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Native Soil was a mid-nineteenth-century Russian reaction against materialism and positivism. It emphasized the need for people to live their lives and develop themselves naturally, so that class differences might be reconciled, the achievements of the West fused with the communalism and Christian fraternity preserved by the Russian peasant, and the Russian nation united in the pursuit of common moral ideals. The metaphor 'Russia and the West' summarized much of the intellectual and political debate of the period: how Russia should use its indigenous and its 'borrowed' cultural elements to solve the political, economic, and social problems of a difficult period.

Professor Dowler presents a detailed study of Native Soil conservatism from about 1850 to 1880 - its various intellectual facets, its leading thinkers, and its growth and gradual disintegration. In this utopian movement, literary creativity, aesthetics, and education took on special significance for human spiritual and social development. Dowler therefore examines the writings of two of the most gifted exponents of Native Soil - F.M. Dostoevsky and A.A. Grigor'ev - and looks at their circle and the journals to which they contributed in an assessment of their responses to the challenges of the period of Emancipation.
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The transliteration system used is that of the Library of Congress in a slightly modified form. AD dates before 1918 are given in old style. In the nineteenth century the Julian calendar used in Russia lagged twelve days behind the western Gregorian calendar.

Conservatives in nineteenth-century Russia have not been accorded the attention by historians that their number and influence would appear to warrant. The collapse of conservative values during 1917 and the apparent vindication of the radical tradition in the Russian Revolution are at least in part responsible for the relative neglect of the conservative tradition. A major hindrance to the study of conservatism in Russia has been the difficulty scholars have had in coming to grips with conservatism as a universal political and social phenomenon. The conservative mentality and its political expressions have yielded less readily to analysis than the more topical and cosmopolitan liberal and radical ideologies. The complex of values, institutions, and traditions that have gone into the making of the conservative frame of mind in particular societies remains a relatively uncharted territory.

Conservatives in Russia have not, of course, been entirely ignored. Some of the leading conservative personalities have been served by fine biographies, and a few useful studies have been made that encompass Russian conservatism in a wider embrace. As a result, it is now possible to trace the evolution of conservative thought in the nineteenth century and to differentiate the various elements that made up the Russian right with greater precision. The recent and unexpected resurgence of Russian conservative thought, spearheaded by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, has made this task all the more relevant, urgent, and interesting.

Conservatism found expression in a variety of forms among a number of institutions and social groups in nineteenth-century Russia. The official Orthodox church and the bureaucracy remained bulwarks of the conserva-
-tive temperament in spite of the presence of a few liberal individuals within both. The peasants, for the most part, persisted in their stubborn traditional loyalty to the myth of the just tsar as their paladin against the depredations of the landlords. Although the liberal constitutional movement spread impressively among the gentry in the post Emancipation period, the majority trusted their conservative instincts and clung to their conservative opinions. Finally, a highly articulate philosophical conservatism, which brought the element of reflection to the other, more traditional conservative forms, appeared around the middle of the century among a significant segment of the Russian intelligentsia.

What united all of these disparate conservative voices 'was the belief in the appropriateness of authoritarian rule for Russia. Until October 1905 when, under duress, absolutism at last gave way, at least in theory, to limited monarchical government, the defining characteristic of conservatism was support for the autocratic principle, according to which all political and legal authority rested ultimately with the monarch. Not all Russian conservatives approved of the autonomy as it was actually constituted, but none would have welcomed the imposition of either formal legal or institutional restraints on the authority of the tsars.3

The existence of dominant conservative elements within the church and bureaucracy and among the peasantry' and gentry is hardly surprising. All of them were in some way reacting to the threat of social, economic, or cultural change. The church had traditionally resisted, more often passively than actively, the encroaching secularization and westernization of Russian life, and the pace with which these forces advanced was especially brisk in the nineteenth century. The bureaucracy had long before become a virtually autonomous institution with its own raison d'etre. It was dedicated above all to self-perpetuation and fiercely resisted any political or administrative adjustments that seriously threatened the position and livelihood of its members.

The situation of the peasantry was more complicated. Its conservatism was in pan the product of ignorance, which the customary mode of village life only reinforced. The peasants had centuries earlier identified the enemy the gentry and, increasingly in the nineteenth century, the bureaucracy but in the absence of any other earthly prospect of attaining justice had doggedly adhered to the desperate hope that a just tsar would one day intervene to deliver them from their tormentors and the usurpers of their lands. It was a barren but not uncomforting illusion. Peasant conservatism was, therefore, habitual but perilously unstable, capable of unexpectedly metamorphosing into revolutionary anarchy.4

The object of peasant discontent, the gentry, had been uneasily aware of the peasant danger since at least the Pugachev rebellion in the early 1770s, and fear of the peasants' axes had traditionally been a mainstay of gentry conservatism. During the nineteenth century, particularly in the wake of the Emancipation in 1861, its conservative inclinations 'were reinforced as its economic position generally deteriorated in spite of government efforts to stop the rot. Along with diminishing economic power came the threat of displacement from social pre-eminence. As the economic position of the gentry declined, its members clung ever more tenaciously to the still considerable remnants of their status and power and to the memory of a more secure and comfortable past.

Conservatism among these groups was largely reactive; it rested on solid traditional, temperamental, or pragmatic grounds and fell, veil within the range of normal scholarly expectations about political behaviour. It is more difficult to account for the advent of a conservative outlook within the intelligentsia. It 'was a relatively new group; the state accorded it no juridical status and officially resented its intrusion, but had to rely more and more on its education and skills. The intelligentsia had no tradition and little past of its own to defend. They themselves represented its intrusion, but had to rely more and more on its education and skills. The intelligentsia had no tradition and little past of its own to defend. Themselves the product of modernization, the intelligentsia could, ostensibly at least, best advance their own interests by promoting further change rather than by seeking to preserve the status quo. What, then, could have induced a portion of the intelligentsia to adopt and defend a conservative position?

In the scholarly literature on Russian history, the term intelligentsia has been applied to a wide variety of groups in a number of socio-economic settings.5 But however diverse have been the groups that intelligentsia has been asked to describe, they all shared a distinctive ethos. All held ideas that conflicted with 'official' or accepted values and all were dedicated to serving the people in some way. The social composition of the intelligentsia changed over time, and the ways in, which its members proposed to serve the people varied and were often at odds. But its general stance of opposition to established values and to the existing state and social order as well as its orientation towards social service remained a constant.

The rise of the intelligentsia to prominence in the middle decades of the nineteenth century was a complex process that extended as far back as the reforms of Peter the Great in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. The technological and administrative innovations that Peter imported from the West were inevitably accompanied and supported by a large share of the intellectual apparatus of Western societies. Not least among the tools acquired by the Russians was the spirit of criticism that was emerging as the basis of intellectual
inquiry in western Europe. Peter had himself encouraged the growth of a secularized critical elite as a counterweight to the religious culture of the Muscovite past that his childhood experiences had taught him to despise and fear. The subsequent development of Russia for the rest of the century was in some ways not unlike that which occurred in the monarchies of western Europe. During the eighteenth century a number of European rulers, for a time at least, successfully harnessed the critical spirit of the age to their own uses, as kings allied with philosophers against the traditionalist forces of feudal society. 'Enlightened despotism' had its limits, however, and the contradictions between enlightenment and absolutism in the end tore the alliance apart.

In Russia, too, the state showed itself to be a progressive force during much of the eighteenth century. Even the shock of the French Revolution was only a temporary setback. Emperor Alexander I, who came to the throne in 1801, led his country through an important series of far reaching administrative, legal, and educational changes. It was only after the defeat of Napoleon and the ensuing conservative settlement at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 that Alexander, a victim of the wave of reactionary mysticism that swept Europe in the wake of victory over France, withdrew the Russian state from its leading role as a force for progress. The disillusionment generated among forward-looking Russians by Alexander's reactionary stance in time precipitated the Decembrist conspiracy of 1825, during which a group of army officers, noblemen all, attempted abortively to create by force a constitutional monarchy in Russia.

The treason of the Decembrists further undermined the already shaky confidence of the state in its ability to manage the changes it had itself put in motion. Under Nicholas I, the brother of Alexander, the Russian state was transformed into a powerful instrument of conservatism. Nicholas and his officials were not reactionaries; they did not oppose all change, but the reforms that they introduced were designed to tighten the bonds between government and society and served to undermine the autonomy of the latter. It was during the reign of Nicholas that the idea of society as a counterweight to the conservative tendencies of the state emerged. Society began to see itself and its concerns as distinct from the state and its interests and to cast itself in anew, progressive role.

Society had been in preparation for its new role since at least the 1820s. The educational reforms of Alexander I not only extended education but also raised the quality of Russian learning as well. The restrictive educational policies practiced by Nicholas I could only retard but not halt the cultural development of his subjects. The lengthening subscription lists to an increasing number of journals, newspapers, and magazines during his reign reflected the growth in Russia of a small, elite reading public. Pockets of articulate public opinion and cultural sophistication, often directed by one or another of the large, monthly 'thick' journals, began to form. Among the main indicators of Russia's almost imperceptible advance towards modernization in the reign of Nicholas was the growth of a viable urban culture. The new sophistication of city life spelled, among other things, the growing differentiation of social classes and the disruption of the traditional noble, peasant, burgher designations of the estates. In the 1830s Nicholas was compelled to create a new estate of 'hereditary honorary citizens' in order to incorporate the rapidly growing professional and commercial groups into official society. The demand for services in the urban centres drew an increasing number of peasants from the countryside, although most of these new urban dwellers remained officially listed on the rolls of the peasantry.6

The growing intensity of urban life, along with the sharper social differentiation it entailed and the deepening interest of the public in cultural matters, had a number of important consequences for Russians. For the first time in its history, the country was able to support, albeit meagrely, a group of independent literati. In addition, the potential for dissatisfaction with Russian conditions as well as the pool from which the disaffected could be recruited were considerably enlarged.

The feeling that society was becoming more and more divided and the undefined sense that all was far from well in the empire of Nicholas I were heightened. Nicholas's secret police intuited the restlessness in Russian society. In 1840 the tsar came across this troubling passage in one of his gendarme reports:

There is hidden everywhere a certain general dissatisfaction, which can be expressed in a statement written to the Chief of Gendarmes from Moscow: 'I do not know exactly but something is wrong.' and this expression we now hear often from the most well-intentioned people. Of course, nothing bad has as yet happened, but unfortunately this kind of an expression is a reflection of a state of mind and feelings which is less propitious than at any time during the entire last fifteen years, and which proves that all the estates in general find themselves in some son of awkward condition, for which no one can account, even to oneself.
The intelligentsia was the creation of Russia's slow and uneven advance towards modernization. The impact of cultural modernization on a few extruded a tiny minority of educated individuals out of the antiquated economic, political, and social order, enabling it to escape from the narrow confines of its class outlook and prospects. Its members were few in number, but the capacity of the rigidly structured Russia of Nicholas I for social readjustment was still too slight to reemerge even the few displaced persons easily. They came from no class in particular. Some were the sons of the landed gentry, many more were children of the bureaucratic nobility whose families had earned noble status by advancement on the Table of Ranks, and a few came from the lesser bureaucracy, merchant families, and other non-noble groups. They had in common their education and the fact that they were, at least temporarily, separated from their class origins and the traditional occupations of their families.

It was, of course, the intelligentsia that formulated the 'accursed questions' of Russian life and consecrated themselves to answering them. Ideas are seldom merely responses to other ideas. More often they are programs of action designed to meet and overcome an unsatisfactory state of affairs. Both the personal situation and social condition of the members of the unattached intelligentsia in Russia were eminently unsatisfactory. They had refused to follow the occupations and life-styles of their parents and, even if their families encouraged them, were, at the very least, culturally estranged from their family environment. Personal alienation was accompanied by a profound social alienation. The high standard of educational achievement of the intelligentsia placed an insurmountable barrier between it and ordinary Russians. Wards of the new urban culture, its members lived and worked either on the fringes of or completely outside official society and could claim no legally recognized class affiliation. As one of the more extreme manifestations of the new social diversification of Russia, they were particularly sensitive to the many nuances of heightening social tensions. They were steeped in the latest intellectual trends of the West and acutely aware of the discrepancy between the vitality of western Europe and the apparent stagnation of Russia under Nicholas I. Their attempts to express themselves in prose and verse were often frustrated by the close scrutiny of a suspicious state.

Alienation was only one of the features common to the Russian intelligentsia. Another was its nearly unanimous distaste for the liberal capitalist societies forming in western Europe. As intellectuals who were not entirely immune from an elitist disdain for 'trade,' its members were repelled by the commercial spirit and capitalist morality of the Western middle classes and the putative vulgarity of their thought and habits. They further rejected the legalism and impersonality of the liberal contractual state, which appeared to them to preclude the possibility of a true community. There were, of course, exceptions, but hostility to the bourgeois state and to a social order based on the rule of law was endemic among the intelligentsia and powerfully shaped its vision of Russia's future political and social order.

Both radicals and conservatives among the intelligentsia feared the growth of capitalism in Russia and adopted remarkably similar positions towards industrialization and the introduction of liberal constitutionalism. Both camps, until the advent of Marxism in the 1880s, envisaged a predominantly agrarian communal society in which industry, though not unimportant within the economy, remained on a small scale under community direction. Both preferred a self-governing federation of communes in which the powers of the central political authority were drastically few. Both profoundly distrusted positive or formal law, seeing the key to social regulation instead in the inner moral convictions of individuals and in a sense of common social purpose. Securing the freedom of the personality and the moral salvation of the individual was likewise a primary concern of both parties. Neither side was content with the status quo but envisaged a Russia morally and socially transfigured.

The members of the intelligentsia shared one additional characteristic. This was their common intellectual origins in the utopian spirit of the romantic period. Romanticism was rooted in the longing for a return to the imagined social harmony, simplicity, and spiritual unity of pre-industrial society. Utopian socialism, which in one or another form provided sustenance to the radical vision of Russia before Marxism, participated in this fundamentally conservative longing. The utopian socialists idealized the agrarian communalism of the past and several among them dreamed of a return to the self-regulating communities of the guilds. One historian recently concluded that 'much of what has been called Utopian socialism ought to be seen as essentially conservative in outlook.' Small wonder, then, that the great literary critic V.G. Belinsky, who was educated and wrote in the atmosphere of romanticism and utopian socialism, should later have served as the inspiration for both Russian radicals and conservatives, or that significant elements of Slavophilism in the 1840s should have reappeared in populism in the 1870s. Nor is it surprising that some intelligently began at one end of the ideological scale and ended at the other; the distance they had to travel was not very great.
The Russian intelligentsia was therefore bound together psychologically, ideologically, and intellectually. Its members were motivated by a shared experience of personal and social alienation, they defined their political and social objectives largely in terms of their opposition to the middle-of-the-road, politically moderate, liberal-capitalist ideology of the West, and they had a joint intellectual and spiritual centre in the visionary utopianism of the romantic era.

In spite of having so much in common, the intelligentsia was, nevertheless, sharply divided between proponents of the right and of the left. This division owed less to differences concerning ends than it did to divergent views about means, which were in turn dictated by opposing conceptions of man and the world and of the nature of the socio-historical process. Once having separated himself by means of his education from the special interests of his class of origin, the intelligent was confronted with a choice. Either he could elect to associate himself with the interests of a particular class, usually the most downtrodden, on whose behalf he tried to speak and act; or he could choose to work towards a syncretic solution to class antagonisms through the discovery of a principle that transcended and reconciled class interests.10

In conformity to this pattern, a radical wing formed within the intelligentsia during the middle decades of the nineteenth century; for the most part, it aligned itself with the interests of the peasant class. The devotion of the Russian left to the peasantry continued almost unabated until the 1890s, when the accelerated pace of industrialization revealed to at least a section of the radicals the revolutionary potential of the proletariat and split the left wing of the intelligentsia. At the other extreme, a conservative camp grew up within the intelligentsia; it attempted to reconcile class differences by appealing to the higher principles contained in nationality (narodnost’), which, for all its divisive ambiguities, the conservatives viewed as a common denominator stronger than the sectional interests of the various social estates.

The class origins of individual members of the unattached intelligentsia reveal little about the route they later chose to follow. Individuals with similar family and educational experiences were to be found in both the radical and conservative camps. Broadly speaking, the intellectual profile of the Russian radical commonly included philosophical materialism, or often positivism, and atheism. The conservatives usually were, in contrast, philosophical idealists who acknowledged the existence of some kind of transcendental power. The idealism of the conservatives was frequently accompanied by aestheticism, or a highly developed artistic sensibility, which prompted them to value art for itself and not as a mere tool for didactic purposes as was more often the case among the radicals. Early family training and educational exposure may have contributed to these differences, but no pattern of behaviour obviously emerges.11

Rather than reflecting a sociological determination, the selection of routes would appear to have been an individual affair, arising from life experience, personality, mature moral choice, and personal contact with one's peers. The importance of the latter factor should not be overlooked. Friendships were often conducted within a framework of formal or informal intellectual circles where the magnetic influence of a strong personality could prove decisive for the whole group. The dominance of A.S. Khomiakov among the Slavophiles and Belinsky or M.A. Bakunin among the westernizers exemplifies a process that must have been repeated often in less well-known circles.

The division between those who identified with one class and those who preferred social reconciliation did not always follow along strictly radical-conservative lines. The theme of reconciliation sometimes appeared persistently in the thought of thinkers usually associated with the radicals. A.I. Herzen, for example, incorporated the idea of reconciliation into his social philosophy, particularly during the early years of the Emancipation period. A similar notion re-emerged in the populist writings of N.K. Mikhailovsky. Such crossing over should not be surprising. Both the conservative intelligentsia and the radicals, as has been shown, were responding to a similar personal and social dilemma and both were inspired by a shared intellectual inheritance. Nevertheless, reconciliation tended to remain incidental to the thought of the radicals but central to that of the conservative intelligentsy.

In pochvennichestvo (the native soil movement) the philosophy of reconciliation attained its fullest expression. Through their journal Vremia (later Epokha), which was owned and edited by the Dostoevsky brothers in the early 1860s, the pochvenniki (men of the soil) achieved a brief period of modest public recognition, though scarcely wide acceptance. The origins of the movement go back to the beginning of the 1850s when a group of young aesthetes the so-called ‘young editors’ took control of the literature and literary criticism sections of the Moscow journal Moskvitianin. The native soil movement retained its early, close ties with literature and criticism, and it was from its literary concerns and convictions that the social philosophy of the pochvenniki developed. Pochvennichestvo was central to the evolution of F. M. Dostoevsky's moral, social, and political views after his return from Siberian exile at the end of 1859,
and he remained loyal to many of its most important tenets until his death in 1881.

Contemporaries most often thought of the native soil movement as an attempt to reconcile Slavophilism and westernism. But both the 'young editors' and later the pochvenniki believed that they, like the times, had moved beyond the debates of westernizers and Slavophiles. During the early 1860s, the 'men of the soil' not only undertook a sophisticated critique of nihilism but also tried to provide young Russians with a positive alternative to the radicalism of Chernyshevsky or Pisarev. Critical as they were of the Russian radicals, the pochvenniki were also at pains to distance themselves from other conservatives. Although they admired and in some respects emulated the early Slavophiles, they differed from them in a number of crucial ways. They also engaged in heated debates during the 1860s with such publicists of the right as M.N. Katkov and I.S. Aksakov. Few of the major concerns of the day escaped their scrutiny.

The native soil movement is sufficiently rich in ideas and personalities to merit a study of its own. Dostoevsky's contribution to the group and the relationship of his thought to that of its other members has been too little appreciated in the literature. To date, no major attempt has been made to place Grigor'ev's 'organic criticism' within the wider, both Russian and European, intellectual currents of his day. But a study of the pochvenniki has wider implications. The comparison of the philosophy and ideology of their movement to those of other conservative tendencies as well as to the ideology of nihilism sheds new light not only on the conservative tradition in nineteenth-century Russia but also on the psychology and behaviour of the whole Russian intelligentsia.