Bierdiajew* (Białystok: Wydawnictwo Politechniki Białostockiej, 2008), p. 258.

LESZEK AUGUSTYN

as a surprise that this world of ours is doomed to violence and suffering? The adoption of this logic could recast all that heinous Bolshevik activity, all this explosion of evil (as penalty for guilt?; through the Bolsheviks meting out the punishment to themselves and others likewise?) as a temporary, cleansing and salutary process, thereby furnishing the Russian revolution with a welcome vindication. In this way, the Bolshevik agenda would be compatible with the conception of history as pan-unity materializing through history's imperfections.

Let us wrap up our explorations in a both cautionary and missionary way, acknowledging that even though historically understood man has always been the architect of his fate, this brand of architecture must be forged collectively; thus, the intervening communitarian and 'societal' circumstances must not be ignored. It could not be otherwise, given the fact that the empirical world is still lagging behind the ideal of unity, manifesting itself as symphonically arranged human lots. There is nothing to indicate that this discrepancy will redress itself soon, and even though historically we have hardly ever been prepared, we had better strive for this preparedness for impending 'historical shocks.' This is the drift of the Russian revolution's cautionary tale, this is the purport of the philosopher's fate. And if the option of revolution, this 'monstrous change,' represents 'the method of operation of the whole European world,'⁶⁷ then even 'an escape' to Asia, which was advised by Eurasian aficionados as a peculiarly Russian response to the revolution, could not successfully ward off the evil of the upheaval's deleterious aftermath. The idea of such a retreat finally turned out to be an intellectual chimera. Thus, effectively, the political hopes entertained by the philosopher proved premature, although as a human being he staunchly continued to stick to his guns of hope. And stick he did, till the end of his own history, which started getting too personal for comfort. Karsavin's case is a telling testament that the politicization of metaphysics does not deliver the anticipated, beneficial rewards. Thus, in order to provide against inevitable disillusionments lying in wait in the realm of human history, we can only forearm ourselves with metaphysical hope. Then, does hope follow in the footsteps of history? Even if it does, let's face it, on its way hope is invariably banished.

TRANSLATED BY Mariusz Szerocki

⁶⁷ Marcin Król, *Jaka demokracja?* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Agora, 2017), p. 184.