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Kurashov's "Philosophy and Russian Mentality: Philosophical Thought in Russia on the Edge of the 21st Century" - Book Review

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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

“our conviction in the existence of both ‘I’ and ‘Thou’ in the fullest degree is confirmed in the state of love” (p. 50). As a “[s]upreme metaphysical feeling of world harmony, the feeling of Absolute being through the harmony of two human beings” (p. 127) love is analyzed in a separate chapter inspired by Solov’evian philosophy of love.

Another metaphysical object which is discussed in the book is Russia. Kurashov defines Russia’s national identity as the “national substance in general ‘minus’ the attributes of the all-human substance” (p. 204). In his opinion, it is best reflected in the traditions of the Russian nation. Here the reader comes across quite paradoxical and highly debatable statements concerning the “essence of Russianness. “ One learns, for instance, that a person “who never drunk vodka [is] not quite Russian” (p. 227), and that individuals can be Russians “by genes, but not Russian in spirit” (p. 254). Such theses, in my view, have not been supported by sound argumentation. The same objection refers to the author’s understanding of orthodox religiosity and its relation to other confessions (pp. 248-249). In spite of these shortcomings, however, VI. Kurashov’s monograph overall represents an original contribution to Russian religious philosophy and to its creative transformation in post-Soviet times.

Mikhail Sergeev, University of the Arts, Philadelphia

Leonid N. Stolovich, *Pluralism v filosofii i filosofia pluralizma*, [Pluralism in Philosophy and Philosophy of Pluralism], Tallinn: Ingri, 2005, 336 pp.

Leonid N. Stolovich, *Istoriia russkoi filosofii: Ocherki*, [History of Russian Philosophy: Essays], Moscow: Respublika, 2005, 495 pp. Reviewed by Mikhail Sergeev.

Professor Emeritus of Tartu University, Estonia, Dr. Leonid N. Stolovich is a specialist in aesthetics, theory of value and history of philosophy. He authored more than forty books and five hundred scholarly articles which appeared in twenty languages. *Pluralism in Philosophy* and *History of Russian Philosophy* are his two latest works. In my view, they are related to each other with respect to their central theme.

The first book, *Pluralism in Philosophy and Philosophy of Pluralism* makes a case for, and methodically develops the notion of “systemic pluralism” in philosophy. Prof. Stolovich writes here “about conceptual pluralism and not about ontological pluralism of being.” (p. 19) It may seem that in this context “systemic pluralism” is a contradiction in terms since, as the author points out, “*systematicity* presupposes a certain kind of *monism* which is opposed to pluralism by definition! On the other hand, isn’t it [true] that *any system* is the system [composed] of various elements?” (p. 19)

Prof. Stolovich resolves the apparent contradiction by presenting his definition of “systemic pluralism.” In his view, “if the elements which are encompassed by the system, are