

THE PREHISTORY OF POST-SOVIET PHILOSOPHIES ¹

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Abstract. *This article constitutes a brief review of the establishment, development, and decline of Soviet philosophy. The author argues that the life of philosophy in the USSR evolved within structures of the Soviet philosophical condition that complicated typical contradictions between contemplation and practice even more than in other modernized societies. This Soviet philosophical condition resulted from the cultural caesura of 1917 – 1922, which fundamentally changed cultural processes in Eastern Europe and Northern Eurasia. It ended in another caesura in 1989–91, which means that at least three generations of philosophers worked and lived through five stages in which the structures underlying this condition were erected, modified, and finally erased.*

Keywords: *history of philosophy, Soviet philosophy, Marxism, Soviet Marxism, Leninism, Stalinism, Soviet dissident philosophy, contemplation, practice*

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The philosophical landscape of Eastern Europe is quite rich and diverse today, with arguably far more philosophical schools and doctrines being developed in and around intellectual centers both there and in Northern Eurasia than before 1989 – 91. The last thirty years have seen explosive growth in philosophical departments, faculties, centers, societies, associations, and publications in the regions' countries (Bazhanov 1999; Godoń, Jucevičienė & Kodelja 2004; Guseinov & Lektorsky 2009; Tevzadze 2010; Menzhulin 2011; Minakov 2011; Bachmetjevas 2022; Tishbeisky 2022; Kūle 2022; Menzhulin 2022). This diversity of post-Soviet philosophical life was—at least until recently—supported by the spread of ideological pluralism, an increase in academic freedom, social emancipation, and the marketization of education.

Yet this multitude of philosophical organizations and publications has not changed the impression among Western philosophers that “the (post-Communist) East” no longer generates new ideas, or that the generation of “new ideas” are the consequence of “Western influences”¹ Philosophers of the East seem to have been adapting to—and learning how to think and work in—the new conditions, which can be described in terms of the absence of repression by authorities, the destruction of ideological monopolies, reduced public interest in philosophical ideas, sporadic bursts of popularity for some popular thinkers, and the hegemony of Western theories and Far Eastern teachings among the general public.

This contemporary situation has a tragic and gripping prehistory. In the 20th century, philosophy survived two major caesuras in the East of Europe. The fall of the Russian Empire and the rise of the Soviet Union in 1917 – 1922, moved philosophy from one of many intellectual practices on the margins of the struggle for power and truth, right into the center of that struggle. Simultaneously, the heightened significance of philosophy made it a subject of control and separation from global intellectual dynamics. Hence, the Soviet philosophical condition constituted an unusual situation for a life of the mind—at least in modern times. This condition was established and developed through several periods until its grand finale in the caesura of 1989 – 91. Thus, between the 1917 – 22 and the 1989 – 91 caesuras, at least three generations of philosophers studied, worked, and laid the ground for the intellectual institutions and practices that can still be seen in the contemporary intellectual landscape of Eastern Europe and Northern Eurasia.²

In this article, I offer a retrospective study of the Soviet philosophical condition, demonstrating its features up until the caesura of 1989 – 91. In the first part, I offer a definition of Soviet philosophy as a specific philosophical condition. In the second part, I offer a periodization and a brief overview of the development of the Soviet philosophical condition. Finally, I identify major tendencies that may have survived the caesura of 1989 – 91 and that are still visible in diverse post-Soviet philosophies.

¹ I discuss this issue more in Minakov 2021. See also the sources of the debate: Habermas 1990; Hösele 1992; Frank 1992; Oushakine 2000; Habermas 2018.

² On the Soviet generations of philosophers, please see Sineokaja 2022 in the Collected Papers volume.

1. Soviet philosophy as a condition

1.1. Soviet philosophy as a contested concept

If we approach the phenomenon of Soviet philosophy directly—upfront, so to speak—the transformation of this phenomenon into a problematic concept is inevitable. Such a problematization has been constantly manifest since the 1950s, when the first studies of this phenomenon were published in the West.

Initially, the debate of scholars studying the Soviet “system” and culture was focused on the relation between Soviet totalitarianism and modernity. Hannah Arendt, the philosopher who laid the foundation for totalitarianism studies, attempted to understand the specificity of the human condition in a totalitarian society in the terms of a “radical break” with modernity’s emancipation and of the subjection of personal experience to the totalitarian collective mind (Arendt 1986, 1989). Despite agreeing with Arendt’s general understanding of totalitarianism, Merle Fainsod defined the Soviet system in terms of “enlightened totalitarianism,” with official Soviet philosophy serving as a tool for total control over scientific and social thought and, paradoxically, continuing the long Enlightenment trends of the rationalization of the world and the emancipation of the human (Fainsod 1965: 9–10; see also a later Kotkin’s argument at: Kotkin 1997: 7).

Those scholars who were interested in Soviet philosophy as part of the wider “Soviet system” went deeper into this contradiction. For example, Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski described the role of philosophy as that of an instrument subjecting human reason to the authorities’ interests and totalitarian ideology. For them, Soviet philosophy was inseparable from Marxist ideology, and it was a source of rupture between logical reasoning and everyday experience—the trauma that reproduced a totalitarian syndrome “through education” (Friedrich 1957: 67). And yet, Friedrich recognized that Soviet philosophy was “a modern phenomenon” connected to the emancipatory rationalist practices of modernity, albeit a perverse one (Friedrich 1964: 13).

This direction in studies of Soviet philosophy continued with Adam Ulam and Bertram Wolfe in the 1960s–80s and then with Sheila Fitzpatrick and Terry Martin in the early 21st century. For them, Soviet philosophy was one of *Soviet Modernity’s* ambiguous intellectual practices that reproduced the dialectical unity of subjection and emancipation, loyalty and rationality, revolution and tradition, the captive mind and human reason in the constant fight for autonomy (Ulam 1963; Wolfe 1969; Martin 2000; Fitzpatrick 2000, 2007, 2018). In this line of study, Soviet philosophy was mainly seen either as a non-philosophical practice (part of political censorship and ideological brainwashing) or as one of the philosophical schools of a wider Marxist thought. The latter assessment is evident, for example, in works by Józef Bochenski and Gustav Wetter, who challenged the philosophical concepts of Soviet Marxism. They looked at the philosophical processes in the Soviet Union through the lens of anti-Marxism and assessed the quality of Soviet philosophy as “extremely primitive” (Bochenski 1950: 2; see also Wetter 1958; Bochenski 1973).

Another approach to the study of Soviet philosophy is illustrated by George Kline, Thomas Blakeley, Helmut Dahm, and Philip Grier, who distanced themselves from the

Cold War agenda as well as from the debate between philosophical schools. Their research was done in the framework of what may be called the history of contemporary philosophy. This approach provided them with an opportunity for more nuanced and less politicized research on Soviet philosophy (Blakeley 1961, 1979; Kline 1968; Grier 1978; Dahm, Blakeley & Kline 1988). This approach was continued by James Scanlan, David Bakhurst, and Evert Van der Zweerde from the 1980s into early 2000. These scholars were highly attentive to internal cleavages, different approaches, and the diversity of intellectual practices in the areas of official, academic, and dissident philosophies and of literary-philosophical fiction in the Soviet Union (Scanlan 1985, 1987; Bakhurst 1991, 2002; Van der Zweerde 1998). Accordingly, in the works by these scholars, one can find analysis not only of orthodox Marxist-Leninist philosophy but also of atheism and religious thought, logical theories and the teachings of different dialectics, and political theories and semiotics in the Soviet period.

For both lines of Western study, Soviet philosophy was an unusual phenomenon not fitting the standards of the Western cultural canon, which constituted a problem for its definition. Soviet philosophy challenged the cultural order that assigned to philosophy its necessary place and limits.

It is worth noting that Soviet philosophy was not a subject of discussion by thinkers participating in it. However, it became an issue during and after the caesura of 1989–91. Basically, the issue stemmed from the source just mentioned: the specificity of the phenomenon challenged the cultural orders that were established after the fall of the Soviet Union and during the creation of new societies. In this context, Soviet philosophy was denied its philosophical dignity, it was declared part of the repressive political system, and it was refuted as Marxist philosophy proved its intellectual powerlessness. Also, it was deconstructed and reconstructed as an alternative philosophical practice to the *Western cultural order* or as an integral part of a long-term *national philosophical canon*—or else as the several-generations—long rupture in such a canon.

The maximalist denial of the philosophical dignity of Soviet philosophy is based on the argument that the Soviet totalitarian system did not provide the free space needed for its public function (Proleev 2003; Dmitiriev 2010; Koriakin 2019). In this connection, Sergii Proleev even called it “anti-philosophy,” a power practice in opposition to intellectual practice (Proleev 2003: 42ff). Meanwhile, Boris Yudin offered to look at Soviet philosophy as an element of the science–authority relationship in the USSR. Yudin explained the dominant loyalty of philosophers (and scholars at large) as the result of an unspoken agreement: the Party protected scientists from the proletariat in exchange for complete, unconditional loyalty (Yudin 1993: 100). Yet there was still room for philosophy to evolve, since the legitimization of Soviet authority needed arguments from both the exact sciences and materialist philosophy. Accordingly, Soviet philosophy developed in a void together with political power, ideologized education, and the sciences (ibid.: 106). It is this void that provides grounds for doubt as to whether Soviet philosophy was truly philosophy.

Many philosophers have interpreted Soviet philosophy solely as Soviet Marxism. This brand of Marxism went through several cycles of reinterpretation, from Vladimir

Ulyanov-Lenin and Lev Trotsky to Joseph Stalin-Jughashvili and many later figures who combined theory with political, military, and administrative practices. Anatolij Loj, for example, argued that these reinterpretations reduced Soviet philosophy to a type of “worldview” that dogmatically subjugated human individuals, communities, or society at large to the goals of the revolution (Loj 2003: 46). Anatolij Jermolenko has also supported this argument, making a case that Soviet Marxism—and Soviet philosophy as such—has lost its connection with philosophies outside the Soviet Union; this disconnection and lack of communication led first to the cynicism of the late Soviet Marxists and then towards the complete intellectual and ideological impotence of Soviet Marxism (Jermolenko 2003: 349).

Another way to look at philosophical practices in Soviet times is to reject the normative value of the Western canon and to accept their otherness. There are scholars who look at *Soviet culture as an alternative to Western modernity* (e.g., Arnason 2000; Hoffmann 2003). From this point of view, the case of Soviet philosophy represents the life of philosophy in a “closed society” or a “society of power,” which is different from the life of philosophy in the Western cultural order (Kurennoi 2002; Nemtsev 2010; Minakov 2020). Even though this approach has its drawbacks,¹ it opens up an opportunity to see and research what was actually going on in philosophy in the domains of ideas, problems, schools, individual biographies, and the histories of philosophical organizations between 1917 and 1991 in Eastern Europe and Northern Eurasia.

The deconstruction of philosophy’s Sovietness is also accomplished through *post-Soviet nationalization*. One of the key processes in post-Soviet development was nationalization, a reorientation of public reason toward reinvented nationalities and identity politics in the states that were established on the ruins of the USSR. For some time, this nationalization was based on the equation that *post-Soviet* meant *anti-Soviet*. This fundamental equation stemmed from the denial of Sovietness through the establishment of new institutions (divisions of power into branches, presidentialism, and parliamentarism), the acceptance of new values (liberty, money, *anomie*, and responsibility for one’s own life), and the pursuit of practices (openness to chaos and unpredictability, readiness for active participation in public life, and self-expression) that were either impossible or strictly limited in the Soviet Union. Yet people living in this flow of post-Soviet innovations still needed some orientation, and nationalization was one of the cultural (as well as social and political) processes that offered it.²

In terms of the history of philosophy, this nationalization manifested itself in a reorganization of the *national philosophical canon*. In some cases, like those described in the studies of 20th-century Latvian or Lithuanian philosophies by Maija Kūle and Viktoras Bachmetjevas (Kūle 2022; Bachmetjevas 2022), the post-Soviet deconstruction of Sovietness has led to the irrelevance of the Soviet philosophical legacy as such for the Latvian and/or Lithuanian philosophical communities.

¹ These drawbacks are well pointed out by A. Dmitirev, who called the culture of Soviet philosophy a “dead water” that prevented Soviet philosophers from practicing their ideas and made their work senseless in a specific normative philosophical sense (Dmitirev 2010: 22).

² On this, see Brubaker 2011; Kasianov 2012.

However, in other cases, Georgian, Russian, Ukrainian, or other scholars, while studying the legacies of individual philosophers of the Soviet period, were inevitably brought to the construction of new contexts in which these legacies were reused for philosophical canons. In these studies, ideological conflict between Soviet and post-Soviet worldviews was usually put aside. Instead, researchers focused on the lives of thinkers and their ideas. In this way, the philosophical legacies of Valentin Asmus, Genrih Batiščev, Vadim Ivanov, Evald Ilyenkov, Volodymyr Jurynets, Bonifatii Kedrov, Pavel Kopnin, Mikhail Lifshyts, Aleksei Losev, Jurij Lotman, Merab Mamardashvili, and many others returned to the center of attention of contemporary philosophers.¹ However, as soon as post-Soviet historians of Soviet philosophy left the biographical and empirical arena, the power of politicization returned, together with general contextual reinterpretations.

This politicization could have either apologetic inclinations (as in Tabackovsky 2002 or Motrošilova 2012, 2018) or manifest as a hypercritical approach (as in Proleev 2003 or Dmitriev 2010), or else it evolved into a reinvention of the nation's philosophical canon. In the latter case, Soviet philosophy was interpreted as a sort of cultural deposit that supplied post-Soviet national intellectual / philosophical historians with elements from the philosophers' biographies and theoretical legacies that would fill the gaps in their canons. Thus, these elements were reinterpreted as parts of Kazakhstani, Lithuanian, Russian, or Ukrainian histories of national philosophy in the 20th century (Donskis 2002; Minakov 2009; Tkačuk et al. 2011; Sydykov et al. 2016; Epstein 2019; Kabelka 2019; Lektorsky & Bykova 2019). This kind of reuse of the Soviet past was both therapeutic for the national traditions and productive in terms of research in the history of philosophy.

1.2. The Soviet philosophical condition

Each of the above approaches has strong arguments in support of its vision of Soviet philosophy. Nonetheless, they all have one common denominator: they constantly problematize the phenomenon and contest the concept of Soviet philosophy. Taken together, they create a situation of *overthinking* in which the wealth of contradictory ideas and interpretations simply leaves no space for involving the Soviet philosophical legacy in the ongoing philosophical dialogue running from ancient philosophers up to today's thinkers.² In my opinion, to avoid this hermeneutic obstruction, Soviet philosophy should be reassessed not as a provocative phenomenon in the history of philosophy, *but as a specific condition under which philosophy subsisted under challenging conditions for at least three generations of thinkers in Eastern Europe and the Baltic States*

Soviet philosophy as a philosophical condition was founded not only on the contradiction between the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa*³ but also on the critical redefinition of the meaning and performance of contemplation / theory and

¹ See: Bystrytsky 2003; Yurynets 2007; Kantor 2009; Motrošylova 2009; Taho-Godi & Taho-Godi 2009; Tolstyh 2009; Lektorskii 2009, 2010a; Arslanov 2010; Popovych 2010; Tkačuk 2016; Turenko 2019.

² On philosophy as continued dialogue among its different elements, see Jaspers 1962; Kearney 1984; Collins 2009; Habermas 2015.

³ Hanna Arendt used this binary opposition to analyze the human condition and philosophy's role in dealing with the theory–practice split in Western culture.

activity / practice. Here, contemplation still meant a withdrawal from active public life, but the theoretical distance of the contemplator was so greatly influenced by the institutions of Soviet thought control, and by the Marxist belief that philosophy is central to the struggle for power that contemplation could have been practiced only in constant cooperation / struggle with public institutions. Simultaneously, due to the strong and lasting ideological monopoly and the absence of the public sphere (at least in the Western meaning of the term) in the socialist state, the public activity of practice was so alienated from the authentic human being and from the aims of communication in the public realm that participation in it was close to an act of existential self-destruction. As a result, the Soviet philosophical condition crucified itself on the philosophical process on the axes of its fundamental contradictions between controlled autonomous contemplation and limited public action, as well as between the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*.

The harmful effects of this double self-alienation of philosophy's life were compounded by the disrupted communication between thinkers within the Soviet Union and their colleagues from the outside world. Once part of wider philosophical networks under the Russian empire (beginning from the 18th century and intensifying from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th), individual philosophers and entire schools dropped out of the dialogue among the world's philosophies in Soviet times. Only Soviet Marxist doctrine remained visible globally, but its philosophical status was doubtful. Within the USSR, the official philosophical "surface" was almost indistinguishable from the official ideology. Meanwhile, closed, often underground philosophical groups lived almost apart from contact with each other and their peers abroad. This was extremely harmful for the life of philosophy in the region since philosophy usually reproduces itself in open, potentially authentic, and preferably uninterrupted communication among different thinkers and schools.¹

As I stated above, the Soviet philosophical condition was established as a result of the 1917 – 22 caesura and lasted until the next caesura in 1989 – 91. A caesura here means a breach in the continuity of a certain cultural ontology. The revolutionary events in the societies and lands once ruled by the Russian Empire fundamentally changed the conditions of life, practice, and thought between 1917 and 1922. Cultural, social, political, and economic lifestyles changed so much and underwent so much innovation that human beings living in the Soviet Union were in a sense *rethrown* into the *new world*. So, the change of 1917 – 22 was indeed a historical caesura.

Yet this caesura went even deeper than these revolutionary changes. What happened in the period of 1917 – 22 also had a certain ontological status. The human experience of rapid change in those times can be described as a re-*Geworfenheit* of *Dasein*. In Heidegger's existentialist philosophy, a human being – *Dasein* – is seen as the existence that is always present in a certain temporal / historical situation: it is thrown (*geworfen*) into the world. The modus of human life is thus in-der-Welt-sein, and the human condition is fundamentally *Geworfenheit* into the Event-*Ereignis*.² In the case of a caesura,

¹ This account is supported by various arguments of, e.g., an ontological, existential, or sociological nature. See, respectively, Heidegger 2002; Jaspers 2001; Collins 2009.

² As in Heidegger 1989, 2015.

we enter into an unusual ontological event wherein it is not human existence, but the world itself, that is “thrown,” while *Dasein* follows it in an act of re-*Geworfenheit*. A caesura of this kind is an extreme case in which continuity and communication are interrupted not by human agency, but by deeper ontological structures—by Destiny or Being (*das Seyn*) itself. This means that the experience of such a caesura bears witness to the co-creation of a new world and a new human being: they are recreated in Destiny’s act of rethrowing both—like dice in a game.

In the conservative ontology of Heidegger, it is close to impossible to fully express the experience of a human existence being rethrown after the rethrowing of the world. But the conceptual language of Michel Foucault can better help with understanding the ontology of such a deep caesura. In Foucault’s perspective, a caesura can be understood as the simultaneous rupture and reassembling of the ontological foundations of power, the human subject, and truth (Foucault 2005, 2007). Foucauldian intentionality opens up for us an ontological *zero-point* in which authentic human presence demonstrates itself as grounded in nothingness, as constructed from an event of self-founding wherein power, truth, and the human subject ground themselves by grounding each other—since there is nothing else that can ground them.

In this way, a caesura can be understood as more than a break in historical continuity.¹ It is the experience of meeting the Nothing in which we can see our true, historically unconditioned selves—in total war, in mass murder, in class struggle, in famine, in proletarian dictatorship—after which the human being, power, and truth re-establish the world and time, along with new power practices, new truth regimes, and a new human condition. For Foucault, the birth of the Western contemporary human subject came in tandem with a disciplined society promoting self-control.² Similarly, the caesura of 1917–22 gave birth to the Soviet Human, Society, and World, while the caesura of 1989–91 brought them to an end and laid the grounds for our contemporary condition.

The archipelago of the Soviet condition included philosophy as an integral part, as one of its islands. This archipelago needed and desired philosophy to maintain the integrity of its truth regimes, which philosophy did by betraying its own self-interest and self-identity, turning itself into a multilayered construction with Soviet Marxism on the surface (or the top) and many hidden philosophical layers (at the bottom). The official philosophy served the authorities well. Still, philosophy was one of the major transgressive forces that managed to smuggle in ideas from pre-Soviet times and prepare the way for the caesura of 1989 – 91 through “ideological diversions.” The Soviet philosophical condition was full of different events and cultural phenomena, and, as that condition, it neither had to harmonize them nor have its own identity.³

¹ As in Agamben 2004: 12 or Nancy 2000: xii.

² Foucault 2005: 17ff.; Foucault 2007: 42ff. See also the argument by Munteanu 1996: 46, 112ff.

³ Despite thousands of professionals who lived by doing philosophy in the USSR, Soviet philosophy has never had its own identity. There were no histories of Soviet philosophy in Soviet times. This is one of the arguments in favor of my interpretation of Soviet philosophy as a philosophical condition (as well as a position) rather than a tradition, event, or phenomenon. In *Perestroika*, there were some publications with

The second caesura brought the Soviet philosophical condition to a close. In the several years between 1986 and 1991, philosophy lost its “central role” for the government and for the public. During *Perestroika*, the modernist discourse of the future, with its interest in logic, dialectics, and universality, was “enriched” (and often replaced) by the conservative orientation towards the past, with its focus on memory, historical justice, and ethnonational particularism in the emerging public space. This emergence of a free public space preconditioned a huge demand for political and social theories, which Soviet philosophy could not offer. As a result, the market of ideas was taken over by various “brands” of foreign philosophies. The decentralization and decommunization of the USSR, along with the nationalization of public discourse in Soviet republics and smaller communities in 1988–89, destroyed the usual hierarchy of philosophical centers and groups. The fall of the East’s autarchy opened the possibility of communication with the outer world, which first boosted East–West philosophical encounters and soon led to Western philosophical hegemony in the 1990s. Finally, the dissolution of the Union and the launch of new polities initiated a new era in the life of philosophy in Eastern European and Northern Eurasian societies.

If the first caesura was aimed at claiming a monopoly on truth, a project that was never fully implemented but that greatly damaged the life of philosophical thought and the quality of intellectual debate in the USSR, the second caesura did not similarly result in *big projects*: philosophy lost its public influence for good and for all. Some praised this loss, some mourned it, but there is no doubt that the social and academic marginalization of philosophers has caused them to pay tribute for their freedom in the coin of growing disrespect for rationality, universality, and contemplation in general.

So, what specifically in the Soviet philosophical condition has elevated philosophy so high in terms of public authority and dragged it so low in terms of contemplative depth? This is the question I will answer in the following part of this article.

2. Periods in the establishment and the demise of the Soviet philosophical condition

An in-depth study of the history of the Soviet philosophical condition has yet to be written. In this study, I would like just to identify the major stages of this condition’s establishment, evolution, and demise.

I propose to isolate these stages based on the specific nature of the Soviet philosophical condition, which gave political and ideological factors in intellectual development equal importance to philosophical ones, and which manifested the void just described between elevated practical significance and depressed contemplative depth. For this reason, I find the periodization of the development of Soviet philosophy offered by Vladislav Lektorskiĭ and Marina Bykova unbalanced and too much oriented toward political processes. In particular, they offered just three periods in the development of Soviet philosophy: (1) the post-revolutionary decade, (2) the epoch of Stalin, and (3) the post-Stalin era (Lektorskiĭ & Bykova 2019: 4–9). I agree that these three periods work

the attempt to formulate this identity (*Surovaja drama naroda* 1989; Jahot 1991), but the post were done already during the second caesura and had no influence on the Soviet philosophers’ identity.

well for tracing the external, political preconditions for the evolution of the Soviet science and other intellectual practices through the period from 1922 through 1986. However, the logic of this periodization misses too much detail to understand the development of philosophy as such in the Soviet period, and it does not relate to the processes in those “levels” and “circles” in which philosophy lived in the Soviet times.

I should note here that the fragmentation of Soviet philosophy into such levels and circles is not unique: the entire Soviet society and culture was compartmentalized, a quality very well analyzed in the study by Mark Lipovetsky, Maria Engström, Klavdia Smola, and others (Lipovetsky et al. 2021). In both Soviet philosophical and cultural processes, a common feature was the fragmentation of *levels* beneath the official surface (which was fully controlled by party and government structures) into underground groups (which could be controlled more, less, or not at all by the official structures). This vertical division was also fragmented horizontally into *circles*, which existed on each of those levels in different Soviet republics and intellectual centers.¹

If this fragmented character of the Soviet philosophical condition is taken into account along with the balance between philosophical and political factors, five distinctive stages in the history of Soviet philosophy can be identified:

- 1) the establishment of the Marxist hegemony and degradation of philosophical diversity, 1922 – 35;
- 2) the spread and hegemony of ideological frenzy, 1935 – 55;
- 3) an ideological confusion and incipient return of philosophical pluralism, 1956 – 64;
- 4) the professionalization of philosophy and proliferation of ideological cynicism, 1965 – 85;
- 5) a decline of ideological monopoly and fuller return of philosophical pluralism, 1986 – 91.

2.1. The first caesura and the establishment of Marxist hegemony, 1922 – 35

This period starts right after the first caesura. The launch of the new philosophical condition was characterized by the search for a new type of institutionalization for philosophy and a new role for it in culture, society, and politics. This quest can be described as consisting of five interconnected tendencies:

- 1) the beginning of the division of philosophers into those regarded as correct (i.e., supportive, loyal, and publishable) and those branded as wrong (i.e., disloyal, hostile, and non-publishable);
- 2) experimentation with new ways of uniting philosophers, which would lead to the creation of ideological platforms able to work in the frameworks

¹ This horizontal diversity has been studied by various scholars in different post-Soviet countries; just to name a few: Jeu & Blakeley 1982; Donskis 2002; Minakov 2009a, 2009b; Sydykov et al. 2016.

established by historical and dialectical materialism; de-platforming of non-Marxist philosophies;

3) the establishment of the hegemony of a new Marxist lingo supporting the dominance of Marxist concepts in philosophy at large;

4) the introduction of pre-totalitarian Soviet censorship of philosophical works and the creation of an early system of Soviet philosophical institutions; and

5) the final establishment of an ideological monopoly on philosophical and general education.

The Soviet cultural condition was severed from the imperial Russian one by World War I, two revolutions in 1917 (the bourgeois revolution in February and the socialist revolution in October), many national revolutions from Poland through Turkestan from 1918–22 (continuing, in some regions, until 1924), civil wars, and many foreign interventions. This caesura was driven by the worldview of a civil war that made use of nationalist or socialist classifications, but in fact fostered profound distrust and paranoia among neighbors, local communities, and ethnic and religious groups. After the Bolshevik government took control over most of the Russian imperial provinces and launched its Union project at the end of 1922, the new order—not only political, but also cultural, social, and economic—was established.

This order was to be constructed in accordance with Marxist doctrine, specifically as understood by the Bolsheviks and national communists in the Soviet republics. In their political imagination, philosophical practice was part of a wider class struggle, and philosophical ideas mattered for the construction of socialism and for the promotion of the World Socialist Revolution. Hence, the distinction between philosophers who were correct (loyal Marxists) and those who were wrong (disloyal Marxists and non-Marxists) became an important part of public life around the Soviet Union. In turning the new country into a springboard for the World Revolution, the Bolshevik central and republican governments had to ensure that Marxism-Leninism would face no internal obstacles to its global aims. Accordingly, during the 1920s, Marxist doctrine repositioned itself from being one of many philosophical platforms to functioning as a hegemonic platform. However, its movement into this central position was not as repressive as in later periods. Still, in this decade Soviet philosophy slowly began to form the philosophical practice and style that would later become its official surface.

An important event for the formation of the Soviet philosophical condition was the practice of forced emigration for social scholars and philosophers, also known as “philosophers’ trains and steamboats.” The Bolshevik government expelled Nikolaj Berdyaev (1874 – 1948), Semion Frank (1877 – 1950), Nikolaj Losskij (1870 – 1965), Pitirim Sorokin (1889 – 1968), and many other non-Marxist philosophers, legal thinkers, historians, and economists from the country in 1922 (Osharov 1973; Glavackij 2002).

This governmental decision can be seen as relatively “mild,” as it stopped short of the physical destruction of intellectuals resorted to in times of civil war—or during Stalin’s rule. After 1922 there were cases of repression of “white” philosophers / social thinkers

(through imprisonment or execution), but the Bolsheviks' attention was mainly directed at the creation of organizations where loyal Marxist thinkers could work, offer theoretical and practical solutions for socialist state-building, and spread their teaching to the masses. The Socialist Academy of Social Sciences (created in 1918, but almost non-functional until 1923) was reorganized into the Communist Academy in 1924. Simultaneously, a network of Institutes of Red Professors had been developing since 1921 to meet the growing demand for loyal professors in educational institutions. In addition, both systems provided the Soviet central and republican party structures, governments, and Red Army units with personnel capable of conducting educational activities and propaganda in the Marxist spirit.

At the same time, throughout the 1920s and into the early 1930s, several alternative philosophical movements were present in public space and academia alongside Marxist philosophy. Although the “philosophical steamboats” struck a decisive blow to the quality and depth of the philosophical process in the early 1920s, many non-Marxists, including Mikhail Bakhtin (1895 – 1975), Boris Fokht (1875 – 1946), Gustav Spet (1879 – 1937), Lev Vygotskij (1896 – 1934), and the young Alexei Losev (1893 – 1988), were able to work and publish.¹ In addition, a significant number of classic philosophical texts were translated and published in the 1920s, including texts unrelated to Marxism. Only after 1929–31 did these translations increasingly focus on materialist philosophers, their predecessors, and those who could be regarded as part of that tradition. The translation of these philosophical works came to an end by the mid-1930s.

Still, between 1923 and 1935, Russian translations of works by Democritus, Plato, Aristotle, Toland, La Mettrie, Diderot, Helvetius, Holbach, Kant, Priestley, Fichte, Hegel, Schelling, Feuerbach, and other philosophers were published; several texts were also translated into Georgian, Ukrainian, and Uzbek. This translation program significantly advanced philosophical studies and conceptual language—both Marxist and non-Marxist—in the USSR.

Marxist philosophical textbooks were also designed and published in significant print runs—on a scale much larger than in pre-revolutionary times. Unlike later-stage publications, these textbooks presented quite different interpretations of Marxism, including some closer to Lenin or Trotsky. This period predated the institution of the “magistral line of the party,” an ideological interpretation of Marxist-Leninist dogmas defined in public acts of the party that varied over time and guided philosophical work at the official surface. Because this institution had not yet been created, the first period of Soviet philosophy was the heyday of early non-dogmatic Soviet Marxism. This area has been studied only sporadically and still awaits systemic research. It was during this period that such thinkers as Valentin Asmus (1894 – 1975), Vladimir Brushlinskij (1900 – 1992), Ivan Borichevskij (1886 – 41), Pavel Blonskij (1884 – 1941), Boris Chernyshev

¹ I should also note that there was a space for intellectual practices on the boundaries of literature, critique, and philosophy that were open for new ways of thinking, philosophizing, and writing—with their own intercultural and interdisciplinary dialogue—in the cultural centers of the USSR: Moscow, Leningrad, Kharkiv, Odessa, Kyiv and Minsk. The example of such new spaces is the Soviet modernisms so well analyzed in: Babak & Dmitiriev 2021.

(1896 – 1944), Aleksandr Deborin (1881 – 1963), Olga Freidenberg (1890 – 1955), Nikolai Kareev (1850 – 1931), Alaeksandr Makovel'skij (1884 – 1969), Dmitrij Mordukhai-Boltovskij (1876 – 1952) and Viktor Serezhnikov (1873 – 1944) actively worked and published their philosophical (and ideological) studies.

An example of partial openness in the emerging official Marxist philosophy is the famous discussion between “mechanists” (Liubov' Axelrod (1868 – 1946), Arkadij Timiriazev (1880 – 1955), Sandor Varjas (1885 – 1939), I. Skvortsov-Stepanov (1870 – 1928), V. Sarabjanov (1886 – 1952)) and “dialecticians” (Deborin, Jan Sten (1899 – 1937), Kareev, Grigorij Bammel' (1900 – 1939)) concerning the status of Marxist philosophy in relation to science and the authorities.

On the one hand, the styles of expression and argumentation in this debate portrayed the Soviet Marxism of that period as a system of views open to interpretation and debate. On the other hand, in the process, both sides—in addition to using philosophical arguments—called on the authorities to intervene and repress their opponents. These calls were attentively listened to by party leadership and security services, and by the early 1930s, philosophical debates often resulted in the expulsion of philosophers from the losing group and the increased attention of party leadership (and availability of special services) to the philosophical winners. The model in which losing the philosophical debate meant loss of one's job and then of one's freedom was pioneered in the 1929–30 discussion between Deborin and Vladimir Vernadsky (1863 – 1945) on the connection between science and materialist philosophy and further tested out in the 1930–32 discussion between “Bolshevizers” (Mark Mitin (1901 – 1987), Pavel Judin (1899 – 1968), Vasilij Ral'tsevič (1893 – 1957)) and followers of Deborin.

This newly minted model then led to the repression of the representatives of the failing group, which was usually presented as a “wrong direction in the interpretation” of Marxist ideas. The same model was reproduced in all educational and scientific institutions, down to the lowest level and to the most politically neutral disciplines, like genetics or linguistics. The way for totalitarian Stalinist society was being prepared not only by the Bolshevik authorities but also by many Soviet intellectuals. In the process, philosophical contemplation was becoming more and more public: philosophical thinking was already regarded as political practice, an action that could be judged either as loyal behavior supporting the proletarian revolution or as a crime against the communist cause.

Throughout this period, changes in philosophical language became increasingly evident. First, the translations of philosophical literature into Russian and other languages enriched the materialist and non-materialist lexicons. But the centralization of power that began around 1927 / 29 also led to (1) the mobilization of “forces on the ideological front” with strengthened internal propaganda and censorship, (2) the intensification of anti-religious “struggle” and the first wave of destruction of churches by officials and party activists, and (3) new acts against private property and in favor of big collective economic actors.

Altogether, these shifts in policy increased the use of censorship, repression, and violence against those working in philosophy, the humanities, and the social and natural sciences. Part of this censorship was carried out by means of linguistic revision. In

Moscow and in the Soviet republics, official languages were reformed twice, first in the 1920s through translations and the creation of new dictionaries oriented to the revolutionary drive toward “new proletarian cultures of Soviet peoples,” and again in 1927 – 34 during the early Stalinist revisions aimed at the unification of the Russian and national languages. Each time, the reforms meant a rapid increase in the use of terms peculiar to Marxism. Increasingly, these terms were also used all too often not only in philosophy and scientific literature but also in the mass media and in the daily communication of propagandists. The adoption of this lingo into philosophy seriously restricted non-historicist, non-Marxist ways of speaking and thinking. Marxist jargon became almost the universal language of philosophy at most levels, from Mitin’s hegemonistic pamphlets to Losev’s pre-imprisonment idealistic works (Losev 1928; Mitin et al. 1930).

Furthermore, the education of philosophers survived radical changes in this period. Initially, the training of philosophers in the Soviet Union was canceled from 1923 to 1926. The training of Marxist theoreticians was mainly conducted in the Institutes of Red Professors. However, by 1926 the low quality of Marxist studies and the lack of educated cadres for the party posts was too evident, so the party leadership approved the reopening of a philosophy department at Moscow University (in the department of history and archaeology). The only professors there were Marxists. In 1931, philosophers and psychologists at Moscow State University withdrew to form a new, separate institution, the Moscow Institute of History, Philosophy, and Literature (*MIFLI*). This institution served as a model for the creation of ideological “educational-philosophical” institutions in Leningrad, Kazan, Kharkiv, Kyiv, Tbilisi, and other scientific-administrative centers of the Union.

Training in philosophy was spreading across Soviet educational institutions to achieve a dual task: (1) to develop “the theory and practice of socialism” and (2) to train workers for “socialism’s construction” (Mitin 1936: 4, 22). In addition, scholars at these philosophical centers participated in debates with their foreign colleagues from both communist and non-communist networks through publications or (much less often) in personal meetings. This initial impulse was a substantial part of the philosophical education up until the very end of the Soviet condition, and even survived in many countries.

Thus, the first period in the evolution of the Soviet philosophical condition was a time of differentiating philosophical practices into two primary categories (correct and wrong), accumulating institutional and cadre potential for the development of Marxist philosophy, and creating mechanisms for thought control in public space and in academia. Despite the constantly growing ideologization of education and philosophical work, there was still some room for non-Marxist philosophy and for a range of Marxist-Leninist positions. This was also the period in which the chasm between contemplation and practice in Soviet philosophy was effectively set up.

2.2. The stage of ideological frenzy, 1935 – 55

During this stage, the Soviet philosophical condition received its “classical” formulation. If the philosophical development of the 1920s and early 1930s transpired in

“herbivore style,” with limited repression, the traumatic, “carnivorous” experience of the Stalin era laid down several matrices in the foundation of philosophical practices that can still be witnessed today, thirty years after the USSR’s dissolution. Among these matrices were:

- 1) official ideology was treated as the *only* philosophical practice;
- 2) a justification of government actions via moral codes and official histories based on a patriotic metaphysics;
- 3) a rupture between philosophical education and research through the division between universities and academic institutes;
- 4) governmental control of philosophical (and wider intellectual) studies through the actions of loyal philosophers, party activists, and security services;
- 5) strict differentiation between official and non-official philosophy, systematic repression of dissident thinking, institutionalization of isolated circles of philosophical thought avoiding any public presence, etc.

One of the results of the Stalinist revolution in the USSR that took place between 1927 and 1935 was an ideological frenzy—a mixture of the authorities’ repressive policies, societal acceptance of the logic of the new class struggle, absolute ideological monopoly, purges in all professional communities (including those of philosophers), and the establishment of a totalitarian system that filled most public and private lacunae. This ideological frenzy engulfed the upper floors of Soviet philosophy, and only isolated thinkers, like Bakhtin or Losev, could survive by reducing the space of free philosophy to texts written not for publication or conversations with select, trusted people.

It is during this period that the unified ideological doctrine of Marxist-Leninist philosophy (the party’s so-called “magistral line”), in the Stalinist interpretation, was first coined. This is when the ideological content of the official surface of Soviet philosophy was finally articulated and refined several times before the death of Joseph Stalin-Jugashvili (1879 – 1953) and the start of de-Stalinization in 1956–58.

This indoctrination was supported by the split between philosophical education and research. Separate institutions, such as the Communist Academy and various Institutes of Red Professors, were merged into the Academy of Sciences, which united research institutes subordinated to the Union and to the governments of the Soviet republics. The totalitarian rupture between centers of research that belonged to the Academy and centers of education (profession-oriented institutes and universities) deepened. The higher education system proliferated the ideologically charged materials approved by authorities for the production of “ideological workers” and loyal intelligentsia, the most faithful of whom were allowed to engage in theoretical philosophical research within the framework of the Academy.

An important factor in the development of the Soviet philosophical condition was the formation of an ideological control network in all educational and research centers. In 1936, the party’s Central Committee issued a decree “On Pedological Perversions”

which, upon its publication, established the system of total party control over education: it launched control over the content of education, the appointment of professors and teachers, and even the style of teaching.

Two years later, the *Short Course of the Bolshevik Party's History* was published. Its fourth chapter—"On Dialectical and Historical Materialism"—was written by Joseph Stalin-Jugashvili (*Istorija Vsesojuznoj...* 1938). This short chapter effectively defined the official doctrine of Soviet Marxism, which survived almost unchanged in educational courses on historical and materialist dialectics up until 1991. The instructions for applying Stalinist material to philosophical and general education were set forth in the November 1938 resolution of the Central Committee through the system that had been in place since 1936. The Central Committee's Department of Propaganda and Agitation was created in 1939 to administer philosophical education and research—the philosophical process on the official surface.

Stalin's chapter laid out the required structure for the teaching of historical and dialectical materialism and the writing of philosophy textbooks. Academic philosophical research was also required to orient to this text. Andrei Ogurcov has described the features of this orientation well:

The fetishization of the clash of cultures and ideological movements, among other factors, led to the assertion of the idea that the class struggle intensified during the construction of socialism and served the ideological justification for repression... the destruction of entire scientific schools and the murder of individual scholars. (Ogurcov 1989: 356)

Philosophy was specifically identified as a central field of struggle: here, the proletarian revolution was to cope with bourgeois ideologies by means of philosophical contemplation and practice. The official surface of Soviet philosophy was transformed into the "camp" of Marxists-Leninists-Stalinists who were obliged to contribute to the struggle for the emancipation of man, to reflect upon the class nature of philosophical teachings, and to participate in the global liberation of humanity from self-alienation.

Party control over philosophical thought, as well as over all the sciences, had been systematically reducing the space for unofficial levels of philosophy. It was during this period that works of non-Marxist and dissident Marxist philosophers were censored, moved to library shelves with highly restricted access, or destroyed (together with their authors). Non-Leninist foreign thought—which makes up the bulk of 20th-century philosophy—was mainly out of reach for philosophers and the public. The repression of active philosophers empowered Stalinist philosophers (e. g., Mitin, Judin, Mikhail Kammar (1889 – 1965)) to lead the purges of their opponents. Thus, Kareev, Ivan Luppol (1896 – 1943), Semion Semkovskij (1883 – 1937), Sten, Spet, Pavel Florenskij (1882 – 1937), and hundreds of other philosophers were repressed, or killed, or died in prisons, or were deprived of work in philosophical institutions.

If the content and ideological control network of the official Soviet philosophy were created in 1936–39, the original philosophers and lasting institutes that worked within the established framework arrived after World War II, in the late 1940s to early 1950s. World War II, with its extermination of multiethnic populations and cultural

rhizomes throughout Eastern Europe, the existential trauma of the survivors of two waves of total war, and the collective experience of participation and victory in the war, changed Soviet society ontologically. If communist rule prior to World War II was, at least partially, seen as the regime that took over because of the civil war, after 1945 it became a legitimate government that had saved the population from physical extermination by the Nazi Germans and their allies.

These experiences and this legitimacy propelled the Marxist impulse for the development of philosophical thought, not only in officialdom, but also at other levels and centers around the Soviet republics (Dubrovskij 2022; Korsakov 2022). Furthermore, many philosophers and humanities scholars, having moved to Siberian and Central Asian cities during the war, stayed on, giving a boost to philosophical schools there. Finally, the gigantic reconstruction program of the western regions of the USSR that had experienced massive destruction during the war also supported an ambiguous process of return for Soviet philosophy. Philosophical centers (university faculties, departments in institutes, and / or academic research institutes) were established or reopened in Chisinau, Kyiv, Leningrad, Minsk, Moscow, Riga, Vilnius, and many other cities. At the same time, these centers were to promote Soviet Marxism and support ideological control over the populations that had been under Nazi occupation. These populations were now permanently suspected of collaboration or disloyalty, and ideological control over them was part of internal security policy.

By 1950, the network consisting of the central and republican Academies of Sciences, universities with philosophy faculties, and post-graduate and doctoral schools were fully established or restored. As of 1946, there were 4,836 educators in the Soviet system of science and education, of whom 44 were doctors of philosophical sciences (habilitated doctors), while 75 percent had no academic degree.

The philosophical educational institutions, despite ideological control, were disseminating knowledge of philosophy (albeit with a Soviet Marxist twist). A special role in maintaining intellectual life was played by the history of philosophy, which opened up space for encounters with classical thought. Contemporary foreign philosophical literature was rarely translated, and access to it was limited to special sections of libraries. Still, the educational system started producing large multilingual works on the history of philosophy. Despite the partisan and class-based approach and the reinvigorated ideological frenzy of 1946 – 52, through these philosophical works, the system fostered general educated interest in rational thought, logic, dialectic, the methodology of scientific cognition, and the philosophies of Kant and Hegel. The first semi-official student clubs were organized, providing humble platforms for debates on dialectic and the logic of scientific discovery, which were later continued at much deeper levels.¹

To sum up, the Soviet philosophical condition in this period acquired the status of an officially central discipline. Because of this special status, strict—in fact, totalitarian—control was established over philosophical thinking and debate. Philosophers had either

¹ On these groups in the late Stalinist period, see Lektorskij & Bykova 2019; Korsakov 2022; Tishbeisky 2022.

to accept the “magistral line” doctrines, or hide underground to survive, or die. The ideological monopoly peaked in this period, casting both philosophical contemplation and practice into the chasm of existential impossibility. As the “main scientific discipline,” philosophy was forced to combine ideological tasks with proper philosophical aims and with the role of supervising the sciences’ participation in what the Soviet bureaucracy’s lingo called “the practice of socialist reconstruction.” In this period, the surface of official philosophy was institutionalized and integrated with the party and security bodies, while non-official philosophy was forced to a minimal existence.

2.3. Ideological confusion and incipient return of philosophical pluralism, 1956 – 64

The death of Joseph Stalin in 1953 and the subsequent fight over succession began a process of slow de-Stalinization in the Soviet Union. The second half of the 1950s turned out to be a period of philosophical reanimation (Lektorskiĭ & Bykova 2019; Dubrovskij 2022). Some lacunae in the public space emerged for non-official philosophy (as well as for other intellectual practices, from poetry to mysticism) with the *Khrushchev Thaw*, when the “cult of [Stalin-Djugashvili’s] personality” was denied at the 20th Congress of the CPSU. For the Soviet philosophical condition, this meant a return to communication between the different levels and circles of philosophy and the opening of interdisciplinary debates. The *thaw*, however, did not end the supremacy of Marxism-Leninism on the official level. The Soviet system still needed some changes to reshape power relations and reinvigorate the truth regime in the Soviet Union. As Adam Ulam well expressed it, the Soviet power system required periods of both increase and decrease in the degree of terror to be effective (Ulam, 1963: 399). In consequence, the Soviet philosophical condition remained structurally unchanged, although the life of thought at the lower levels and in marginal centers was much more active in this period.

In this period, philosophy was given a certain space for its own reorganization. If in the previous post-war period philosophical institutions grew in number, after 1956 it was evident that these institutions began to experience qualitative change, especially in terms of the people taking the lead in them. In the Soviet republics, new heads of institutes of philosophy were appointed, and new deans of philosophy faculties were elected. Moreover, post-war philosophers started publishing articles with views and ideas departing from the “magistral line.” These publications promoted reassessment of the “ideological frenzy” period and philosophy’s role in it.¹ In this new stage, publications in “samizdat” form took on the main role in disseminating information about local dissident and Western philosophical thought (Komaromi 2012; Gordeeva 2020). Thanks to samizdat, a forgotten culture of free-thinking philosophizing began to revive in certain levels and circles. However, neither the distribution of these texts nor the speed of discussion could satisfy the need for *normal* philosophical communication. Also, these unofficial publications were mainly focused on issues raised in Russian philosophical or theological centers, while Belarussian, Georgian, Lithuanian, or Ukrainian thinkers were

¹ Especially in works by A. Solzhenitsyn, B. Djakonov, and others.

published only sporadically in samizdat (Bungs 1988; Zisserman-Brodsky 2003; Anders 2020; Melnykova 2018).

These conditions of ideological confusion also created a chance for official philosophical institutions to bloom. The resonance of philosophical development through most of the levels and centers gave researchers like Florovskij and Epstein grounds to call it a *philosophical awakening* (Florovskij 1998: 17; Epstein 2019: 6). Mikhail Epstein, who studied works by philosophers of this period extensively, offered a summary of eight philosophical directions that were defined in the late 1950s – 60s and developed into the 1980s, with some impact on philosophies after the caesura of 1989 – 91 (Epstein 2019: 10–13). My own research supports Epstein’s findings, although I studied philosophical work not only in the Russian centers of the USSR, but also in Georgia, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, and Ukraine.

The first direction is what can be called *late Soviet Marxism*, which diverged into nationalist and humanist strands. The union of Marxism with nationalism was instigated by Stalin-Jugashvili’s article “Marxism and Problems of Linguistics” (2008 [1950]). Epstein is right in suggesting that in this text, the Marxist concept of class gave way to the “national unity” embodied in the “national language” and supported the proletarian case around the world (Epstein 2019: 10). However, it is important to note that there were different traditions of the Marxism-nationalism merger in many Soviet republics well before Stalin-Jugashvili’s text; the article, however, legitimized such merger in the Soviet philosophical condition. This merger has later influenced political philosophy in Russia in the 1980s, but even before this, it had influenced philosophers in Georgia, Lithuania, and Ukraine to raise the issue of the legitimacy of national cultures in the world proletarian revolution and in the Soviet Union’s development in the 1970s (Dziuba 1974; Gamsakhurdia 1976; on this, see also Vaitiekunas 1965; Parming 1977; Duik & Karatnycky 1990; Johnston 1993).

This tendency was also connected with the non-Marxist *philosophy of national spirit*, oriented toward Slavophilism, different ethnonationalisms, and the neotraditionalism of thinkers like Rene Guenon and Giulio Evola (Julius Evola) (Epstein 2019: 12). I would also include here the Heideggerian influence that was interpreted by some philosophical groups as the ontology of (ethno)national spirit, which is still an influential tendency in Georgia, Russia, and Ukraine (De George 1965; Sverdiolas & Kačerauskas 2009; Karpenko 2014; Kavaliauskas 2018; Sharpe 2020).

The second Epstein’s direction was the *Marxist humanist tendency* also had its roots in the 1950s, but it was connected with the Russian translation of Marx’s *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844). This tendency was critical for the de-Stalinization of Soviet Marxism-Leninism and offered the possibility of “socialism with a human face.” This line came under pressure after the suppression of the Prague Spring in 1968 and returned in *Perestroika* times after 1986 (Epstein 2019: 10). Its characteristic ideas can also be found in the leftist dissident thought of the 1970s.

Another direction in Soviet philosophy of that period was connected with *neo-rationalism, structuralism, and general methodology*. In this area, philosophical study was entering the fields of the natural sciences and humanities on the issues of research

methods and the methodology of scientific cognition as such. Here, philosophers were allowed to work with a lesser degree of ideological control, which resulted in interdisciplinary studies in formalism, semiotics, general systems theory, cultural studies, social organizations, and cybernetics (Epstein 2019: 10–11; see also Waldstein 2008 and Tishbeisky 2022).¹ This direction of theoretical studies and research was widely practiced in post-Soviet academies of the 1990s.

The direction that Epstein called *personalism and liberalism* was a Soviet philosophical and literary reception of post-war European existentialism (mainly represented by the ideas of Sartre and Camus) along with reinterpretations of Dostoevsky's, Berdiaev's, and Lev Shestov's ideas. It gave an impetus to many philosophical works at both official and underground levels and equally inspired leftist and liberal dissidents supporting human rights as a foundation for social progress (Epstein 2019: 11; see also Shlapentokh 1990: 22ff).

Soviet philosophy and theory of culture, or *culturology*, was an attempt to legitimize the idea of cultural dialogue in the field defined by Soviet Marxism and the doctrine of class struggle. There were Soviet philosophers who, in a way, continued the theoretical work of Spengler, Florenskij, and Bakhtin with the key concepts of dialogue, otherness, polyphony, and carnival (Epstein 2019: 11; see also Dragadze 1978; Bibler 2009; Soboleva 2016).

There was also a growing influence of *Christian thought* on Soviet philosophers. In Russia, this return of Christian thought related to the impact of literary works by Pasternak and Solzhenitsyn, while in the Soviet republics it was influenced by other sources, including Ukrainian Greek Catholic, Lithuanian Catholic, and Georgian Orthodox theologians (Gobar 1978; Vardys 1982; Senyk 2002). In 1988, when the Soviet leadership allowed celebrations of the 1,000th anniversary of Rus' baptism, the religious renaissance began using the foundations laid by these underground religious-philosophical streams.

This philosophical awakening was also connected with the returning influence of *cosmism and mysticism*. The *Thaw* allowed various gnostic, occult, and theosophical doctrines back into discussions in philosophical circles, where they were synthesized with modern scientific theories. In this context, the legacy of Konstantin Ciolkovskij, Nikolai Roerich, Vladimir Vernadskij, and other thinkers was reinvented and turned into influential doctrines confessed in groups around the USSR (Epstein 2019: 13; see also Menzel 2013; Siddiqi 2016; Terbish 2020).

¹ It is worth mentioning that this line starts even before 1956. As the study of Ilya Tishbeisky shows, the Moscow Logical Circle was active since 1952 / 3, and it was a space that gave life to Georgij Ščedrovickij-led *metodologija* movement, a specific Soviet philosophical movement distant to Marxism and supported by some party and government bodies (Tishbeisky 2022: 88). However, I do not agree with Tishbeisky's conclusion that 1960s – 1980s were the years of the Soviet Marxism's retreat (Tishbeisky 2022: 88-90). Yes, the Soviet Marxism was losing its "philosophical quality" due to increasing cynicism and aversion of new generation of philosopher to other questions where Marxism had a lesser significance; but it was also reinstated its hegemony under Mikhail Suslov, and it was far more proliferated in the educational system than under Stalin.

The eight years of “ideological confusion” provided short-lived liberation to official philosophical centers not only in Moscow and Leningrad but also in other cities like Almaty, Kazan, Kyiv, Tbilisi, and Vilnius. For example, contemporary Ukrainian philosophy is rooted in the processes of this period. With the arrival of Pavel Kopnin in Kyiv as director of the Institute of Philosophy (of the Ukrainian Academy of Science), a long process of institutionalization and capacity-building in the philosophical practice of the Ukrainian SSR began. Kopnin dared to link seminars (in historical and dialectical materialism, as well as in philosophy of science) in the institute with the philosophy faculty of Kyiv State University, which resulted in the creation of an entire generation of Ukrainian philosophers. The University itself underwent reorganization when the history and philosophy faculty were “merged” and new departments were established: the Department of the History and Theory of Atheism, which served as the center of anti-religious propaganda in the enlarged USSR; the Department of Modern Philosophy; and the Laboratory of Social Research, which became the first center of sociology in the Ukrainian SSR.

As in Moscow, official philosophy partially began communicating with non-loyal and dissident thinkers. Vasyl Lisovyj, a witness to these processes, described this communicative situation in the following way:

There were no sharp borders between the broad intellectual and cultural movement of the 1960s ... and professional (academic) philosophy—not only in terms of ideas, but also in terms of personalities. (Lisovyj 2007: 64)

As an example, Lisovyj refers to the fact that dissidents Ivan Dzyuba (1931 – 2022), Vasyl Stus (1938 – 1985), Jevhen Sverstyuk (1928 – 2014), and attended universities or institutes, while Mykhailo Braichevs’kyj (1924 – 2001), Mykhailyna Kotsjubyns’ka (1931 – 2011), Ivan Svitlichnyj (1929 – 1992), and others officially worked in academic centers. This situation had a positive effect on both groups of thinkers. Ukrainian non-official philosophy was a source of non-communist ideas, which took both liberal democratic and national conservative forms. The former was directed at the democratization of the USSR and the establishment of a liberal regime in all republics of the Union. Meanwhile, the national conservatives gravitated toward ethnocultural values and promoted a nationalist program. For its part, academic philosophy increasingly focused on the study of logic, dialectic, and scientific methodology, thereby developing the rationalist virtues of Soviet Ukrainian philosophy. At this time, the history of philosophy was the disciplinary space where non-Marxist philosophical research was possible.

This thaw was short-lived, but the ideological disorientation of the authorities gave philosophers an opportunity to deal with the totalitarian trauma, restore some elements of doctrinal pluralism, and advance several long-term directions that were partially connected with foreign philosophical centers and continued to grow until after the second caesura.

2.4. The professionalization of philosophy and the proliferation of ideological cynicism, 1965 – 85

The 1964 Brezhnev coup was followed by the establishment of Mikhail Suslov's neo-Stalinist ideological policy, which tried to control the results of the *Thaw*, including those in philosophy. At the time, Soviet philosophy was being further institutionalized at the official and semi-official levels, while communication with foreign philosophers was more open for those Soviet scholars who were regarded as loyal. Moreover, philosophical education, while remaining essentially dogmatic, was somewhat improving.

According to A. Ogurtsov, in 1975 there were 4,370 students studying philosophy with the philosophy faculties of seven universities, namely the universities at Kazakh (in Almaty), Kyiv, Leningrad, Moscow, Rostov, Tbilisi, and Ural (in Sverdlovsk). In the 1970s, these faculties prepared about 800 specialists in philosophy annually. As of 1976, 13,745 philosophy professors were teaching Marxist-Leninist philosophy throughout the higher educational institutions of the USSR. At that time, there were 351 habilitated doctors and 6,554 candidates of philosophical sciences among them. The highest qualification in philosophical studies was provided by post-graduate programs at the universities, the academic institutes, the Academy of Social Sciences under the CPSU Central Committee and republican party organizations, and the Higher Party Schools (Ogurtsov 1989: 7ff). The Soviet philosophical condition involved ever more *professionals* in philosophy—educated intellectuals whose ideas mattered and who were permanently in the situation of facing the impossible choice stemming from the practice–contemplation double alienation.

Soviet philosophy dwelt in university faculties that grew in terms of people involved and new departments established. These departments focused on the allowed philosophical areas and themes. For example, the philosophy faculty of Kyiv State University, after it was restored as a separate part of the university in 1965, consisted of departments focused on the following thematic areas: history of philosophy; philosophy of the humanities; philosophy of the natural sciences; ethics; aesthetics; logic; psychology and pedagogy; history and theory of atheism; and scientific communism. At Moscow University and Leningrad University, the areas were approximately the same, while at other universities the number of departments was somewhat smaller, usually from three to five.

Philosophy curricula throughout the Soviet Union grew at the expense of general cultural courses and included the following: dialectical materialism; historical materialism; history of foreign philosophy; history of philosophy of the Soviet peoples; history of Marxist-Leninist philosophy; modern bourgeois philosophy and ideology; aesthetics; ethics; history of religion and atheism; the world history module (from the history of the ancient world to contemporary history); the field of socio-economic disciplines (scientific communism, political economy of socialism and capitalism, history of CPSU); psychological and pedagogical sciences; and, finally, the division of natural and exact sciences (basics of modern mathematics, general and theoretical physics, and basics of biology). Such training was expected to provide Soviet “philosophy specialists” with a thorough materialist education integrated with the social and natural sciences. At the

same time, general education in the humanities lagged far behind, owing to a lack of fundamental courses in the classical languages, history of art, etc. The worst situation was that of knowledge of languages, critical thinking, academic writing, public speaking, and theological studies. The general framework of the curriculum was set up to reproduce a materialist and Marxist historicist worldview among those receiving the Soviet philosophical education.

The training of teachers of Marxism and other philosophical disciplines was put on a Ford-style assembly line after 1966, when a compulsory course on “scientific communism” was introduced in all the USSR’s educational institutions. For this course, a specialist in philosophy had to be prepared not only to deliver the doctrine to vast audiences but also to skillfully answer questions from “immature” youth. A special difficulty arose when that youth wanted to discuss the difference between the principles proclaimed by the authorities and real everyday life in the USSR. The philosophical faculties issued so-called “methodological recommendations” that could help specialists find correct answers to *problematic questions*. These *correct answers*, in a way, demonstrate that the course and its *methodology* aimed at convincing audiences rather than developing their thinking abilities—a perverse strategy opposing and subverting the Socratic maieutic.¹

Despite these conditions, the Soviet philosophical awakening continued in the above-mentioned philosophical directions. However, there were valuable additions. First of all, in the 1970s – 80s, Soviet philosophy and other intellectual and artistic practices were developing their own *conceptualism and postmodernism* (Epstein 2019: 13). Conceptualist and early postmodernist ironic optics focused on Soviet Marxist concepts—like collectivism, equality, and the people—and undermined their ideological meaning. The centers of this wave were visible in Moscow, Leningrad, Odessa, Lviv, and Novosibirsk, but these ideas also found wider audiences around the Soviet Union.

This ironic trend in philosophical circles was merging with another tendency of this stage: cynicism. Whereas during the rule of Stalin-Jugashvili and Khrushchev, the ideological guidelines of Marxism-Leninism were largely unquestionable for those working in official philosophical institutions, in the 1970s to early 1980s intellectuals could reduce the introjection of the Marxist creed through cynical compartmentalization. In the introductory parts of their works, Soviet philosophers were to mention Marx, Engels, and Lenin, but they did so only as an empty ritual, a defensive gesture. Although Marxist language remained in texts, thinkers tried to maintain personal distance from the doctrine. This practice allowed the preservation of their inner freedom of contemplation, but at the price of the self-humiliating refusal to engage in public discussion or action.²

This cynicism, however, was an alternative to Orwellian doublethink: a cynical position provided some painful integrity to the late Soviet personality that was paradoxically genuine in official and intimate controversies.³ In terms of the Soviet

¹ A summary of such “wise advice” can be found in Tadevosyan et al. 1987. On transgressive Socratic cynicism, please see Močalova 2020.

² For more on this late Soviet cynicism, see Yudin 1993 and Jermolenko 2003.

³ For more on this non-binary Sovietness, please see Yurchak 2013: 12ff.

philosophical condition, this cynicism was a result of acceptance of the chasm as an existential platform: it provided physical safety, a stable income, and the ability to philosophize—even if the results of this philosophizing were not for public use.¹

Another strong trend was the nationalization of philosophical processes in all the Soviet republics, including Russia. Alongside the slow decline of Soviet Marxism as a philosophical position, some local patriotic and nationalist tendencies were growing in Moscow, Kyiv, Tbilisi, and elsewhere. In philosophy, this was reflected in the opening of departments for the study of the national philosophical heritage. For example, despite the stern control of the republican Central Committees over the non-proliferation of “bourgeois nationalism,” researchers were looking at Georgian religious teachings, the links between Islam and philosophy in Kazan, or the Mohylian philosophical heritage in Ukraine.

This tendency started in the late 1960s, and in the 1970s it was always on the margins of the official philosophical surface, needing constant administrative defense from ideological censorship. For example, the Mohylian research was possible due to constant political cover by Pavel Kopnin, initially director of the Institute of Philosophy of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences (Kyiv) and later director of the Institute of Philosophy of the USSR Academy of Sciences (Moscow). Later, the ideological and methodological foundations of these pre-discursive nationalist conventions manifested in the second caesura and in the early 1990s, when nationalism—in its different forms—became the major source of legitimacy for the new truth regimes and social orders in independent Georgia, Russia, and Ukraine.

The chiefs of the philosophical centers (heads of academic institutes and university faculties, ideological workers of the Central Committee, and their entourages) were able to create working conditions for a generation of philosophers who were born from the spirit of the Thaw and its associated philosophical awakening. This allowed Genrikh Batishchev (1932 – 1990), Vladimir Bibler (1918 – 2000), Evald Ilyenkov (1924 – 1979), Vadim Ivanov (1933 – 1991), Mikhail Lifshyts (1905 – 1983), Jurij Lotman (1922 – 1993), Merab Mamardashvili (1930 – 1990), Nelli Motrošilova (1934 – 2021), Svetlana Neretina (b. 1941), Mikhail Petrov (1923 – 1987), Myroslav Popovych (1930 – 2018), Georgij Sčedrovickij (1929 – 1994), Alexander Zinoviev (1922 – 2006), and many others to work in a relatively comfortable environment.² However, there were very specific parameters, including institutionalized censorship and ideological monopoly, waves of repression of dissidents, and pressures to move from philosophical centers into other, less ideologically important academic institutes. Yet there were also some limited possibilities for publications, seminars, and communication with foreign colleagues. As Motrošilova described it from her own experience, this was a philosophical situation based on an antinomy: there were censors and controllers from Stalin-era

¹ It is worth mentioning that this cynicism was relatively non-productive: philosophical texts that were considered highly valid in the 1970s and 1980s are not in demand in today’s philosophical world—we have enough dogmatists and cynics of our own.

² On this cohort of philosophers, please see Kantor 2009; Motrošilova 2009; Tolstyh 2009; Lektorskij 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2014; Arslanov 2010; Popovych 2010.

Marxist centers—but there were also “creative communities,” spaces of free philosophical creativity and communication, despite all disciplinary and political borders (Motrošilova 2013: 6, 14–15; Motrošilova & Tatarenko 2018: 343–45).

The late Soviet post-totalitarian power and truth regime were still strong. Even in 1983, at the June plenum of the CPSU Central Committee, Stalinist solutions were offered in response to increasing social dissatisfaction with the standards of living:

The political vigilance of the Soviet people, their irreconcilability with hostile views, their ability to resist the ideological diversions of the class enemy... should be increased and strengthened... [to fight] the opportunistic raids on the real socialism. (*Materialy* 1983: 70–71)

Andropov's attempted reforms and increased ideological censorship demonstrated that the authorities' zeal to reinstate totalitarian rule and ideocracy lacked both human and institutional resources.

Indeed, despite the control and ideological monopoly, the development of philosophical research in the areas of the history of philosophy and “critique of bourgeois doctrines” provided access to contemporary non-Marxist philosophical thought (Dewey, Husserl, Heidegger, Ricœur, Habermas, etc.). Official philosophical publications, including some in the languages of the national republics, were growing in numbers and spread ideas not limited to Marxism. Studies of Kant and Hegel—due to their role as predecessors of Marx—were recognized as having the right not only to exist but also to develop actively, creating late Soviet “Kantians” and “Hegelians.” All this served as a basis for the philosophical leap to the *Perestroika* stage of the Soviet philosophical condition.

2.5. Decline of ideological monopoly and fuller return of philosophical pluralism, 1986 – 91

By the early 1980s, the Soviet Union faced the existential problems generated not only by political, security, and economic situations but also by its very success in education. An inflexible ideological frame, cynical professors, and a huge educational and party bureaucracy simply could not react to the demands of social development and globalization. The watershed in Soviet domestic politics was the XXVII Congress of the CPSU (February 27 – March 6, 1986), at which the need for urgent measures in the spheres of economic and social development was acknowledged. Furthermore, the success of the needed executive measures depended on deep economic and administrative reforms, democratization of the decision-making process, and liberties for those involved in the analysis and interpretation of the causes and consequences of catastrophic socioeconomic processes. For that reason, one of the main decisions of the congress was articulated in a document called “The Main Trends of *Perestroika* of Higher and Secondary Education,” which demanded a “new quality” of personnel training for industry and administration to restore socioeconomic progress. This new education and training system had to maintain equilibrium between “ideological and political maturity” and professionalism (Sičkarenko 2013: 163).

Gorbachev's educational reforms coincided with those in Britain and Japan. In the 1980s, Britain and Japan also faced the issue of educational systems unable to meet the

needs of the globalizing economy. However, their reforms were not targeting an educational system that had been tasked with social engineering. In the Soviet Union, the *Perestroika* reforms started with the idea that the “new Soviet man” had never been formed in the USSR, in spite of all the revolutionary victims and efforts of the previous fifty years. This meant the education system had to give up on social engineering and be reoriented from the quest for Soviet Man to the needs of the economy and effective management. Gorbachev’s reforms aimed at changing the ideological “cement” of the USSR’s political regime and social order.

Quite predictably, the role of philosophical education in this context was seen as highly important. Characteristically, the Soviet mind assumed that the policy of *glasnost* had to be morally and ideologically grounded to be effective. Philosophy had to provide Soviet society with discursive conventions that would allow it to accept pluralism of opinion and the necessity of public discussion while limiting the negative results of public discord. The Soviet philosophical condition, however, had not prepared philosophers to act publicly, think critically, or to link contemplation, practice, and experience. In consequence, the party’s tasks were never implemented by philosophers, at least not in the ways party leaders wanted.

Instead, Soviet philosophy was actively participating in, if not leading, the process of ‘de-platforming’ the ideological monopoly and all the historical myths and identity posits of the Soviet lifeworld. The normative and rational force of philosophy, as well as of many other intellectual practices, was applied to launching the process of critical review of what had been laid down in the foundations of the Soviet society and regime—the process that Anatolij Tykholaz called “unmasking” (Tykholaz 1998: 60). Many heretofore suppressed facts about the crimes of the Soviet authorities and many official myths about heretofore-worshiped idols and demonized opponents of Soviet power were quickly brought into the center of public attention.

The *Memorial* movement, banned in Russia last year, stemmed from this process. Intellectuals focused on unmasking the past to such an extent that collective memory became the field of struggle, in which liberals from the *Memorial* movement fought with neo-Sovietist conservatives from the *Pamiat’* (Memory) movement and with many nationalist intellectuals promoting an ethnonational *revival* of the past. Historical studies of the Soviet past by figures like Roy Medvedev or Alexander Solzhenitsin were at the center of public debate (Solzhenitsin 1989; Medvedev 2010). In addition, non-Marxist sociological studies of the late Soviet society commanded considerable interest (Žukov 2003: 15ff).

Philosophy, however, did not assume the role of a Weberian science, which to rationalize the lifeworld had to focus on the present and the future. Official philosophers were ignored as they tried to use disrespected Marxist language or demonstrate their cynical approach. Unofficial, dissident philosophers quickly became engaged in the political struggles of liberals, social democrats, national patriots, etc., whose voices were too contradictory to be heard. With rare exceptions, as in the Mamardashvili case, philosophers could not offer a nonpartisan opinion—yet if they did, they were not listened to since the opinions they expressed were too unpopular and thus provocative. Soon

before the caesura of 1989 – 91, philosophy relinquished its central position in the Soviet lifeworld to the historians, who soon came in addition to inspire legal studies, literary fiction, and aesthetic theory.

One of the reasons that history—and historical fiction—became the leading intellectual practice was that Soviet philosophical institutes and faculties did not immediately accept *Perestroika*'s call for pluralism. The official surface was still influenced by ideological inertia, continued party control, and a sort of disciplinary snobbism that restrained philosophers from timely reaction to the public's demands. Philosophers from other layers and centers were fast becoming involved in many new opportunities in journalism, politics, religion, and business (especially publishing). In 1988 – 91, tens of philosophical books by previously forbidden authors—just to name a few, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Carl Gustav Jung, and Pavel Florenskij—were re-published, and many new translations of core 20th-century philosophical works were undertaken. In 1989–91, the number of translations of philosophical, historical, and sociological works doubled annually (Khapaeva 2005: 10–11). At all levels, the Soviet philosophical condition was falling into ruin from blows struck by the philosophers themselves.

Furthermore, philosophical education was dropping off in the structures of the Soviet condition. In Moscow, the democratization of philosophical education began around 1988. That year, the election of the dean of the philosophy faculty of Moscow State University drew considerable publicity when Professor Alexander Panin defeated the candidate promoted by the authorities. Panin immediately instituted reforms, bringing many new intellectuals onto the faculty in newly established departments and launching the project of a new philosophy textbook. For the centralized Soviet educational system, this new textbook offered the start of decommunization. A group of philosophers and sociologists headed by Professor Ivan Frolov developed a new *Perestroika*-style two-volume textbook (Frolov et al. 1989).

The Introduction to Philosophy became an extremely popular product used by most humanities and social sciences centers in the Soviet educational system to displace the Marxist didactic texts. By the end of 1989, *Perestroika*'s influence had already spread to the philosophical centers in Almaty, Kyiv, Minsk, Tbilisi, and elsewhere. But everywhere—with the exception of the Baltic countries—philosophical institutions remained closely tied to the authorities and had a very narrow space for influencing the style and content of late Soviet politics.

The pluralism of philosophical ideas and communication platforms led to the destruction of the Soviet philosophical condition. This pluralism provided philosophers with more opportunities to revise their own positions, study more widely, and take time for contemplation and practice. By the time of the second caesura, the chaos of intellectual and social processes was opening new horizons for the life of philosophy in new cultural and political conditions.

Conclusions

The life of philosophy since the dissolution of the USSR has put an end to the alternative status of the Soviet philosophical condition. Its structures, limitations, and incentives have ceased to exist, and the philosophical processes in the societies of Eastern Europe and Northern Eurasia no longer constitute an alternative¹ apart from other contemporary philosophies. Philosophers from these societies have adapted to the new conditions of theoretical work, including a great decrease in both authoritarian control and public interest, as well as the hegemony of philosophical ideas from outside the region.

As I have argued, the Soviet philosophical condition was a product of the caesura of 1917 – 22, which moved philosophy from its place as one of many intellectual practices into the center of the struggle for the power and truth regime. This caesura constituted not only a rupture in cultural continuity but also an ontological event that critically changed the life of philosophy.

Before the Soviet philosophical condition came to an end with the caesura of 1989 – 91, it developed in five different stages through which at least three generations of philosophers lived and worked. Arguably, their philosophical institutions, directions, and practices survived the changes of 1989 – 91 and may still be found, though on a different scale, in the contemporary intellectual landscape of Eastern Europe and Northern Eurasia.

My study is an attempt to reconsider Soviet philosophy as a condition and to offer a periodization of its development. A clear portrait of the evolving characteristics of this condition provides researchers on Soviet philosophical thought with an opportunity to better understand the logic of its development, its sociopolitical context, the motivations of individual philosophers, and the elements that may still be found in contemporary philosophical processes. The periodization offered is a result of looking at the development of Soviet philosophy in terms of a balance among political, wider intellectual, and narrower philosophical factors. In combination, these lenses may help better understand how philosophy can live within, be subordinate to, yet ultimately undermine the power regimes creating ontological obstacles to philosophical contemplation and practice.

¹ This non-alternative status still means a long philosophical silence (or lack of new ideas) in the East.

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