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The Ways of Professional Philosophy Development in Russia

Alexey Malinov*

Saint Petersburg State University, Universitetskay nab. 7/9, 199034, St. Petersburg, Russia

Abstract

The paper deals with the history of professional, or university, philosophy in Russia. Having appeared in 18th century, professional philosophy has been playing the leading role in dissemination and popularization of philosophical ideas, formation of conceptual thinking and working out of Russian philosophical terminology. Nevertheless, nearly three hundred year history of professional philosophy gives grounds to consider it deficient. In addition, its relationship with authorities was uneasy. More than once philosophy, including in universities, was banned and subjected to persecution. Moreover, the authorities' utilitarian approach to philosophy did not stimulate its development as speculative practice. It is not odd that more often professional philosophy was turning into ideology, which impacted on its own nature adversely.

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1. Introduction

University philosophy is an indispensable part of the intellectual culture of every society and an indicator of its general spiritual level. Both the fact that philosophy was taught in educational institutions and the formation of the system of philosophical education (foundation of the Faculties of philosophy) stimulated working out professional philosophical terminology and popularizing the philosophical knowledge; also, it satisfied social demand for philosophy. Professional philosophy induced to translate classical philosophical texts and contemporary researches, which also played a great part in stimulation of philosophical culture of the society. The history of university philosophy in Russia covers more than three centuries, which allows to clarify its peculiarities and, perhaps, its national features. Professionalization of philosophy is the result of its institutionalization and its formation as a kind

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +79523816188
E-mail address: a.v.malinov@gmail.com

of knowledge. Philosophy as a kind of knowledge implies that those intellectual movements and doctrines which aim to ground philosophy as a science predominate in universities. A different understanding of philosophy is rarely supported in professional philosophical circles. That is partly determined by the fact that claims of philosophy to be a science and its attempts to show itself as a form of knowledge only give it a chance to justify its own existence to authorities and other users. The philosophy in universities appears to be more constrained with those restrictions and requirements which are imposed on the system of education. Freedom as the very basis of philosophical thinking contradicts frequently the objectives set to university education. In Russian history of philosophy the scholarly problematics, i.e., the issue of existence of the philosophical schools and movements, the problem of their typological and regional peculiarities, their specific character in comparison with the schools and movements in other sciences, is understudied.

2. Objectives, methodology and research design

The study of the history of professional philosophy in Russia plays a significant part in the Russian historical and philosophical process. The aim of the article is to show the way Russian professional philosophy has gone over the past three centuries. The study will adopt both traditional methods of history (such as a comparative historical research, typological method, problem method, genetic method, historical interpretation and critique, historiographical analysis) and the specific methods of the history of philosophy (such as a conceptual reconstruction, showing up the social and the cultural context, the source analysis and comparative analysis of ideas).

The professional philosophy, i.e. university one, has recently been attracting the attention of Russian scholars. Apart from the studies devoted to various philosophical problems, movements and schools, the studies of university philosophy as a whole (Bazhanov, 1995; Pustarnakov, 2003), i.e. of the philosophy in Academic (Bezlepkin, Kacharava, Solonin, 1999), St-Petersburg (Emel'yanov & Novikov, 1998; Ovchinnikova & Chumakova, 1999; Kobzar', 2010), Moscow (Pavlov, 2010; Kozyrev, 2010) and some other universities (Drach & Tikhonov, 2010; Zav'yalova, 2011; Ibragimova & Serebryakov, 2011), have appeared. The monographic researches and articles on individual philosophers teaching at the Russian universities are so numerous that they deserve to be studied in a separate historiographical inquiry.

3. Discussion of the research outcomes

3.1. Professional philosophy in Russia in the 18th century

To put it strictly, the beginning of the professional philosophy in Russia can be dated from the 18th century. The establishment of the system of education resulted in the appearance of philosophy teachers in newly founded educational institutions, i.e., there appeared those who made their living by philosophy. It is well known that Peter I had talks with Professor Ch. Wolff over the latter's possible move to St. Petersburg. And if the German scientist had agreed, we could have begun the history of Russian professional philosophy with Professor Ch. Wolff. In Middle Ages, there was no common understanding in Russia what a philosopher meant. The word *philosopher* was applied to both a literate and educated person and an illiterate but righteous man. A clearer criterion appeared in the 18th century, as philosophy had become a profession. Although the practical spirit predominating during the epoch of Peter I did not favoured and helped such contemplative work, philosophy was admitted as an indispensable element of the system of education. The tsar-reformer invited with Leibnitz twice to consult with him about the establishing of the Academy of sciences in the new capital of the country. However, the tsar did not follow Leibnitz's advice. Only practical philosophy could meet Peter's I demands. Thus, by the emperor's edict G. Buzhinsky translated into Russian the book *On The Duty of Man and Citizen According to the Natural Law* (S.-Petersburg, 1726) by S. Pufendorf (though retranslated not from German original text, but from its Latin translation).

However, professional philosophy in Russia connected with S.-Petersburg Academy of sciences (1724), Academic (1724) and Moscow (1755) universities was not notable for originality. The philosophical courses taught in Latin were the renderings of popular European textbooks. The first Russian textbook on philosophy published in St.-Petersburg in 1751 under the title "Some knowledge concerning the philosophy in general for the benefit of

those who cannot read foreign books about it” by G.N. Teplov was also a compilation. The appeal of N.N. Popovsky, one of the Lomonosov’s followers, to lecture in Russian at the beginning of his course on philosophy at Moscow university was not supported by foreign professors who were the majority of university teachers at that time. It should be noted that N.N. Popovsky made his appeal in his speech delivered in Latin. After Popovsky had left the university the lecturing on philosophy was resumed in Latin. The secondariness of Russian professional philosophy was quite understandable and could be excused with the processes that had been taking place in Russian society at that time. The period of acquaintanceship with West European science and culture together with learning from Europe also reflected in Russian philosophy. Nevertheless, there was a positive aspect in this process. Although the adoption of western Europe philosophy did not encourage an independent thinking and, thus, did not stimulate the development of Russian philosophy (at least before the appearance of the critical viewpoint on its own philosophical teachers), it at the same time helped work out philosophical terminology and jargon that searched for the compatibility between language and thinking. This process was encouraged by both translations of the philosophical texts together with Russian expositions of philosophical conceptions and attempts to compile first Russian dictionaries. In particular, concise dictionaries of that type served as introductions to the philosophical courses by F. Lopatinsky and by G.H. Teplov.

Consequently, the 18th century showed basic features of both professional philosophy in Russia (non-originality and secondariness) and the philosophy professors themselves (philosophical unproductiveness and lack of talent). It was only confirmed by the subsequent development of Russian philosophy. In justice, it should be noted that colourlessness, plainness of professional philosophy and lack of talent of university professors are not the specific features of Russian philosophy. Professional philosophy is such in its essence. The most notable European philosophers as a rule were not connected with universities. To put it strictly, their philosophy was not scholarly or academic. For those who in fact contributed to the development of philosophy, philosophy itself was not always occupation of their life, nor was it the goal of their careers. The short period from the end of the 18th to the beginning of the 19th centuries in Germany when philosophy in fact existed in universities and university professors were also philosophers (I. Kant, I.G. Fichte, G.W.F. Hegel, F. Schelling) might be considered an exception to the rule. Subsequently, prominent philosophers either worked beyond the universities or were connected with them during a short time period.

3.2. Professional philosophy in Russia in the first half of the 19th century

The role of professional philosophy is indicative in the first half of the 19th century, when all the most interesting in Russian philosophy took place beyond the universities. That was the time of philosophical circles and salons. P.Y. Chaadayev, Slavophilists and Westernizers were the representatives of salon philosophy. Although the members of the *Society of Lyubomudriye*, the circles of N.V. Stankevich and A.I. Herzen were the graduates of Moscow university and although many Russian Westernizers even were the professors of Moscow university (P.G. Redkin, K.D. Kavelin, T.N. Granovskiy, B.N. Chicherin, S.M. Solovov, P.N. Kudryavtsev, M.N. Katkov etc.), it should be noted that all of them were not professionals in philosophy (M.N. Katkov was the only of them to hold the chair of philosophy at Moscow university for nearly two years). They were either historians and lawyers or historians of law. Moreover, at the universities themselves because of the curatorship of Magnitsky and Runich the lectures in agronomy and mineralogy (Moscow University Professor M.G. Pavlov) or *prolusion* to medicine (Medical and Surgical Academy Professor D.M. Vellansky) appeared to be most philosophical.

Salon philosophy existed in an oral form and was developing in the form of a friendly conversation or dispute or even in the form of a family tea-drinking, as slavofilists used to do it. At the same time, it appealed not to the young people, but to the idle audience, with ladies as its significant part. Such philosophy is the way of pastime. That is why it should not be boring, and should be non-committal and less strict than academic philosophy and often is openly provoking. P.Y. Chaadayev and inveterate debater *rabid duelist of dialectics* A.S. Khomyakov were the masters of such paradoxes and queer news. The philosophical texts by A.S. Khomyakov had deliberately unprofessional character: incompleteness and no footnotes in spite of the plenty of facts and quotations. The life style of slavofilists, which was incompatible with professional philosophy, gave them opportunity to show off as the independent and spiritually free thinkers. In fact, the slavofilists were the first in Russia to reproduce the primordial

archetype of philosophy as a form of pastime and disinterested search for truth. The slavofilists did not serve to anybody. That was their conscious choice, which guaranteed the independence of their philosophical discourse. The critical intention of slavofilists' searches was stronger though. Indeed, they started from either disagreement with western European philosophy or disapproval of the state of affairs in Russia of that time. Nevertheless, slavofilists formulated their goal clearly: it was the developing of the independent thinking, i.e., original philosophy giving the opportunity to overcome unproductive learning, in which Russian professional philosophy had been vegetating. It should be noted that the attempts of I.V. Kireyevsky and K.S. Aksakov to hold the chair of philosophy at Moscow university were unsuccessful. Unlike slavofilists, professional philosophy had never ventured to support the freedom of speech, press, expression and opinion and never backed the extension of the rights of nobility on other estates and never protested against serfdom. Liberal demands of slavofilists were alien to university professors preferring to show their loyalty to authorities.

Philosophical salons marked one more peculiarity of Russian philosophy, which distinguished it from professionalization: predominance of *non-committal* and *indulgent* genres, such as the epistles and letters. And if the epistles of Philotheus, the letters of Ivan the Terrible and the petitions of Avvakum Petrov had belonged to the epistolary genre in the true sense of the word, "Philosophical letters" by P.Y. Chaadayev, "Letters on the study of nature" by A.I. Herzen, "Philosophy of inequality. Letters to foes on social philosophy" by N.A. Berdyaev and epistolary form of "The Pillar and Ground of the Truth: an Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters" by P.A. Florensky were the manifestations of the philosophical viewpoint of their authors. The epistolary character of Russian philosophy is the evidence of its open resistance to professional philosophy. Such position can hardly be considered as a drawback or demonstration of any inferiority complex. Professionalism itself should not be considered as the indispensable feature of philosophy. Professional philosophy in Russia was the least Russian and the least philosophical.

3.3. *Professional philosophy in Russia in the second half of the 19th century*

The professional philosophy still poor suffered a severe blow in 1850: the chairs of philosophy were liquidated at all the universities except the German University of Derpt (Tartu). The minister of National Education prince Shirinsky-Shikhmatov (with the first Russian name Platon meaning Plato) justified his decision with the lack of proof that philosophy was beneficial, but possibly harmful. But that was not the point. Authorities feared that even the imitative university philosophy together with its loyal professors could encourage independent thinking. In the middle of the 19th century and on the government feared of philosophy because of apprehension of appearance of independently thinking persons. Nevertheless, all the following authorities' attacks against philosophy, university education and science (1884 University Regulations and actions by minister I.D. Delyanov might be mentioned here) were as usual grounded on the already old-fashioned and more than once rebutted reason of their uselessness.

When it was decided to reestablish the chairs of philosophy according to the 1863 University Regulations, it turned out that there were no professional philosophers left. The lecturers of Theological Academies started being transferred to the universities. F.F. Sidonsky was transferred to St.-Petersburg University, and P.D. Yurkevich was transferred to Moscow University. In fact, training philosophy was only restored when students and graduates of Theological Academies sent to study in Germany began returning from there. However, restoring the tradition of lecturing on philosophy had taken about 30 years. The university philosophy gradually had got stronger and acquired the features of academic respectability and professional complacency. This period is characterized by the change in philosophical fashion (positivism, leibnizianism, intuitivism etc.) and institutionalization of philosophy. Thus, the professional philosophical associations (Moscow psychological association, Saint-Petersburg University philosophical association) were established; the philosophical journals stimulating professional integration of philosophers started to come out: *Questions of philosophy and psychology*, *Logos*, *Myisl*; the work on translations became more well-ordered and active. But even during this auspicious period professional philosophy did not predominate and determine the image of Russian philosophy. The ban on philosophy resulted in the shift of philosophical debates into the sphere of journalism, which for a long time determined the publicistic character of Russian philosophy. Russian literature and poetry more and more often became involved into the world view and philosophical problematics. In the second half of the 19th century, the literature-centrism of Russian philosophy had finally strengthened (F.M. Dostoyevsky, L.N. Tolstoy and F.I. Tyutchev). It is symptomatic that V.S. Solovyov, the

most prominent philosophical figure of that time, was only connected with universities for a short period and that the leaders of the so called *Religious and philosophical Renaissance* (N.A. Berdyaev, L.I. Shestov, D.S. Merezhkovsky and V.V. Rozanov) did not in the least belong to them. Highly original N.F. Fyodorov's philosophy of the common task could only be produced within the unprofessional sphere. N.F. Fyodorov is also interesting for the reason that his creative work clearly shows how professional philosophy gets new ideas from the unprofessional sphere. Such is *Russian cosmism*.

3.4. Professional philosophy in Russia after the "philosophical ship"

Philosophers' ships, i.e., the exile of the scholars from Soviet Russia in 1922, put an end to the Russian professional philosophy. Being expelled, philosophers had got much more politicized; the scientific treatises had given way to publicism, and theory had been replaced by abuse. Those who tried to retain professional philosophical dignity used to repeat dogmas brought from home and replicated philosophical truisms. In Soviet Russia professional philosophy had come to an end and given way to profession of ideologist. Finding practical application of philosophy, an official ideology successfully reconciled authorities with philosophy. The faculties of philosophy joined the work on scheduled fulfillment of the Government procurement for training ideologists. Though remaining a university course, philosophy ceased to be professional. There was not historical paradox in it. Philosophy returned to the type of philosophy predominating in Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and The Slavic Greek Latin Academy which both aimed at professional training of the preachers and defenders of Orthodox Christianity. However, isolationism and polemic orientation did not impede to form the system of education relying on the Western European examples. In one case it was the second scholastics and in the other it was Marxism. The philosophical obscenity of *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* by V. Lenin became the model of thinking. It can be noticed that if not to take into account the stupid simple-heartedness of orthodox and dialectic schizophrenia of non-orthodox Marxists it will be obvious that those who retained the capacity for independent thinking (M.M. Bakhtin, D.L. Andreev, A.F. Losev, L.N. Gumilev) were excluded from philosophical elite bureaucracy. Philosophy was forced either to disguise itself as a philological exegesis or resort to incomprehensible language of symbolic logics. At the same time, the name of the *lovers of wisdom* was attributed to the careerists working at the universities and ideological departments.

The change of ideological surroundings has not led to the noticeable professionalization of philosophy. Like in every uneasy time the impostors, the adventures and pure villains appeared during the period after Perestroika. University philosophy did not become an exclusion. In comparison with the type of philosophy of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy the further archaization of professional philosophy showed up in two old vices – nepotism and simony. Philosophers refused from the power only available to the intellectuals, i.e., the power to criticize authorities; thus, from the view of authorities they lost the respect. What economically ineffective and ideologically useless faculties of philosophy still exist can be accounted for either by ignorant thoughtlessness of authorities or their fear of passing for unenlightened. The fall of ideological dictatorship has not added the independency to Russian philosophy. The fear of independent thinking, and indeed the inability to think and the habit to refer to others' authority has led to a new wave of philosophical vogue. Russian philosophy could not resist the temptations of phenomenology, analytical philosophy, psychoanalysis, postmodern philosophy, heideggerianism, hermeneutics, structuralism and other variants of *xenomania* (*chuzhebesie* meaning blunt veneration to Western civilization by Y. Krizhanich's expression). The historical experience of Russian philosophy shows that in order to achieve the independency a generation must change, i.e., it should take about 30 years. The period from 1980s to 1990s has been about to come to an end, which gives reason to hope for the beginning of a more productive stage of Russian philosophy. Disinterest of authorities in philosophy and some social isolation of philosophers may stimulate even university professors' freethinking. Nevertheless, philosophers will have to put up with the fact that all their achievements will remain their unprofitable glory. Philosophy does not promise material well-being. Even with all the advantages of social stability which the institutionalization gives to university society philosophers will remain outcasts in universities.

4. Conclusion

No doubt, one cannot deny that to some extent lack of state care about university philosophy has raised its professional standards. However, the belonging of professional philosophy to university system does not allow to expect significant achievements from it. The matter is not only in the fact that every system is aimed at reproducing and encouraging mediocrities. Professional philosophy is not a successor to lovers of wisdom but sophists, wisdom experts. The sophists who were willing to teach everything for money are known to be the founders of the system of education. The faculties of philosophy establishing new chairs and departments not for the sake of science but for the sake of one's economical and personal demands organize the education on the same principle. Philosophical education is a modern sophistic. Nevertheless, the old stereotype of the orientation of philosophy towards professionalism is still retained. When unable to be demanded as a servant of ideology, philosophy aspires to change the function of a servant for the function of a sponger. Philosophy has no choice except to find a benefactor and live on donations, but at the same time not to be too burdensome for him as the status of a poor relation compels to a certain economy. At least that is a fairer position. Then, it might be possible either to cut teaching philosophy as a compulsory course at other faculties, though it would only be better to teach it at the top years of the studies, or to refuse from awarding the Bachelor's degree in philosophy and only admit the students to the Master's degree. I think the second variant will make positive impact on professionalism of philosophers. Nowadays the very fact of the Bachelor's degree in philosophy seems a delusion of the relevant ministry and cunningness in relation to those who study philosophy. It is not easy for a qualified philosopher to find a situation because his only suitable employment is that of a lecturer, which requires the Master's degree. The Bachelor's degree in philosophy only exists because of inadvertence or thoughtlessness of the ministry of education. The only perspective for philosophical training is developing the higher degrees of education – Master's degree and postgraduate study. Prolongation of the period of studies up to three years would be extremely desirable. It is presumable that the Master's degree in philosophy allows its holders not only to be researchers who are not in great demand (if not at all), but the lecturers as well. That is why Master's degree programs should be oriented to Bachelor's degree ones in specific scientific areas. For instance, it might be philosophy for historical and philological specialization, philosophy for medical and biological specialization, philosophy for natural science and engineering specialization, philosophy for creative specialization, philosophy for sociological and psychological specialization etc. The limitation of the philosophical study with Master's degree programs and postgraduate training would only change the quality of bulk of philosophy students. Firstly, the average age of the philosophy students would be higher than that of the students of the most other faculties. From my own teaching experience I can state that it makes a positive influence on the very process of education. That is quite enough to compare the full-time philosophy students with those of the part-time. Being older, the part-time students are more interested and mentally stronger in studies than the full-time ones. Secondly, the faculty of philosophy will admit to the Master's degree programs the students already possessing the professional skills in some sphere, to say nothing of the fact that as a rule these people have clear world view and even life experience. In this connection, I must note that the refusal from the part-time department at the Faculty of philosophy of St.-Petersburg state university was a great mistake.

However, the only implementation of Master's degree program in philosophy will not radically change the situation in professional philosophy, as philosophy is not a profession but an asceticism, i.e., a certain life style and thinking. Those who would like to consider themselves professional philosophers will have to think on a timetable.

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