A New Chapter in the History of Russian Émigré Religious Philosophy: Georges Florovsky's unpublished manuscript, Russkaia filosofiia v emigratsii

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The article discusses Florovsky's approach to the history of Russian philosophy, focusing on his unpublished article 'Russkaia filosofiia v emigratsii' ('Russian Philosophy in Emigration', finished in 1930). In this article, Florovsky interprets the expulsion of many philosophers from the Soviet Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 as a political and spiritual act, amounting to the government's rejection of creativity and freedom. He takes up the issue of continuity and discontinuity in Russian intellectual history and reaches a conclusion that it is émigré thought, especially religious philosophy, which stands in continuity with the philosophical heritage of pre-revolutionary Russia. In contrast, he interprets the communist ideology developed inside the Soviet Russia as a disruption of this intellectual tradition.

Georges Florovsky (1893–1979) is generally known as a historian of Russian religious thought and an Orthodox theologian. As an intellectual historian he is mostly remembered for his magnum opus, *The Ways of Russian Theology*; as a theologian he is primarily associated with the 'return to the Church Fathers' in twentieth-century Orthodox theology. His theological project is usually discussed under the heading of the 'neopatristic synthesis' (a term that he coined, but did not use frequently) and contrasted with the modernist direction taken by his older contemporaries, including Pavel Florensky, Nikolai Berdyaev, and Sergii Bulgakov. In my new book, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance*,[1] I discuss Florovsky's interactions with the leaders of the religious-philosophical renaissance and question the polarizing narrative of Russian émigré theology. According to this narrative, the Paris school of Russian religious thought is neatly divided into the camps of the 'modernists', such as Berdyaev and Bulgakov, on the one hand, and the neopatristic theologians, such as Florovsky and Vladimir Lossky, on the other hand. I show that Florovsky's theological project was in fact deeply influenced by the problems and

[1] Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

central themes of the renaissance both in its pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary émigré expressions.

In 1920, as the Bolsheviks were tightening their grip on South Ukraine, Florovsky, then 26 years old, left Russia for good. The experience of displacement and emigration had a formative impact on him. On the one hand, emigration and the nomadic scholarly life that followed it was a traumatic experience; on the other hand, it was precisely emigration that drew Florovsky into the orbits of influence of such leading émigré philosophers as Pavel Novgorodtsev, Petr Struve, Nikolai and Vladimir Lossky, Nikolai Berdyaev, Sergii Bulgakov, Boris Vysheslavtsev, and others. It is possible that he would have met with at least some of them if they had all remained in Russia (the location would likely have been either the Lubianka prison in Moscow or a labour camp in Siberia). However, the emigration intensified and accelerated the process of their interaction by creating a new, more tightly knit and more contentious social world. I trace these interactions in considerable detail in the book. I also have a chapter that discusses Florovsky's involvement in and disenchantment with the Eurasian movement. I argue that a form of Eurasian doctrine peculiar to Florovsky made its imprint on the main historiographic scheme of *The Ways of Russian Theology*, the account of the western pseudomorphosis of Russian religious thought.

My study of Florovsky draws on a vast amount of unpublished material, principally gathered from two major archives, the Florovsky Papers at Princeton University's Firestone Library and the equally important archive at St. Vladimir's Seminary Library. This archival research has produced a number of valuable finds. For example, at St. Vladimir's I found and identified several chapters of Florovsky's dissertation on Alexander Herzen, the full text of which had previously been considered lost. I have also discovered Florovsky's lectures on the philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov, given in Prague in the winter of 1922–1923, the very existence of which had previously been unknown to Florovsky scholarship.

In this article I will focus on a manuscript of Florovsky's essay 'Русская философия в эмиграции' ('Russian Philosophy in Emigration'), the manuscript of which is kept in the Florovsky Papers at Princeton.[2] I will discuss Florovsky's understanding of the place of émigré philosophy in the history of Russian philosophy. My special concern will be Florovsky's handling of the issues of continuity and discontinuity, as well as his periodization of Russian philosophy and selection of sources. I will touch upon the question of how the perspective of 'Russian Philosophy in Emigration' compares to Florovsky's other treatments of Russian intellectual history.

[2] I edited and published this essay as 'Г.В. Флоровский. Русская философия в эмиграции' ['G. V. Florovsky. Russian Philosophy in Emigration'], *History of Philosophy Yearbook* (2013): 314–337, a journal published by the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Since it is sometimes a challenge to gain timely access to scholarly periodicals published in Russia on this side of the Atlantic, an electronic copy of this publication is available at http://www.stthomas.academia.edu/PaulGavrilyuk.

After Florovsky left Russia in 1920, he first settled with his parents in Sofia, Bulgaria, where his father found a nominal post at the local Orthodox seminary. It was in Sofia that Florovsky became friends with the founders of the Eurasian movement: Nikolai Trubetskoi, Petr Savitskii, and Petr Suvchinskii. He stayed in Sofia only two years, leaving for Prague in 1921 in hopes of employment at the newly founded Law Faculty of Charles University. In Prague he began to distance himself from the Eurasians and came in contact with the leading Russian philosophers and public intellectuals who were banished from Bolshevik Russia by the direct order of Lenin during 1922–1923. Florovsky had a less cruel fate than some, since he left Russia voluntarily during the general evacuation, forced by circumstances rather than by banishment. Nevertheless, while he did not arrive on the 'Philosophy Steamer', Florovsky clearly saw himself as sharing one intellectual world with its 'passengers'. (Of course we should not imagine one vessel carrying all philosophers; some arrived by sea, others, like Florovsky, by land). Here is how he put the matter in the first two paragraphs of 'Russian Philosophy in Emigration':

> There is something peculiarly tragic about the fact that several years ago a large group of Russian philosophers was banished from their native land by the order of the Soviet government. They were banished specifically as philosophers. This was a symbolic gesture, which meant a denial of creativity and freedom. Philosophy became useless and prohibited in Soviet Russia. Philosophy became prohibited precisely because the philosophical pathos and creativity are expressions of spiritual freedom. The Soviet lifestyle (*byt*), on the contrary, is a wilful denial and quenching of free spirit. To be sure, there is the official 'Soviet,' 'Red' philosophy. But this 'philosophy' is simulated and fake; it is a 'philosophy' without problematic issues, without searching, without creative agitation […]
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> The rejection and nonexistence of philosophy in Soviet Russia define the historical place and the meaning of Russian philosophical emigration. Despite the variety of different [philosophical] directions and the contention between them, it is possible to treat the Russian philosophical 'dispersion' as a unified whole. These are not just individual refugees, but precisely a 'dispersion', a Russian philosophical colony in Europe. … Russian thinkers abroad remain the sole carriers of the creative traditions and heritage of Russian philosophy. They are not only keepers, but also continuators. One can put the matter thus: The Russian philosophical 'dispersion' marks a new moment, a new stage in the common historical destiny of Russian thought.[3]

[3] Florovsky, 'Russian Philosophy in Emigration', 314. This and all subsequent quotations are original translations from the Russian text.

With these admittedly dark colours, Florovsky paints the historical background against which he will assess émigré philosophy. The predicament of Russian philosophy is tragic. The expulsion of Russian philosophers is no mere political act; it is also a spiritual act, defining the Soviet regime as something antithetical to philosophy. As far as Florovsky was concerned, there could be no free philosophical inquiry in Russia and, consequently, no genuine philosophy (his passionate affirmation of philosophy's spiritual freedom is worthy of Berdyaev). The exceptions only proved the rule: the stifling of freedom and creativity by the Bolshevik regime meant that philosophy was finished at home and could only be continued outside Russia.

At stake in this discussion was a broader historical issue: *which* Russia, the one that was in the hands of the Bolsheviks, or the one that the exiles took with them abroad in their minds and hearts, could lay claim to the patrimony of the pre-revolutionary Russia? Like any revolutionary dictatorship, the Bolshevik regime at first promoted a rhetoric of discontinuity, even if complete discontinuity was a historical impossibility; the exiled Russian leaders, despite the trauma of expulsion and cultural deracination, or perhaps precisely because of the reality of expulsion and deracination, promoted a rhetoric of continuity. On both sides one was dealing with competing rhetorical strategies, which were meant to *enforce* a certain vision, rather than merely describe an existing historical reality. Both sides often claimed to be the *exclusive* embodiment of true Russia at the present historical moment, but each understood the meaning of 'true Russia' very differently. Florovsky chose the history of Russian philosophy as the battleground on which he could mount the strongest opposition to Soviet ideology. Many leaders of the emigration, including Fyodor Stepun and Nicholas Berdyaev, chose the same weapon. As the Soviet government was physically destroying any remaining representatives of religious philosophy (Vasily Rozanov died of starvation during the Civil War; Pavel Florensky and Gustav Shpet were sent to the Gulag and then executed; Aleksei Losev survived in the Gulag, but with permanent damage to his eyesight), in the 1920s and 1930s the émigré philosophers worked hard to rescue the philosophical tradition by keeping the historical memory alive.

Florovsky's essay is divided into six unequal sections, the first, second and the final sixth one framing the narrative. In the second section, Florovsky offers a division of the history of Russian philosophy into three major periods. The first period, spanning the mid-1820s to the mid-1850s, he characterizes as Russia's philosophical 'awakening', when the task of developing an original national philosophical tradition was first formulated. The second period, coinciding with the second half of the nineteenth century, was marked by a 'religious-philosophical turmoil' and a 'battle for philosophy' because free philosophical inquiry was under much government pressure at the universities (implied parallels with the plight of philosophy in Soviet Russia would not have escaped Florovsky's émigré readers). In Florovsky's highly selective reading of this period, the philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov and

his followers had a focal significance, with the philosophical themes in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky being equally formative and influential. Florovsky's reading is highly selective because he effectively dismisses the materialism and positivism then prevalent in university education as nothing more than 'anti-philosophical temptations'.[4] The third period, roughly coinciding with the beginning of the twentieth century, was marked by a return to religion, a revival of idealism, and an overcoming of positivism and Neo-Kantianism. Most leading religious philosophers of this period began their literary careers in Russia and found themselves expelled abroad in the 1920s.

It should be noted that Florovsky had already deployed the same three-fold periodization in at least two of his previous works, his dissertation on Alexander Herzen and his lectures on the philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov, both finished in 1923. The Herzen dissertation is dedicated primarily to the first period, while the Solovyov lectures focus primarily on the second period. The third period, dealing with the leaders of the religious-philosophical renaissance, was first an intellectual milieu of which Florovsky was a part and only secondly a subject of historical investigation. In 'Russian Philosophy in Emigration', finished in March 1930, Florovsky dealt primarily with his contemporaries, many of whom became close personal acquaintances in emigration. This extremely short focus of historical perspective distinguishes this essay from the vast majority of Florovsky's historical studies. Even in *The Ways of Russian Theology*, published in 1937, Florovsky brought his historical narrative up to the first years after the Bolshevik revolution, but no closer to his own time.

In the third, longest section of 'Russian Philosophy in Emigration', Florovsky distinguishes two directions of Russian émigré philosophy. He considers 'ontologism' (represented by Nikolai Lossky, Semen Frank, and Lev Karsavin) to be the dominant trend and views 'criticism' or 'transcendentalism' as a less influential continuation of Neo-Kantianism (represented by I. Lapshin, S. Gessen, Fedor Stepun, Boris Yakovenko, and G. Gurvich). Somewhat awkwardly, in this section Florovsky also considers the work of Lev Shestov and others whose views do not fit into these two categories.

In the fourth section, Florovsky treats religious philosophy, emphasizing the central significance of the followers of Vladimir Solovyov, the most influential of whom was Bulgakov. This section contains the most extensive treatment of Bulgakov's sophiology found anywhere in Florovsky's academic writings (another important source is his personal correspondence, especially his unpublished letters to A.F. Dobbie-Bateman). The general tone of Florovsky's treatment is neutral and expository, while the background music is an indirect critique of sophiology that Florovsky had recently put forth in such essays as 'The Contradictions of Origenism' (1929),

[4] 'Russkaia filosofiia v emigratsii', 4.

'The Dispute about German Idealism' (1930), and 'The Dead-ends of Romanticism' (1930). At the time of writing these essays and 'Russian Philosophy in Emigration', Florovsky was Bulgakov's junior colleague and protégé at the St Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris. During the Sophia Affair, which broke out in the mid-1930s, Florovsky generally refrained from criticizing Bulgakov publicly, although he privately expressed his dissatisfaction with Bulgakov's system. In contrast, Florovsky's critique of Berdyaev was quite sharp both in 'Russian Philosophy in Emigration' and in *The Ways of Russian Theology*. Berdyaev, given his fighting spirit, did not wait long to return the favour.

The fifth section of 'Russian Philosophy in Emigration' is dedicated to the philosophy of history (treating Pavel Novgorodtsev and Petr Bitsilli) and philosophy of culture. Under the latter category, Florovsky again mentions the work of Berdyaev, especially his analysis of freedom, creativity, and the crisis of culture. Interestingly, in the same section Florovsky mentions Eurasianism in one brief sentence, without naming any names or citing any works. Given how badly the movement was compromised by its involvement with the Soviet secret service in the late 1920s, Florovsky's former association with its leaders must have been a cause of some embarrassment to him.

Consistently referring to himself in the third person, Florovsky mentions his own essays in three places, in the context of discussing religious philosophy, philosophy of history, and philosophy of culture. Apparently, at this point in his own intellectual development, before he published his lectures on the Church Fathers and *The Ways of Russian Theology*, Florovsky has not yet settled intellectually into the role of a neopatristic theologian and preferred to self-identify as a philosopher and intellectual historian, whose contributions were a part of the Russian Religious Renaissance and who did not see himself as set apart from the movement.

In the final section of his essay, Florovsky recognizes that a conclusion about contemporary developments would be premature. He intimates that the resources of modernity have been exhausted and that Russian philosophy is poised to take a new turn. Florovsky maintains that in order to make a new creative breakthrough it is necessary 'to return to the classics'. He concludes by hinting that 'Russian philosophical explorations are inspired by the anticipated synthesis', but does not develop the idea. In December 1936, at the First Congress of the Orthodox Theologians held in Athens, Florovsky publicly announced his theological programme of a 'return to the Church Fathers' with a view of producing a neopatristic theological synthesis. In *The Ways of Russian Theology*, completed at the same time, his interest shifted from philosophy to theology, the scope of his historical narrative expanded by the factor of ten, from the discussion of the past hundred years to more than a millennium of Russian history; more importantly, the overarching concern to show deep originality and continuity of Russian religious philosophy gave way to a narrative that emphasized painful 'breaks' and discontinuities, what he called the western pseu-

domorphosis of patristic and Byzantine tradition. Instead of contrasting a vibrant tradition of émigré philosophy with 'the rejection and nonexistence of philosophy in Soviet Russia', as he did in the essay under discussion, in *The Ways of Russian Theology* Florovsky cast the development of Russian religious thought against the historical horizon of the Byzantine theological tradition. Perhaps it is because 'Russian Philosophy in Emigration' no longer reflected his changed perspective that Florovsky never published this piece. Nevertheless, this essay represents an important *transitional* work in his interpretation of Russian philosophy. The transition that is at stake here is from the 'originality and continuity narrative' of Russian philosophy to the narrative of pseudomorphosis of Russian theology.

In conclusion, we might reflect on how Florovsky would have diagnosed the state of philosophy in Putin's Russia today. I doubt that he would have been greatly impressed, although his verdict about post-Soviet philosophy might have been less damning than his judgment on the Soviet one. In 'Russian Philosophy in Emigration', Florovsky's operating assumption is that totalitarian regimes tend to stifle the creativity that is vital for the flourishing of free philosophical inquiry. As Putin tightens his hold on mass media, will his government continue to marginalize socially and suffocate economically any philosophy that does not serve its imperialist agenda? Are we to expect a present-day 'Philosophy Steamer', or, to modernize things a bit, a 'Philosophy Airliner'? Is it not telling that out of all the émigré philosophies that have 'returned' to Russia after the Perestroika, Eurasianism (in different forms) has proved to have the greatest staying power, finding its most eloquent proponents in people like Alexander Dugin, who is a fascist pseudo-intellectual turned professor? Unfortunately, the present-day proponents of Eurasianism, Dugin included, are reluctant to heed Florovsky's warning against turning a cultural theory into an ideological weapon of the state. Will Russian philosophers, especially those who have the courage to oppose the state propaganda machine, become political refugees yet again? And if they do not leave for the West, will they retire into what Sergei Averintsev called 'internal immigration' in their own country? Only time will tell.