Conservatism and the search for national originality

Russian conservatism emerged in the nineteenth century within the traditions of the larger European conservative experience. From the time of the Enlightenment, the challenge of the parties of progress had elicited a joint counter-offensive on the part of conservatives throughout Europe and armed them with a shared ideology. Though latecomers to the family of modern European conservatism, Russian conservatives were also compelled to face the threat posed to traditional values by the advent of economic, social, and cultural modernization. In spite of their basic kinship, the separate branches of European conservatism were as noteworthy for their dissimilarities as for their family resemblance. The conservatives, who made it one of their cardinal principles to preserve the heritage peculiar to each distinct nation, were directed by their own logic to emphasize the differences rather than the similarities among the institutions, culture, and behaviour of separate national groups. In the case of the Russian conservatives, Russia's long history of religious exclusiveness probably served to strengthen this particularist trait among them. The conservatives' insistence on national particularism meant that while what was considered worth conserving varied widely from country to country, the general framework of the conservative philosophy remained more or less the same. Conservatism was, therefore, characterized less by a commitment to a specific form of government or social order than by a certain attitude towards the world, man, and history.

The first stirrings of modern conservatism in Europe were as old as the origins of the modem state. As kings and princes took measures in the seventeenth century to enhance the power of the central authority at the expense of regions, estates, and corporations, a defensive conservative mentality was rudely awakened. In the eighteenth century
determined rulers found new allies in the *philosophes*. The 'party of humanity' indecorously assailed the traditional institutions, beliefs, and privileges which, sanctified by centuries of usage, sustained the old order and, in its view, stifled the individual and deprived him of his natural rights. The aggressive assertions of the *philosophes*, which were rooted in an elaborate social philosophy, compelled conservatives to formulate a philosophical defence of the life they had formerly taken for granted. Since modern ideological conservatism was originally a protective reaction to the philosophy and practices of the Enlightenment, its character was conditioned by the very principles it opposed.

At the heart of Enlightenment thought was an optimism, that had been building since the Renaissance, about the intelligibility of the universe and the essential goodness of human nature. By the outbreak of the French Revolution, the more radical individuals among the *philosophes* had removed the source of evil from man himself and relocated it in corrupt and corrupting social institutions and traditions. The principal bequest of the Enlightenment to both radicals and liberals of the modern era was the belief in the perfectibility of man and the sufficiency of human will and reason for the regeneration of human nature by the creation of a rational social order. Freed from the restraints that traditional society imposed on his thoughts and actions, the new rational man in the renovated social and political order would be subject only to those limits that derived from his own reason and that he willed on himself.

In order to examine human nature more clearly in the pure light of reason, the *philosophes* abstracted man from his existing historical associations and from the traditions that they believed debased him and placed him in a metaphorical state of nature. In this imaginary condition, they argued, the true nature of men became apparent: they were autonomous beings, possessed of reason and equally endowed with a number of inalienable natural rights. The universalism of the *philosophes* was balanced by a realistic eighteenth-century assessment of the strength and persistence of local and national differences. Later radicals were less inhibited, and the notion grew that societies ought to be constructed less on the particular historical experience of individual nations than on a body of abstract and universal assumptions about humanity.

With rationalism came utilitarianism. Most of the *philosophes* agreed that man's primary motivation was concern for his own security and comfort. It was this concern that, in their minds, lay behind the creation of a political society on the basis of a social contract. Through the social contract, the contracting parties sought to secure their personal wellbeing by the political regulation of relations among competing individuals within a framework of civil and universal human rights. The state was no longer seen either as an independent creation of Providence or as a unique product of a particular historical experience but principally as an instrument created by humans to promote the conditions under which the citizen was freest to advance his own economic and social interests. In such a state, regional particularism and traditional social distinctions were expected to give way to a more homogeneous and open society of equal citizens or, in later radical thought, to almost total social levelling.

Conservative thinkers were quick to grasp the implications of the Enlightenment's views of man and the world and to attribute to them the worst excesses of the French Revolution. In order to counter the radicals and liberals effectively, the conservatives had to demonstrate that the workings of the universe were not as accessible to human reason as the *philosophes* had supposed and that the reason and will of man were alone adequate to reorder society successfully and regenerate human nature. The conservatives had none of the optimism of the *philosophes* about the innate goodness of man. They contended that evil was not an ephemeral product of an irrational environment but a permanent and even necessary aspect of the human condition. Nor, given their philosophy of imperfection, would conservatives entertain fantasies about human perfectibility. Edmund Burke, who with the publication of his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in 1790 emerged as the acknowledged leader of the conservative forces, remarked with heavy irony that conservatives were 'afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason, because we suspect that this stock in each man is small.'

Since the conservatives believed that unassisted human reason could avail so little, they were not unnaturally sceptical about the possibility of a society in which men obeyed only the dictates of their own reason. Internal or self-imposed restraints were seen as inadequate to contain the destructive sides of human nature which the optimists overlooked. External restraints were also necessary, and history had been a long and painful struggle to uncover ideals and institutions suitable for subduing the beast in men. Rather than trust to abstract human reason, Burke recommended that men should rely on concrete, historical experience, 'the general bank and capital of nations and of ages.' Rationalistic social engineering could result only in chaos or tyranny. Customs and traditions bound societies together, gave them order, stability, and continuity, and provided the surest guarantee of individual liberty against the encroachments of the state. To attack and destroy them was to invite the shambles of the French Revolution.

Along with the abstraction of Enlightenment thought the conservatives
also dismissed its universalism. They scoffed at the notion that men in all
times and places were the same. Even among the tradionalists, who had a
more static view of the world than did the next generation of the
romantics, historical relativism crept in: every age and every nation
produced institutions, ideas, and social arrangements uniquely appropri-
tate to them. Conservatives glowed in variety. Everywhere men were
different because everywhere they were steeped in particular national
and local traditions and customs. Joseph de Maistre, who after Burke was
the most influential spokesman for the conservatives in the period of the
French Revolution, insisted that 'every age and every nation has a special
distinctive nature which must be carefully considered.'

The main failing of the philosophes, according to their conservative
critics, was their inability to see men and society as they really were:
their entire methodology was suspect. It was contrary to common sense
to strip the human being of the attributes bequeathed to him by the milieu
into which he was born and to place this abstract, residual man in a
mythical state of nature where he was inexplicably but conveniently
endowed with natural rights. The idea 'man' was to the conservatives an
abstraction that had no real existence. There were only men, real
individuals, who lived, worked, and died under particular historical
circumstances in concrete social settings. Their rights were not innate but
derived from the position in society into which they were born. The
social estates and the distinctions and privileges they conferred were not
the products of chance or human malevolence but the work of
Providence, sanctified by history. It was social rank that gave men
definition and moral purpose. The various classes together, each with its
own innate principle, constituted a sacred corporate organism that
harmoniously performed all the necessary functions of society.

The intent of conservative political thinking was to secure the
individual from interference, in the name of reason or the public good, by
the state. Conservatives advocated a politics of limits. The regulation
of social relations rested on ingrained habits and practices and on the
traditional rights and privileges of the duly constituted social estates. It
did not depend on state control. The conservatives did not see it as the
purpose of the state to manage the anarchical clash of individual wills but
to symbolize a nation's unity and oversee the smooth workings of a
social organism ordained by God or history.

The French Revolution seemed to confirm the worst fears of the
conservatives. Under the banner of liberty and equality, chaos and
destruction spread through France and seeped into neighbouring
countries. Napoleon imposed order of a sort, but the liberal ideas on
which the Revolution had originally been launched gained even wider
currency in the constitutional settlements that followed hard on the
conquests of the imperial army. With the defeat of Napoleon and the
convening of the Congress of Vienna in 1815; the conservative reaction
got under way. Throughout Europe, whatever of the old regime that
could be restored was restored. The patience of the traditionalist
conservatives on the Continent, who during the Revolutionary and
Napoleonic periods had confidently looked forward to a restoration, was
rewarded as monarchs turned to them to furnish ideological sustenance
for the reactionary policies to which they were committed. The Holy
Alliance of Russia, Prussia, and Austria, with its dedication to the
eradication of liberalism wherever it was to be found, aptly symbolized
the siege mentality of conservatives in the restoration period.

The restoration should have sated the forces of European conservatism
after 1815 but did not. Conservatism itself turned out to be no proof
against the romantic longing that infected almost a whole generation in
the post-Napoleonic period. During the romantic age, a new generation
of conservatives arose that was dissatisfied with the solution imposed on
Europe by the traditionalists. The reasons for their discontent are not
hard to find. Since 1789, Europe had experienced an unprecedented
series of changes. After the stolid decades of the old regime, almost
anything now seemed possible. The return to the pre-revolutionary status
quo had been partial at best. A great deal had changed and was still
changing. The restoration, -therefore, brought order but not stability. The
uncertainties of the age heightened the sense of loss among
conservatives and nurtured a longing for a total transformation of
society. Few conservative romantics were simple defenders of the status
quo but were utopian visionaries intent on rebuilding the world.

The conservative romantics took as their own most of the theories of
the traditionalists but placed new emphasis on old ideas and added some
original thoughts of their own. Like the traditionalists, the romantics had
little faith in the powers of human reason. They did not disparage the
rational faculty but believed with Coleridge that 'man is something
besides reason.' They stressed instead the importance for man of the
'integrated personality' in which intellect and feeling were held in an
equilibrium. For the romantic conservatives, the human personality
consisted of a complex of faculties which incorporated reason but
included also emotion, intuition, and faith. The elevation of one faculty
over the others occasioned an imbalance in the human soul, destroyed its
For the conservatives, it was this wholeness, and separated the individual from the inner meaning of the universe. Harmony with the external world rested on perfect harmony within the internal world of the individual.

The core concept of romanticism was that reality was fundamentally thought or idea. The romantics conceived of history as a dynamic process in which the idea of the universe gradually revealed itself and attained consciousness in the minds of men. Most conservative romantics, therefore, rejected the static conception of a world governed by the God-given, absolute standards characteristic of the traditionalists and adopted a thoroughly relativistic and historical position. Each age or nation was held to make a unique and valuable contribution to the creation of the whole fabric of the universe.

The place of individual nations in some universal scheme was an especially intriguing question to conservatives in the romantic age. They were not the first; J.G. von Herder had anticipated their concern in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. He contented himself with the notion of the fullness of the universe in which every age and every nation contributed some small part to an unknown and unknowable universal plan. The German idealists, most notably Hegel, spoke of world nations that were specifically designated by the 'World Spirit' to dominate the intellectual and cultural life of an age and provide a temporary vehicle for the furthering of a universal design. Near the end of his life, Hegel's countryman the poet Schiller contrived to have the best of all worlds. He graciously conceded the invaluable service rendered to history by all nations whilereserving the crowning achievement for Germany. 'Each people has its day in history,' he wrote, 'but the day of the German is the harvest of time as a whole.' The confusion of philosophy with history and the fascination with cosmic second guessing were traits shared with the Germans by many Slavs, and Schiller's optimism could be and was easily adapted to Russian needs by the simple expedient of substituting Russia for Germany.

In the relativistic scheme of the conservative romantics, change was seen as inevitable and even salutary. The theory of change that they most often settled on rested on an analogy with biology, the most vital of the sciences in the early nineteenth century. Unlike the philosophe who had viewed societies and nations as mechanisms, conservatives saw them as organisms that were born, matured, and died according to some unseen, inner necessity. Not all of the conservatives intended that the organic analogy be taken literally. Burke, for example, used the term but only as a metaphor in order to convey the fundamental importance of gradualism in historical development. In his view, change in history was essentially an empirical process achieved through cautious trial and error. The idealist philosopher Hegel, in contrast, saw in history a teleology or hidden purpose that was gradually working itself out in the affairs of men and nations. It was only the German romantics, led by Novalis and Adam Müller, who most consistently urged a literal application of biological organismic to society, state, and nation, but they were less influential, particularly in Russia, than might be supposed.

It needs to be pointed out that it was not quite the same thing to argue that the separate parts of a society were organically joined in a single purpose as it was to insist that society was a living organism. The jurist Friedrich von Savigny best expressed the organic idea as it was most commonly understood when he wrote in 1814 that what bound a nation into one whole was 'the common conviction of the people, the kindred consciousness of an inner necessity.' The conservatives, it was this inner necessity, and not the disruptive rationalism of the social reformers, that dictated true change. Legitimate change was internal and spontaneous, not external and conscious.

The store of common conviction to which Savigny referred was, for conservatives, the minimal requirement for the survival of a nation. It was an unwritten bond, more durable than the external unity imposed by written constitutions and positive laws. Men were dependent creatures whose moral convictions arose from a shared social experience. The conservatives feared that the utilitarian pursuit of pure self-interest could end only in social disintegration since, in their view, social harmony rested on the subordination of individual interests to long-established communal values. Liberal individualism was tantamount to atomization and an estrangement of man from man that no society could for long endure.

The conservative romantics were not in complete agreement on the issue of individualism. Some of the Germans, such as Novalis and Müller, went so far as to subordinate the individual completely to the higher unity of the community. They interpreted freedom to be the total identification of the individual with the aspirations of the group. This view culminated in Fichte's conception of the state in which individuals were entirely subsumed in the whole. Other romantic thinkers were more sensitive to the dangers posed to the individual by the glorification of the community. They envisaged a society in which each individual, through the full development of his own personality, furthered the growth of the whole. Hegel's fellow idealist F.W.J. von Schelling was particularly
aware of the tension between the individual and society and maintained
that cohesion was greatest in that society in which the individual was
freest to cultivate his unique personality.

The organic conception of the nation, which carried with it the notion
of the moral solidarity of the individual and the community, was
accompanied by a further idea that was to be of great significance for
intelligentsia conservatives in Russia. This was expressionism, an idea
that originated with Herder. In his criticism of the universalism of the
Enlightenment, Herder had stressed the value to the individual of
membership in a specific cultural group. He went on to argue that since
individuals were products of a particular time, place, and culture, all their
acts, especially their artistic endeavours, constituted an expression of the
personality of the whole nation. The conclusion that the Russians, among
others, drew was that nationality was most fully expressed in art.14

The European inheritance of the intelligentsia conservatives in Russia
was exceedingly complex, and it is virtually impossible to trace specific
influences with any confidence. The Russians were most profoundly
affected by the Germans, with their dynamic, idealist, and relativist view
of history and their organic, expressionist approach to the nation. Even
within the German tradition, however, differences were evident that were
later to provoke passionate arguments among the Russians. The ambiguities
of the German bequest raise complications enough, but the
Russian conservatives were never loath to borrow from any source, even
from their ideological opponents, to make their case. The product of their’
eclecticism was a unique Russian variation on the general theme of
European conservatism.

The continuous background of Russian conservatism was the highly
durable Russian autocracy. Until the turbulent reign of Peter the Great,
the Orthodox church had supplied the substance of Russian conservative
ideology. The alliance of church and state was sealed in the opening
years of the sixteenth century, and for nearly two hundred years the
absolutist claims of the princes and tsars of Muscovy rested on the
sanction of the church. The powerful monopoly of the church in Russian
cultural life and its almost pathological hostility towards the religion and
culture of western Europe early accustomed Russians to think in terms of
the contrasts between Russia and the West, a habit that was later to
become a fixed characteristic of the conservatives. Towards the end of
the seventeenth century the church began to lose its independence in
relations with the state and, even before the reign of Peter, had ceased to
be a partner and become the adjunct of the secular authority.

Peter vastly accelerated the process of the secularization of Russian
life that had been going on since the Time of Troubles at the start of the
seventeenth century. In his efforts to combat the dead weight of the past,
he created a westernized elite within the upper groups of the society.
Peter may have intended to promote little more than a technological
revolution in Russia, but in the long run the cultural revolution that
resulted from his reforms proved to be of more lasting significance for
his subjects. It symbolized a clear break in Russian history between the
religious culture of the past and the westernizing, secular culture of the
future and created a cultural gulf between the upper and lower classes of
the society. To be sure, the gap between the educated and uneducated in
most societies is large, but in Russia the problem was exacerbated. Peter
demanded that the upper classes reject traditionalist assumptions, but
these still underlay peasant life. There was resistance to Peter's reforms,
much of it centred around the church. The old boyar aristocracy also
protested the loss of its status and privilege that accompanied the
introduction of the Table of Ranks. The last great spokesman for the old
aristocracy was Prince Mikhail Shcherbatov who in his Corruption of
Morals in Russia bitterly denounced the life-style of the westernized
gentry and the frivolity of the court.15

Shcherbatov's strictures made little impression on the Russian gentry.
Unlike the boyar aristocracy from which Shcherbatov was descended, the
gentry had been the beneficiaries of Peter's reforms. It is true that they
depicted the compulsory service to the state which Peter imposed on
them for life, but after the great reformer's death they succeeded in
having the term of service shortened until in 1762 it was abolished
altogether. The first and most important step towards the emancipation
of the gentry took place in 1730. During the succession crisis of that year,
which was precipitated by the unexpected death of the new emperor,
Peter II, the boyars made a final, desperate attempt to impose their
authority on the autocracy. They proposed a constitutional settlement that
would have subjected the decisions of the monarch to the approval of an
aristocratic council. The gentry, which preferred the rule of one to the
rule of the aristocratic few, came to the support of the new empress, Anna.
In return for a few concessions, it formed a partnership with
the autocracy against the old aristocracy. The dyarchy of autocracy and
gentry formed the new foundation of Russian conservatism until the
middle of the nineteenth century. The Decembrist revolt of 1825, in
which many prominent gentry families were implicated, shook the
alliance, but it endured with few modifications until the Emancipation
reforms of 1861.
The gentry ideal of correct relations between the autocrat and the nobility was patriarchalism. The Russian nobleman had traditionally preferred the resolution of social conflicts through the personal intercession of the tsar to the regulation of society by the impersonal authority of the law. Since the operation of the patriarchal ideal rested on direct access to the monarch, the gentry deeply resented the growth of a bureaucracy that increasingly interposed itself between the ruler and society. Bureaucratization was not, however, a process that either the monarchy or the gentry could readily control.

The expansion of the bureaucratic machinery of imperial Russia was partly the consequence of the impressive growth from ca 1750 of the population and the increasing social and administrative complexity that the greater numbers entailed. The first half of the nineteenth century saw the beginnings of the urban transformation of Russia. As old administrative or religious centres acquired new economic functions and new commercial and industrial centres arose, the urban population of the empire increased by roughly three million people between 1812 and 1857. From approximately 5 per cent of the population at the turn of the century, the proportion of city dwellers rose to nearly 10 per cent of the total by 1863. The greatest increase occurred among the commercial and industrial middle classes and the factory workers.

The first steps towards urbanization, one indicator of modernization, were accompanied by another: the slow but none the less significant advance of education. Alexander I had undertaken a thorough restructuring of the education system from top to bottom. His successor, who was reluctant to extend more than bare literacy to the lower social orders, restructured the system to his own tastes and took care to control and manipulate the curricula of schools and universities. But the government could no longer dispense with a pool of educated citizens to effect the nation's business, and under Nicholas the number of Russians in schools steadily increased. Whereas in 1804 the Ministry of National Enlightenment had only some 33,000 students in attendance at schools within its jurisdiction, it had more than 125,000 in 1856.

The second stimulus to modernization was as well as bureaucratization the pressing need for Russia to compete successfully in the international arena with the economically and technologically more advanced nations of western Europe. Since the beginning of the seventeenth century, the autocracy had been caught on the horns of a persistent dilemma. On the one side was the urge to preserve the special shape and characteristic social relations of Muscovite society on which the authority of the tsars had traditionally rested. On the other side was the need to innovate at the very least in the areas of technology and administration in order to keep up with modernizing neighbours in the West, but at the risk of disrupting the peculiar social order that favoured the preservation of autocratic government. In the nineteenth century international competition was intensified by the spread of nationalism and the need for continuous modernization became more urgent.

The dilemma presented by the demands of modernization was never resolved in Russia. During the nineteenth century successive generations of government officials grappled with the problem of adapting existing institutions to the needs of a modernizing society, but a satisfactory balance between stability and change was not struck. If the efforts of Russian statesmen to preserve the social order awoke the spirit of radicalism among some elements of society, their attempts to 'systematize' Russian government through controlled change intensified feelings among conservatives - and others.

In spite of its abiding suspicion of most change, the Russian nobility had not been standing still. Following Peter's reforms, the successive generations of the Russian gentry came more and more to resemble their noble counterparts in the West both by outward appearance and inward conviction. To the best of their ability, most members of the gentry who could afford it emulated the cosmopolitan style of life that was rooted in the West.

The gradual Europeanization of the gentry was paralleled by a second important development. During the second half of the eighteenth century, a handful of Russian intellectuals painstakingly pieced together the foundations of a Russian national consciousness. They were proud of their Muscovite heritage and even prouder of Russia's accomplishments since Peter. The dualism of the Russian inheritance not unnaturally generated tensions in the minds of the patriots. As early as the latter pan of the eighteenth century such tensions began to be expressed in the metaphor 'Russia and the West.' It stood for the break between Muscovite and Petrine Russia, the cultural separation of the educated and uneducated, and increasingly, as will be seen, the rift between the proponents of a more traditionalist policy and the advocates of further westernization.

One of the more innovative and influential resolutions of the tension between traditionalism and Europeanism was first proposed in the nineteenth century by the novelist and historian, and most eloquent apologist of gentry conservatism, N.M. Karamzin. In 1802 he observed that 'Peter the Great, who united us with Europe and showed us the
benefits of enlightenment, did not long humiliate the national pride of the Russians. We looked at Europe, so to speak, and at one glance we assimilated the fruits of her long labours. The implication was that it was part of the nature of Russians to be able to assimilate the achievements and accumulated knowledge of other nationalities and make use of them within a purely national context.

The War of 1812 and the victory over Napoleon heightened Russian feelings of national pride. In the 1820s and early 1830s Russian romantics turned to German philosophy for an account of the meaning of history, especially Russian history. It was during the two decades following the Congress of Vienna that most of the philosophical underpinnings of the more thoughtful varieties of later conservatism first entered the Russian consciousness. Guided by the German idealists, Russian romantics believed implicitly in the creative powers of the human mind. Convinced that history was intelligible, they saw the historical process as an organic unfolding of universal consciousness. The agents of the advance of consciousness were individuals and nations. Each nation, they contended, contained a particular spiritual essence that progressively attained conscious expression in its history, art, and literature.

The Russian romantics demanded more of philosophy than the solution of theoretical problems. They insisted on unity and wholeness, on the fullness of life, the integral relationship of knowledge and personality, and the synthesis of ideal and real, thought and life. In the belief that all knowledge was concrete, they rejected rationalism and empiricism as abstract and one-sided and sought instead to poeticize the individual, the nation, and the universe. From the beginning Russian romantics freely mingled questions of philosophy with questions of nationality and found in the mysteries of the Russian nation the wholeness and universality that philosophy ultimately could not provide.

Karamzin's type of faith in the universality of Russians persisted, therefore, throughout the romantic period in Russia. P.A. Viazemsky, for example, believed that Russians were able to make their own everything of beauty and value that came from the outside world. Viazemsky, a writer and critic, was referring to the creations of Russian literature. But the idea soon re-emerged in philosophy. P.Ia. Chaadaev put the same notion to use in order to inject a new element into contemporary interpretations of Peter the Great. In his 'Apology of a Madman' Chaadaev argued that Peter's reforms were not alien to Russia but profoundly national and represented the logical outcome of Russia's cultural advance towards humanity. V.F. Odoevsky also noted, in his *Russian Nights*, that Russians had for a long time been conscious of their universality. Peter, he maintained, had linked the elements of west European nationality with the love and unity that was inherent in the Russian soul and so had prepared the way for Russia's universal mission.

In 1819, Viazemsky provided the Russian language with a new word, *narodnost'*. Within it he hoped to encompass all the supposed characteristics of Russian national originality. *Narodnost'* was a crucial element in nearly all social and political thought in nineteenth-century Russia, but it was the very heart of conservatism. It was not, however, a precise term. Conservatives not only disagreed about the proper content of *narodnost'*, but differed also as to how it could be reinjected into and diffused throughout the life of the nation.

Originally *narodnost'* was intended to describe those elements that distinguished Russian literature from the literature of other nationalities, and it never entirely relinquished its early close associations with literature. Herder's expressionism prevailed in Russia in the idea that the native originality of any people was expressed in its literary creations. The great poet Aleksandr Pushkin suggested in 1825 that the religion, government, and climate of a country combined to 'give each people a peculiar physiognomy which is to a greater or lesser degree reflected in the mirror of poetry'. Pushkin's view was to have a lasting influence in Russian literature and literary criticism. The artist, as the product of his time and place, was believed to be organically linked to the life of his nation. Literature revealed to man the hidden meaning of the objective world and gave conscious expression to the unconscious, hidden springs of nationality.

By the 1840s the tension between the Western and Russian ideals had become personified in two small groups of intellectuals, the westernizers and the Slavophiles. Both groups have been discussed amply and often elsewhere in the literature. It is sufficient to remark here that the debate between the two camps turned on the metaphor Russia and the West. In the Russia of Nicholas I there was no opportunity to address concrete social and political issues, and this metaphor served as a kind of substitute for the great ideological matters dividing progressives and conservatives in the more open intellectual atmosphere of western Europe. Both Russia and the West, as they were understood by the two sides, were abstractions that bore little resemblance to the reality of either. The West conveyed the progressive virtues and implied a rationalist solution for Russia; Russia embodied the conservative virtues
and foreshadowed a traditionalist future. The West stood for something that Russia did not have but should acquire; Russia stood for something Russians had once had but were imminently in danger of losing.

By the end of the decade, the controversy between the Slavophiles and westernizers had more or less reached an impasse. But the possibility of synthesizing the major ideas of the two camps and the two sides of the metaphor that they represented had always been present. Karamzin and the Russian romantics had already provided a means of bridging the gap between Russian particularism on the one hand and the greater world of Europeanism on the other. All that was needed in order to complete the synthesis was a number of individuals who were equipped by their social experience and intellectual interests for this complex task.