

# Heidegger in Russia and Eastern Europe

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Edited by  
Jeff Love

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# Introduction

## *A (Counter-) Revolution Delayed*

Jeff Love

The philosophy of Martin Heidegger exerted an extraordinary influence in the twentieth century. Even before the publication of *Being and Time* in 1927, his version of phenomenology had attracted attention from all over the world. As the heir apparent to Husserl in phenomenological circles, Heidegger cultivated a generation of talented students who would introduce his thought to their respective countries, ranging from Argentina to Japan. While the various streams of influence and adaptation of Heidegger's thinking have yet to be fully explored, his influence in Japan, Western Europe, South America, and the United States is fairly well documented.<sup>1</sup> This volume is concerned with contributing to this general exploration in connection with a part of the world that for much of the twentieth century was profoundly hostile to Heidegger's philosophy, largely on political grounds. For if Heidegger's influence was felt in Eastern Europe in the interwar period, particularly in Czechoslovakia, thanks to Jan Patočka, the same cannot be said for the Soviet Union. And with the consolidation of Soviet power after the Second World War, it became not merely difficult, but dangerous to occupy oneself with Heidegger's thought, especially given the philosopher's initially enthusiastic support for the National Socialist regime.

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The chapters that follow are devoted, in the best Heideggerian sense, to uncovering and elaborating a somewhat hidden history. The most striking feature of this history—indeed, all the more striking given Heidegger’s extremely controversial status now as a philosopher whose association with National Socialism was neither casual nor innocent—is the extent to which Heidegger’s thought inspired and continues to inspire emancipatory struggle. It is fair to say that reading Heidegger became a gesture of resistance, first against the authority of the communist state, and second, and for many outside observers much more disquietingly, against the dominance of European thought itself. The two streams of resistance are in fact inextricably linked, in particular in Russia, because the environmental and psychological devastation suffered by the peoples of the communist East made it far easier to connect resistance to communism to resistance to the Western tradition in general as one that culminated not in Social Democracy but in the political repression and brutal exploitation of the environment characteristic of the communist states. In the end, the manifold failures of the communist states invited what we may recognize now as a counterrevolutionary stream of thought whose original association with National Socialism was either attenuated, glossed over in silence, or even reinterpreted as essentially of emancipatory intent. Heidegger became a source of inspiration for both those seeking a new kind of state entirely and those whose nationalist tendencies came far closer to what we might call a renewed fascism.

Heidegger’s thought has thus played a strikingly ambivalent emancipatory role in Russia and Eastern Europe, ranging from an attack on the pieties of Marxist dogmatics to what may be the last and perhaps most radical anticolonial struggle: that of Russia against the hegemony of Western thought, particularly as pilloried in the guise of modern American neoliberalism, at once ravenous and vacuous.

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The present volume traces this history in three parts. The first part examines Heidegger’s strong interest in Russia as well as the influence of Russian literature on Heidegger. It begins with Michael Meng’s investigation (chapter 1) into the significance of what we might refer to as Heidegger’s “Russophilia” with reference to a dialogue Heidegger staged in a Russian prison camp and completed on a very significant

date: May 8, 1945, the day of the final unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany. It ends with Alexander Kluge's imagined encounter (chapter 4) between Heidegger and a young Jewish girl whom he seeks to protect from Otto Ohlendorf's brutal Einsatzgruppe D, which killed more than ninety thousand Jews in Ukraine and the Crimea. This imaginary encounter was first published in German in 2004 and appears here in English for the first time.<sup>2</sup>

One of the most notable aspects of Heidegger's interest in Russia was his interest in Russian literature. As Horst-Jürgen Gerigk notes in chapter 2, the young Heidegger had two portraits on his writing desk in 1922, one of Pascal, the other of Dostoevsky. While Heidegger rarely refers to Dostoevsky in print, according to Hans-Georg Gadamer, Heidegger's enthusiasm for Dostoevsky was considerable, and, as Gerigk outlines in some detail, one of their important affinities was a common orientation to eschatological thinking, an orientation to a new, salvific beginning that is as dramatic in Heidegger as it is in Dostoevsky.

*Being and Time* bears witness also to the influence of Dostoevsky's great rival and counterweight, Lev Tolstoy. The famous note referring to Tolstoy's novella, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, in section 52 of *Being and Time* has led to all manner of speculation over the influence of Tolstoy on Heidegger. In chapter 3, Inessa Medzhibovskaya digs deeper to uncover a much broader network of affinities and influences than has hitherto been contemplated. What is more, she explores some of the ways that Tolstoy's virtuosity in expressing different approaches to objects and situations finds a correlate in a radicalized Heideggerian phenomenology.

Chapters 5 through 9, in the second part of the volume, deal with various ways in which Heidegger's thinking was received by three important philosophers who all deserve more international attention than they have had so far: Jan Patočka (1907–1977), Krzysztof Michalski (1948–2013) and Vladimir Bibikhin (1938–2004).

As I note briefly above, Patočka played a crucial role in introducing phenomenology to Czechoslovakia in the interwar period. He was the only one of these three philosophers to have known both Husserl and Heidegger personally, and his influence in Czechoslovakia has been enormous. He played a significant role as an opponent of the Communist regime and died after being brutally interrogated by the secret police. The two chapters included in this volume attempt to provide a broad introduction to Heideggerian elements in Patočka's thought. Josef Moural (in chapter 5) gives an overview of this influence, whereas

Vladislav Suvák (in chapter 6) examines the relation between Heidegger's extremely important essay on truth, "On the Essence of Truth" (1943) and Patočka. Together the chapters seek to shed light on how Patočka adapts Heidegger's thought to a renewed Socratism that may seem to have little to do with Heidegger.

Krzysztof Michalski played a similarly important role in Poland by developing an openly theologically oriented approach to Heidegger. Michalski cautions, as Andrzej Serafin points out in chapter 7, that a Heideggerian theology has to be a most peculiar one since Heidegger's notion of God hardly seems to fit the doctrinal and dogmatic requirements of any established church. Yet, on this account alone, Heidegger's investigations may be more genuinely Christian because they seek to get to the bottom of what a "God" can or must be. The exploration of deity itself is radical and sets Heidegger against rather more traditional notions of deity—in this sense Heidegger opens up new possibilities for a renovated Christianity that have nothing to do with how Christianity has hitherto been understood or practiced outside of the initial century after the death of Christ.

This section also presents a text (chapter 8) by Michalski himself, presented here in English for the first time, a translation that Michalski personally supervised. This text highlights one of the most important elements in Heidegger's thinking in the communist East: questioning. While questioning is no doubt also perceived as an affront to accepted ways of thinking in any context, the fundamental significance that Heidegger grants to questioning and an unceasing pursuit of questioning had powerful resonance in the closed forum for discussion that prevailed in Eastern Europe. In Heidegger is found not only questioning but the notion of reviving a kind of philosophy that did not necessarily have to end up or be in concordance with ruling Marxist dogma that, in its objection to dogma of any kind—indeed, even being taken as such on its own—had considerable significance and exerted an attractive force of its own.

In chapter 9, Michael Marder introduces the thought of Vladimir Bibikhin by focusing on one of its key features, a thorough reconsideration of who we are based on the notion of what we consider our own. What belongs to us? and What does it mean to belong? are simply two questions raised by Bibikhin's investigations of the difference between what belongs to us (and why) and what cannot belong to us or resists us. To draw attention to the fundamental importance of ownership to modern understandings of the human being as master or owner of the

world, this “*maître du monde*” identified by another Russian philosopher (Alexandre Kojève), is an important aspect of Bibikhin’s thought. Equally important is Bibikhin’s exhortation to create a new attitude to ownership by giving oneself in some degree over to what resists appropriation by us, thereby relinquishing the need to possess, to have and command. Here Bibikhin attempts to reject the foundation of property pertinent to both the Soviet state and post-Soviet economism in favor of a new relation to ownership whose political implications remain revolutionary.

Indeed, the political ramifications of Heidegger’s thinking, so explosive at the moment, were no less explosive in the communist East. Part 3 of the volume examines these political consequences in Czechoslovakia as they helped to ground the famed “Velvet Revolution” of 1989 and, more immediately, as they play out in modern Russia. Daniel Kroupa’s absorbing description (chapter 10) of Patočka’s influence on a wide spectrum of intellectuals in Czechoslovakia before and after his untimely death in 1977, is a remarkable insider’s account, since Kroupa played an important role in the liberation of Czechoslovakia from the yoke of Soviet rule in 1989 and the early 1990s. Heidegger acted in these contexts as a voice of rebellion and emancipation, hardly as a representative of Nazism or, to recall Emanuel Faye’s memorable title, as the “introduction of Nazism into philosophy.”<sup>3</sup>

The impact of Heidegger’s thought on Russian politics is far more complicated, and it highlights profound divisions in the Russian attitude to the West. As I point out in chapter 11, the Russian attitude to the West and Western thought has never been free of ambivalence. The two major streams of Heidegger’s influence in Russia provide an absorbing outline of this ambivalence. On the one hand, Alexander Dugin draws on Heidegger’s critique of metaphysics as a critique of universalism and a support for a totally different attitude to politics (chapter 12). This attitude is totally different because it does not demand a universal hegemon but allows for many differing centers of power and a cultural diversity that resists domination by one way of thinking. Dugin refers to this notion as multipolarity, and it can sound quite attractive unless one considers to what degree it resembles the old segregationist notion of “separate but equal” that justified the maintenance of racial division and conflict in the United States. Moreover, Dugin’s attempted recovery of a distinctively Russian *Dasein* is difficult to distinguish from traditional Russian nationalism and imperialism with its belief, stated

succinctly by Dostoevsky, that the star of salvation (for the world) shall arise in the East.

Vladimir Bibikhin, surely an antipode to Dugin, seems equally concerned with issues of salvation (chapter 13). Yet this salvation is rather distant from a specifically Russian salvific mission vis-à-vis the rest of the world. Still, Bibikhin seems most concerned with protecting Russia from the dangers of modern consumer society, the kind of capitalism characteristic of the United States, though Bibikhin does not single out the United States as the crucial threat in the world as Dugin does. In his striking article on the difference between *Being and Time* and *The Contributions to Philosophy*, the principal underlying current of thought is the recognition and exploration of the need for a thoroughgoing examination of who we are in contrast to the—potentially easier—submersion in quotidian cares. In this respect, Bibikhin seeks to bring about a moment of self-reflection in the overwhelming dash for personal enrichment and power characteristic of the 1990s and the early part of the new millennium.

The volume ends with the work of one of Bibikhin's closest friends and arguably the most important voice in contemporary Russian philosophy, Sergey Horujy. Chapter 14 provides a brief and anecdotal account of Heideggerian influence in the Soviet Union from one of the key participants. He then gives a brief outline of his "synergistic anthropology," his own thinking as influenced by Heidegger, that draws on the rich Russian religious tradition, and, in particular, Hesychasm, the practice of silence, to offer a new identity for human beings that escapes both rampant consumerism and the dangerous aspects of Heidegger's thought. That thought, for Horujy, is unable to grasp the most terrible crimes of the Nazi regime and thus remains forever complicit with it.

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A word about the limitations of this volume, two of which seem to me important enough to discuss briefly in this introduction. While Czech, Polish, and Russian responses to Heidegger are amply discussed in this volume, several countries in Eastern Europe are left out. For example, one of Heidegger's important students was Walter Biemel, a Romanian who studied with Heidegger in the crucial years from 1942 to 1944. Biemel remained in Germany and became a well-known professor. While Biemel can no doubt be called a Romanian philosopher, it is

evident that he moved almost wholly in the German philosophical sphere and did not feel a calling to create a distinctively Romanian philosophy or to adapt Heidegger to Romanian traditions, as seems to be the case with the main philosophers dealt with in this volume.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Heidegger had a significant impact on an important Romanian poet who wrote in German, Paul Celan, as well as an important modern Polish poet, Adam Zagajewski. In the case of the former, the relation has been so widely studied elsewhere that it made little sense to include it here; as for the latter, the influence of Heidegger on Polish poetry is a subject worthy of its own volume.

A perhaps more serious omission is that of the important Hungarian Marxist thinker, Georg Lukács, considered by many the leading Marxist thinker of the twentieth century. While Heidegger has had many opponents, few have been as formidable as Lukács, who was well aware of Heidegger quite early on and who carried out a not-so-hidden polemic with his thought. Two works come immediately to mind: Lukács's article from 1949, "Heidegger Redivivus," that took aim at what Lukács considered Heidegger's attempt at rendering his thought acceptable after the nightmarish collapse of the National Socialist regime; and Lukács's immense work, *The Destruction of Reason*, that carries on a violent and sustained confrontation with the German idealist tradition and the radical thinking of Nietzsche and Heidegger in particular.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the very interest in authenticity and the ontological that were for Lukács signs of the destructive character of Heidegger's thinking become sources of inspiration for several of his East European readers like Michalski and Bibikhin.

I have chosen not to include Lukács, however, for several reasons. First among these is the eminence of Lukács himself. There is a far more extensive international literature on Lukács than on any of the figures introduced in this volume. Perhaps more importantly, this volume is dedicated to exploring the lesser-known and most productive aspects of Heidegger's thought in Russia and Eastern Europe, where it has contributed to creating a new kind of thinking. In this respect, the impact of Heidegger on Lukács is different, because it is wholly negative.<sup>6</sup> Lukács encountered Heidegger as an enemy from the outset, and his engagement with Heidegger, though complex, is largely a work of opposition to Heidegger that sought to undermine and eradicate his baleful influence in favor of what has seemed to many to be Lukács's adherence to a kind of high Stalinism. It is no surprise that, as a Marxist, Lukács would seek

to counter Heideggerian ideas as forming part of enervating, antirevolutionary bourgeois philosophy. While this is no doubt so, it is also fair to say that Lukács ultimately sought something more than bland assertion of Stalinist orthodoxy: to defend the kind of reason that Habermas later sought to defend as being capable of creating a venue for discussion and the adjudication of disputes that would result neither in the narrow imposition of the prerogatives of one group on another nor alienating reification. Lukács saw the destruction of reason, the dismantling of the tradition of universal reason, not merely as a political gesture intended to support a fascist revolution, but as playing a fundamental role in a thoroughgoing counterrevolution whose end was to eradicate egalitarianism *in toto*. This story, fascinating in itself, merits a volume of its own.

## NOTES

1. For example, the influence of Heidegger on the philosophers of the so-called Kyoto School is fairly well attested. See Ma Lin, *Heidegger on East-West Dialogue: Anticipating the Event* (New York: Routledge, 2008). How Heidegger was received in the United States was tracked by Martin Woessner's *Heidegger in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Heidegger's influence on the well-known Argentinian philosopher Carlos Astrada is itself well known, as is his influence on the revolution in Iran through the curious figure of Ahmad Fardid.

2. Alexander Kluge, *Cronik der Gefühle* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2004).

3. Emanuel Faye, *The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy in Light of the Unpublished Seminars 1933–1934*, trans. Michael Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011).

4. The more distinctively Romanian voice might be that of Alexandru Dragomir (1916–2002), who published nothing during his lifetime. His work is just beginning to be published in Romanian with a selection of texts made available recently in English. See Alexandru Dragomir, *The World We Live In*, ed. Gabriel Liiceanu and Catalin Partenie (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2016).

5. Georg Lukács, "Heidegger Redivivus," *Sinn und Form* 1 (1949): 37–62; *The Destruction of Reason*, trans. Peter R. Palmer (London: Merlin Press, 1980). See also Georg Lukács, *Existentialismus oder Marxismus?* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1951).

6. Jan Patočka, one of the key figures in this volume, wrote an incisive account of the conflict between Lukács and Heidegger. See Jan Patočka, "Heidegger vom anderen Ufer," in *Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. Klaus Nellen, Jiří Němec, and Ilja Srubar (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991), 556–73.