

BOOK REVIEWS

Galin Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave: Lukács, Bakhtin, and the Ideas of their Time*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2000, 327 pp.

Georg Lukács (1885–1971) was the preeminent Marxist intellectual of the postwar Eastern Bloc. Earlier, during the 1930s in Moscow, Lukács was engaged in editing and publishing previously unknown works by Marx and Engels, and inspired a whole generation to go back to Hegel for a less dogmatic understanding of Marxist literary history. The theory of the novel became an especially fierce battlefield of intellectual debate under the Stalin regime. During the same period, Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895–1975) developed his own views on the novel, far from the scene of public life. It was only in the 1960s that he managed to reach a wider audience with the publication of his studies on Dostoevsky and Rabelais. Since then, Bakhtin's star has continued to rise, whereas Lukács's ideas have looked increasingly abandoned.

Galin Tihanov undertakes to show that Lukács occupies a prominent place among Bakhtin's predecessors and contemporaries. Tihanov's surprising conclusion is that, despite his long-life struggle against Lukács's influence, Bakhtin remained deeply indebted to his Master. This applies in particular to Bakhtin's predilection for the novel above the epic, which merely reverses Lukács's *Theory of the Novel*. Obviously things are both simpler and more complicated than that. Simpler, because both philosophers share a deep nostalgic longing: Lukács for lost epic totality, Bakhtin for folklore and antiquity. At the same time, things are more complicated, because both Lukács and Bakhtin failed in their attempts to understand literature in a profoundly historical way, ascribing to the novel some pre-given and timeless properties.

Tihanov offers more than a comparison between Lukács and Bakhtin. Both philosophers are depicted in their historical

context, and their texts are analyzed as varying syntheses of numerous sources and influences. The reader discovers in each chapter new perspectives and connections. Much attention is given to undervalued areas, like Lukács's studies of Hegel, and Bakhtin's reworking of a Russian tradition of literary studies, represented by Veselovskij, Tynjanov, and Freidenberg. Tihanov shows himself committed to the genre of intellectual history, defined here as a search for the underlying unity of Lukács's and Bakhtin's intellectual careers through comparison with their predecessors and contemporaries. Sometimes, however, Tihanov pushes this approach against the limits of what can be expected from intellectual history, trying to view his subject from outside.

This is the case, for example, in his comments on Alexandre Kojève and Jean Hyppolite, whose views Lukács disqualified as a reading of Hegel in an "existential, irrational sense" (252). Like his adversaries, Lukács believed that Hegel's dialectics of work was more than a mere moment in the dialectics of consciousness. The emergent independence of the slave's consciousness means a "desired (and imagined) growth of the human faculty for acquiring knowledge of the world through labour" (258). Not only human relations, but all of history must, according to Hegel's analysis, be explained as a life and death struggle between a master and his servant. Never, though, will the master become a slave, nor the slave a master. Should this change occur, history would in fact stop. Kojève describes bourgeois society as a pseudo-overcoming of the master-slave opposition. Hyppolite goes one step further by discovering in *language*, in particular the language "of *esprit* and wit" (252), the possibility of a theatrical staging of the master-slave relation. In language, we can estrange ourselves without having to die. Language holds all contradictions together without arriving at a non-historical truth, and keeps reproducing the contradictions ad infinitum. Thus, language is both what sustains the infinite movement of history and what expresses the truth of this world.

In a critical vein, Tihanov shows how Lukács and Bakhtin fail to recognize this truth in their philosophies, falling back on

a historical theoremes. Lukács reads Hegel's phenomenology as an "optimistic and dignified *Bildungsroman* of the entire human race" (258), and thus cleanses Hegel of bitter aspects, such as his insistence on "fear" as an essential presupposition for the growing freedom of human consciousness. Bakhtin's historiologies are repeatedly blocked by phenomenological reductionism. In his *Rabelais*, for instance, he glorifies "the body in its most material and primitive aspects which preclude change and evolution" (290).

It can be expected, however, that these failures, which still belong to "language," are not entirely devoid of meaning. It would be disappointing if Tihanov only wanted to demonstrate the superiority of Hyppolite's ideas, which were dismissed by Lukács (251–2). The intellectual history would then spring from a concept that is itself never exposed to philosophical scepticism. It would be interesting to see whether Lukács and Bakhtin have something to offer that does not fit so easily into the paradigm of master and slave.

Tihanov offers a clue to one such *différance*, when he considers Lukács's dismissal of Kojève and Hyppolite as a "carefully pondered tactic to make his own Marxist interpretation of Hegel look unprecedented and unique" (252). If such a tactic were to be successful at all, it would hide under the polemical scenery a more fundamental similarity, a bond that replaces the struggle. This historical truth would consequently be excluded from the linguistic scene.

Another consideration could arise with respect to Bakhtin's supposed phenomenological reductionism. In this case, the clue has to be sought in an early stage of Bakhtin's phenomenological orientation, in which he focused on the relation between author and hero in aesthetic creation. Tihanov laments this choice: "Rather than following the prevailing tradition of interest in the relation between subject and object, which would still allow ample room for sociological reasoning, Bakhtin chooses to ponder a transformed version of this relation – the bond between author and hero – in a way that distills and purifies it of any social dimension" (197). Where phenomenological reduction would leave intact the difference between

subject and object, Bakhtin's conception lapses into reductionism by treating their relation as a *bond*, in which one position can be substituted for another. Hyppolite certainly would have objected to such reductionism. Tihanov himself is less unequivocal. Referring to Derrida's reading of Hegel, Tihanov confesses that he integrates the master–slave comparison in the wider concept of bond (15), and wholly in this spirit concludes his book with a touching, though imaginary scene of Lukács and Bakhtin together: “From the point of view of intellectual history, though, the former and the current master remain locked in a firm embrace” (295).

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Erik van Ree, *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin: A Study in Twentieth-Century Revolutionary Patriotism*, Routledge Curzon, London/New York, 2002, 366 pp. £65.00 / \$114.95.

To many a contemporary mind, a discussion of the political thought of Stalin may seem one of the last subjects to take into serious consideration. Was he not the paranoid leader of one of the two major manifestations of evil in 20th century politics? The cruel dictator of a system which could only survive through massive repression, starting with the liquidation of the *kulaks* “as a class” in the 1930s? The codifier of Marxism–Leninism as the “Marxism of the epoch of imperialism and proletarian revolution” (p. 255), i.e. of the transformation of Marxism from a revolutionary and critical theory into the dogmatic legitimizing ideology of Soviet power? The vain orchestrator of his own personality cult? If Lenin could still be considered a political thinker, source of the idea of imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism, author of an important text in political

philosophy, *Gosudarstvo i revoljucija*, an idealist, albeit a fanatical one, would Stalin, a drop out seminary student, not have to be perceived as a simple-minded dictator drunk with power? Why study his *thought* rather than his political deeds? What more reason would one have to take Stalin seriously as a thinker than, say, Kim-Il-Sung?

If the book by Erik van Ree teaches us one thing, it is that there is indeed ample reason to take Stalin seriously as a *thinker*. And this not so much because of his originality as an “innovator” of Marxism but, on the contrary, as its faithful developer: as Van Ree demonstrates in great detail, virtually all elements and positions that one finds in Stalin can be traced back through Lenin and Marx to the French Enlightenment, notably the Jacobins. Stalin, Van Ree claims, was not a mere ‘opportunist and a shrewd pragmatist’, but a man of principle (p. 1), not a psychiatric case, but a true believer and ‘a convinced adherent of the Bolshevik ideology of murderous class war’ (p. 5f). The explications of Stalin’s thought in his writings show him to have been led by two principles: efficiency and power (p. 276).

What singles out Van Ree’s study in particular is the use of unique and reliable material: Stalin’s overwhelmingly Marxist private library with his numerous handwritten marginal notes (p. 15). Within this library, his preferences were, again, exclusively Marxist (p. 260). In a well-composed series of neat chapters on topics such as ‘Proletarian revolution in a backward country’, ‘The sharpening of class struggle’, ‘Stalin and the state’, and ‘Revolutionary patriotism’, Van Ree gives a balanced and complete account, chronological and thematic at the same time, of the many theoretical and practical issues Stalin had to deal with during his long career: a revolutionary for 20 years (1896–1917), party-man for another decade (1918–1928), and then uncontested leader for almost 25 years (1929–1953). These issues he tried to solve on the basis of a strict version of Marxism. He claimed a single original contribution to Marxism–Leninism, *viz.* ‘the theory of the persistence of the state under socialism under the condition of capitalist encirclement’ (p. 257). Otherwise, he was the best of possible pupils,

displaying reverence to Lenin and Marx while occasionally being critical only of Engels.

Van Ree rejects the hypothesis that Stalin drew on a specifically Russian or Orthodox-Christian tradition: there were similarities with Orthodoxy, but they were superficial, and those Russian thinkers who did inspire Stalin, Vissarion Belinskij and Nikolaj Chernyshevskij were, precisely, *Westernizers* (p. 16). This latter point is questionable, I think, as it pre-supposes a too simple opposition of Westernizers and Slavophiles: this opposition was part of the 19th century discussion itself, and as such it is in fact part of the explanandum, not of the explanans. Not accidentally, most Westernizers, including Belinskij, Chernyshevskij (son of an Orthodox priest and seminarist), and Stalin himself (son of a deeply religious Orthodox mother, and also a seminarist), were Orthodox before they became Westernizers. The fact that Stalin drew on Western (Marxist) and Westernizing Russian sources does not exclude, therefore, that there was something profoundly Orthodox in the way in which he received these ideas, related for example to the notorious dualism of ideality and reality that, with its disdain for everything this-worldly, facilitates the type of radical instrumentalization that Van Ree correctly ascribes to Stalin. For Stalin, as for Lenin, violence, even terror, was never a goal in itself (p. 285), but as a necessary means it was fully justified by the sacred goal of establishing 'the Kingdom of Labour on earth' (p. 167). To my mind, therefore, Van Ree slightly underestimates the religious element in Stalinism – just as he seems to disregard the continuity between fanatical forms of Christianity and the type of Enlightenment thinking to which he relates Stalin's thought. Indirectly, however, this connection supports Van Ree's argument that it is impossible to explain Stalinism away by ascribing it to Asiatic despotism or Orthodox tradition: like Nazism, Stalinism does belong to the disquieting elements of *Western* modernity.

While Van Ree drives home his 'extraordinarily bold conjecture that there is no fundamental doctrine in the work of Lenin and Stalin that cannot be found in the Western European revolutionary tradition' (p. 14), this does not imply that 'the only specifically Russian thing about all these concepts was that Lenin

and Stalin turned them into practice on an incomparably larger scale' (p. 15): there might also be a difference in the methods or the zeal involved, or in the "resistance" of the human and societal material. The author seems to subscribe to the conception of the Soviet system as an "ideocracy", i.e. to the idea, propagated by the system and its ideology, that with the formation of Marxism as "true theory", the relationship between socio-economic basis and ideological superstructure could be reversed. What, however, if precisely *that* ideocratic idea is ideological (quite irrespective of what Stalin thought or believed) in the sense of concealing the persistent obstinacy of societal reality and at the same time *a priori* legitimizing whichever intervention in it?

Van Ree's final conclusion is rather alarming. To his mind, 'the bottom line is that, while Hitler is the gangster next door, Stalin is our own flesh and blood, our own son turned serial killer' (p. 286). Since it is impossible to prove that Stalinism was heir to a Russian or Asian tradition, we must assume that it was 'not the end of the Enlightenment Utopia of Reason but its fulfillment' (p. 287). Who is this 'we'? Westerners haunted by the Enlightenment in its politicized, "Jacobinist" variant? Ex- and post-Marxists? Former fellow travelers? World society? Would there not be another 'we' entitled to say that Hitler was 'our son turned serial killer'? Who is part of that 'we'? That "political Enlightenment" entails a great political danger – arguably just as great as the danger entailed in political Islam – is known since at least Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes* ('Die absolute Freiheit und der Schrecken'). The question then is why this lesson proves so hard to be learned. In this sense, Van Ree is absolutely right that there still is a task of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* related to the 'credit' – minimal, but real – once given to Stalin by many Western intellectuals (including the present reviewer, and including, presumably, the author). This book presents in full the material needed for such a reevaluation.

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Mikhail Ryklin, Dirk Ufflemann and Klaus Städtke (eds.), *Uskol'zajushchij kontekst. Russkaja filosofija v xx v. Materialy konferencii (Bremen, 25–27 junija, 1998 g.)*, AD MARGINEM, Moskva, 2002, 383 pp.

In 1998 an international conference entitled “Russian philosophy under post-Soviet conditions” was held in Bremen (Germany). The book reviewed here contains 15 papers presented during this conference as well as the final discussion. The excellent introduction (written by the editors) outlines the most important questions examined during the conference. In view of the large number of articles, it is therefore not surprising that the content of the book is heterogeneous. The articles deal with various questions such as freedom in the work of Shestov, the “figure of silence” in the Moscow-Tartu School, the relation between philosophy and philology in contemporary Russian discourse, and the role of the history of philosophy as an academic discipline in post-Soviet Russia. As the title of the book suggests, the issue of the context in which philosophical discourse takes place in Russia provides the framework that brings together the broad thematic content of the articles. The book deals with two central themes of particular importance for the Russian philosophical tradition. First, the question of language and the place of philosophy, and second the relation between philosophy and politics.

In the Introduction the editors raise the question of the linguistic context and thus the context in which Russian philosophy develops; several of the articles take up the point as

well. Furthermore, the texts themselves are a “contribution” to this discussion: Russian was the working language of the conference, it took place in Germany, and some of the participants are Russians working and living abroad, either partly or permanently. Therefore, as the editors state in the Introduction, this situation “... furthers the tradition of the less than automatic relationship between place and language that has been so characteristic for philosophy since Chadaev”(8). In the final discussion, this issue is addressed once again in the guise of the question whether the fact of belonging to a Russian philosophical tradition is of any importance for philosophers in Russia today. It is not surprising that opinions differ widely – from rejection to identification on, and even to the rejection of the question itself.

Several articles focus on language. Evgenij Barabanov considers the classical issue of the relation between literature and philosophy emphasizing that in Russia the language of philosophy is the same as the language of literature. The problem also interests Natal’ja Avtonomova. She discusses the question of translation, which is in many ways symptomatic of the state of Russian philosophy today. To illustrate the issue she refers to debates between philosophy and philology in the 1990s. What is needed in her opinion is a form of philosophy in which texts are analysed precisely and previously inaccessible papers are translated. Closer co-operation between the academic disciplines of philosophy and philology is desirable. A philosophical language and especially new concepts must be “invented” to enable critical discussion with ideas imported from the West. Without a new language, there can be no new philosophy in Russia. Dirk Uffelmann concentrates on the other side of this coin, the question of place, of space. He demonstrates, with the help of numerous examples, the importance that space – whether in the physical or abstract sense – has in the history of Russian philosophy, as well as in discussions today. He speaks of the “situationism” of Russian philosophy.

As mentioned, the second important theme is the relation between philosophy and the political environment in a broader

sense. Klaus Städtke undertakes a critical analysis of the Moscow-Tartu School and comes to the conclusion that their texts are usually either over- or underestimated in the West due to the lack of consideration of the cultural and political context in which they were created. The principle of bipolarity, of central importance for this school, has to be applied to the movement itself. The members of this school ignored their own standpoint within Soviet culture and deliberately focused instead on past eras of Russian history. Soviet culture is omnipresent as the implicit “other” that is not articulated as such, but which no satisfactory interpretation of this movement can ignore. Nikolaj Plotnikov looks at the institutionalization of philosophy in the Soviet Union. In his opinion, the context-based question concerning the function of philosophy in the Soviet Union makes more sense than the very abstract question concerning the existence of a Soviet philosophy. It is not the content of this philosophical movement, but its institutional organization and function which is of interest to research. It is in these weak institutions – relics of the Soviet system – that Plotnikov sees the shortcomings of contemporary Russian philosophy. This context, or more precisely the philosophical culture where philosophy takes place, is the main theme of the article by Evert van der Zweerde. His view of the history of philosophy is an optimistic one, and he focuses especially on the change of context. Analyzing the treatment and the importance of the history of philosophy in different eras, from the “Silver Age” to the present day, he concludes, on the basis of several criteria, that today we can speak about the “normalization” of the history of philosophy as an academic discipline in Russia.

In addition, the volume contains several analyses of philosophical texts or authors. Michajl Jampol’skij and Valerij Podoroga provide a new reading of the texts and films of Eisenstein. Rainer Grübel looks at the notion of freedom in the work of Shestov. The article by Alexander Haardt offers an interesting comparison between Bachtin and Sartre, while Igor’ Smirnov traces a direct path from Semn Frank to the Internet. Boris Grojs examines the work of Kojève, the latter’s reading of

Vladimir Solov'ev, and the question of the "end of history". Finally, Michajl Ryklin analyzes the metaphysics in the work of Mamardashvili.

This kind of meticulous analysis is still urgently needed in Russian philosophy, as numerous philosophical works from the past have still not been thoroughly discussed. In some cases, this lack has led to a "mystification" that the kind of critical examination of the Moscow-Tartu School, for example, helps to overcome. The majority of these interpretations are related to texts and persons of the Soviet period. A debate on contemporary themes and subjects is lacking. The two exceptions are the articles by Avtonomova and Klemens Friedrich respectively. The latter analyses the concept of power in the work of Podoroga and Pomeranc. He levels the criticism that in contemporary Russian thinking absolute individual freedom is contrasted with the absolute lack of freedom in the universal system of power. Alternative concepts of power are lacking in contemporary discussions.

A concluding impression concerning the volume is that, of course, the articles do not provide an overview, never mind a conclusive judgment on Soviet and contemporary Russian philosophy. However, it is exactly this characteristic which offers a good impression of 20th century Russian philosophy. The diversity of themes and methods as well as the difficulty of obtaining a global picture reflect the state of Soviet and contemporary Russian philosophical discourse.

A last word about the "external" aspects of the volume. First, the cover is highly original and stands out, in a positive sense, from other publications. It is regrettable, however, that this attention to detail is not consistent throughout the book – I came across several typing errors and one page was printed twice.

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Dane R. Gordon and David C. Durst (eds.), *Civil Society in Southeast Europe*, Rodopi, Amsterdam/New York, 2004.

This collective volume is the third of a special series dedicated to post-communist European thought. The materials include 15 essays that focus on 3 issues of high relevance in political science today. First, the concept of civil society – defined as any form of collective mobilisation aimed at a constructive socio-political goal – serves as the central theme linking the individual contributions, each of which is devoted to a different subject, approach or country. Second, the Balkan region opens new perspectives for scholarly exploration. After the turbulence of recent years, the new calm has made possible multidisciplinary research in the region as well as thorough case studies. Finally, transition theories provide the framework throughout. Former Yugoslavia is a fertile ground not only for the description of an incipient political era, but also for original hypotheses concerning the future of the newly independent nations. Taking into account past experiences and present realities, the editors explore the chances of the emergence and stabilisation of civil society in the region.

Certain general elements of the concept of civil society are described from a normative perspective; these include, among others, ethics, participation, accountability, environmental questions, civic virtue, and democratic ideals. This approach is probably due to the fact that most of the authors have a philosophical background. The description they provide of the region – of which most are natives – is of a sociological, philosophical, and historical nature. The majority of the chapters focuses on former Yugoslavia – Serbia and Kosovo are very well covered – while less space is given to Bulgaria. Romania is almost completely absent and no word is said about Greece. The title is, therefore, misleading as the book does not cover the entire area of Southeast Europe.

The contributors reflect on ways to give a new impulse to civil society. Georgi Fotev, for example, establishes a parallel between civil society and balkanisation – a process he explains

using historical arguments. Describing the end of balkanisation as a corollary of the development of civil society however seems a bit simplistic. Assen Dimitrov is optimistic about an improved situation thanks to a liberalised market. However, this argument is weakened by the Russian example, where the brutally fast introduction of market economy brought about precarity and the loss of prospects. Dan Gordon and Ann Howard seek solutions in environmental policy; Scott Brophy, Charles Temple, and Kurtis Meredith see education as an instrument to improve civic virtue; Hugo Vlaisavljevic believes in the virtues of ethnic and cultural reconciliation; whereas Maria Dimitrova underlines the crucial role of the intellectual elite.

Their reflections may be a good starting point at the normative level, but when it comes to analysing the concrete empirical reality of civil society in any given country, a normative approach is not really sufficient. From the point of view of political science, there is no attempt to clarify the meanings of civil society and the possible implications for an analysis at the empirical level. Few answers are offered to questions such as who are the actors in this society, how are they related to political institutions, to what extent are they promoting democratic values.

The authors seem to conceive civil society as an entity independent of the State. It would have been helpful to view it as an efficient partner to launch legitimate and stable policies. They also adopt a rather idealist vision of civil society. Unfortunately, there is no mention of the “dark side” of the phenomenon that we sometimes observe in the Western Balkans. On the other hand, civil society alone cannot cope with the many challenges of democratization. Currently, former Yugoslavia cannot bring a new dynamic to its social capital without revising its entire political system. Not to mention that a satisfactory economic level is a precondition for a climate of trust and social security, which are themselves minimal conditions for participation in public life. Nevertheless, Fotev is right to argue that the weight of history and its legacies must be taken into account in the analysis of the situation. Still, it is up to the State to facilitate a new political culture that can be used

as a model for the development of a social order. At the moment, as Zagorka Golubovic notices, civil society is captive to powerful references to cultural and ethnic identities that rely on authoritarian and conservative tendencies. In general, it would have been pertinent to point out that the path to democracy – in its liberal form – is not a linear progression. The varied national configurations generated by the collapse of the Yugoslav Federation are proof of this.

The tone of the book is essentially ideological. However, the authors make clear from the beginning that their considerations are based on a combination of observation and personal experience. The result is a form of discussion in which description of regimes is coupled to the identification of problems and the search for solutions. The value of such an interactive approach consists in privileging a dynamic analysis that allows readers to participate in the debate by reflecting on a large variety of possible solutions to the problem of constituting a strong and active civil society in South Eastern Europe. However, a more rigorous treatment of the different national contexts and more supporting empirical data would have been desirable.

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