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Lazari's "Ideas in Russia. Polish-Russian-English Lexicon" - Book Review

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BOOK REVIEWS

Andrzej de Lazari. ed. *Ideas in Russia. Polish-Russian-English Lexicon*, ed., vol. 1-5, Warsaw: Semper, 1999-2003. Reviewed by Mikhail Sergeev.

The first five volumes of a projected six-volume lexicon of *Ideas in Russia* edited by prof. A. de Lazari came out in print in 1999-2003. The sixth volume is expected to come out in 2006. The core idea of the lexicon is expressed in its title and suggests “a diversity of Russian tradition [which is] much richer than the stereotype of the ‘Russian idea’” (Preface, v. 1, p. 6). The entries of the lexicon--their number will total 600--are devoted to various thinkers as well as concepts and problems of Russian philosophical, religious and social-political thought developed in and outside the motherland.

The creators of the lexicon had no plan to encompass the entire cultural heritage of Russia from the Middle Ages to contemporary times. The idea was to produce not an orthodox, but rather an experimental encyclopedia. Biographical data is reduced in the lexicon to a minimum and the articles themselves, written by scholars from various countries, and of different professions and worldviews, are filled with the spirit of debate. The reader will find here alternative articles on the same or closely related topics. Such a radical pluralism is stimulating and praiseworthy unless, of course, these differing interpretations do not overshadow--as they occasionally do--the very subject of discussion.

Separate articles of the lexicon are devoted to such prominent 20th century Russian thinkers as Amal'rik, Averintsev, Bibler, Golosovker, Men', Zinov'ev, Shafarevich, Yanov, and others. A variety of religious themes is covered, including, for instance: Moscow – New Jerusalem, ecumenism, eschatology of Rus', theosophy, atheism, Buddhism as well as Protestant and Orthodox Christian theology in Russia. In philosophy special articles discuss the reception of Aristotle, Plato and Wolff in Russia, the movements of neo-Platonism, immanent subjectivism, the categories of free will, reason, and many others.

Each volume of the lexicon contains articles in Polish, Russian, and English languages placed in a Russian alphabetical order with the addition of extensive bibliographical material. The trilingual format of publication makes it accessible to the Western as well as to the Russian scholars and general readers who “would like to better understand Russian mental categories on the basis of a possibly broad historic and cultural background” (v. 1, p. 8). The price of the lexicon is quite accessible as well. The best deal on *Ideas in Russia* is \$13.00 per volume plus shipping and handling at Yan Zabrodsky's bookstore in Warsaw (tel.: 48-22-651-3966). For additional

information regarding this lexicon please contact its editor prof. A. de Lazari at: alazari@kryisia.uni.lodz.pl.

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Vladimir I. Kurashov, *Philosophy and Russian Mentality: Philosophical Thought in Russia on the Edge of the 21st Century*, Kazan': Kazan' State Technological University, 1999. Reviewed by Mikhail Sergeev.

The book that is brought to the reader's attention is the work by doctor of philosophy, prof. Vladimir I. Kurashov who is a recipient of the Russian Academy of Sciences Award for distinguished Russian philosophers. Kurashov's book discusses the general problems of theoretical and practical philosophy. In his own view, the "specificity of the present work is that based on the analysis of the theoretical problems of philosophy (first of all, ontology and epistemology) it clarifies the limits of philosophical-scientific knowledge" (p. 9). As for Kurashov's style of philosophizing, it focuses on "what he experienced and thought about thoroughly without caring the least for following any particular tradition." (p. 8).

The book consists of five parts; the first is devoted to the discussion of the first principles of theoretical philosophy. The definition and the goals of philosophical discourse, the problems of being and consciousness belong here. The second part focuses on the limits and possibilities of philosophical-scientific knowledge. A special attention is paid to the multifaceted analysis of the concept of truth and its application in scientific, philosophical and religious spheres. The last three parts of the monograph transfer the reader from the domain of theoretical to practical philosophy. The third section investigates the most important existential human problems: love, happiness, the meaning of life and human ecology. The next part of the book discusses the category of nation in its universal and local (Russian) dimensions. Finally, the concluding fifth section sums up the previous reflections by addressing the fundamental philosophical question: what does a man live by?

Kurashov's monograph is filled with a great deal of material from the history of philosophy, contemporary philosophy of science, as well as ideas and observations of the author himself. This is one of those books that are not based just on one innovative thought, but display rather an encyclopedic approach. One cannot read it fast but should get acquainted with its content slowly, chapter by chapter. A special attention paid to the metaphysical questions and to the absolute values produces both intellectual and moral stimulation.

Let me point to some of these metaphysical objects of investigation about which, as Kurashov argues, "we can only know that [they] are and not know what [they are] in substance" (p. 35). First of all, this is our "soul which is beyond consciousness but can manifest itself in it through certain thoughts and feelings" (p. 31). The concept of the soul is tied with the notion of love, and