



IVAN V. KIREYEVSKY
(1806-1856)

THE ANTHROPOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF IVAN KIREYEVSKY

THIS TEACHING of Kireyevsky must be examined in connection with asceticism (see Part I). It is directly related to asceticism, connecting it with philosophy and affirming the eternal meaning of ascetic endeavors.

In his teaching on the soul, Kireyevsky pointed to its hierarchical structure. At the foundation of his teaching he placed "ancient Christian anthropological dualism,"¹ the distinction between an "outer" and "inner" man. Using the language of contemporary psychology, he distinguished between the "empirical sphere of the psyche," and its many aspects on a deeper level lying below the threshold of consciousness, the central point of which may be called the "inward focal self." These are the powers of the spirit which have been relegated by sin to the depths of man beyond the threshold of consciousness, this being the reason for the loss of the original wholeness which conceals in itself the very root of individuality and its specific quality. These powers, this inner man, is closed off to the consciousness as a result of the power of sin. By overcoming sin and "concentrating" the powers of the soul, man should strive to unite his empirical sphere with the inner center, the "inward focal self," subordinating this empirical sphere to himself. "The chief character of

1. Zenkovsky, *History of Russian Philosophy*, p. 222.

believing thought," says Kireyevsky in this remarkable passage, "consists in the striving to concentrate all the separate powers of the soul into a single power, to seek out that inner focus of being where reason, will, feeling and conscience, the beautiful and the true, the wonderful and the desirable, the just and the merciful, and the whole sweep of the mind, are fused together into one living unity, thus *restoring* the essential personality in its original indivisibility" (II, 337). In this restored wholeness of powers, the hierarchical primacy belongs to man's moral sphere; and the health of all the other aspects and specific qualities of his soul depends on the health of the moral sphere.²

Kireyevsky expressed the basic problem of his doctrine of epistemology as follows: "The understanding with which man apprehends the Divine also serves him for apprehending the truth in general" (II, 306). In other words "the apprehension of reality is a function of the knowledge of God."³

This important aspect of cognition of the soul forms the basis of Kireyevsky's epistemological constructions, and provides a key towards understanding the latter. "In the very depths of human reason, in its very nature, lies the possibility of the consciousness of one's fundamental relationship to God" (II, 322), *i.e.*, faith. Faith, the knowledge of God, is a deep, mysterious union not only of man's spirit, but also of his entire personality, with God — the one highest and true reality.

Similarly, the understanding of the secondary, created reality has to do not only with reason, but with "one's whole being and one's whole participation in reality." The depth of cognition, the possibility of "possessing reality" and the truth which is concealed in it, is determined not by cognition alone, but "by the luminosity of understanding, its realization in man's 'inward focus on self.'"⁴ This is possible only in the wholeness of the spirit, in the gathering of all its powers.

But the Fall caused the impairment of the structure of the soul. Although faith, too, was impaired and relegated to the depth of the soul, it still preserved the power to restore the lost wholeness of the spirit. And in so far as faith has been preserved in the inward focus of the spirit, it restores the natural functioning of the mind and "makes the mind understand that it has deviated from its moral wholeness; and this understanding helps us to rise above the 'natural' course of activity," *i.e.*, to rise above the 'natural' state. "For the Orthodox believer knows that the wholeness of the truth requires the wholeness of the mind, and the quest for this wholeness constitutes the con-

2. *Ibid.*, p. 225.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 228.

4. *Ibid.*

stant task of his thinking”(II, 311). . . . “Thus, where faith is present, a ‘dual activity’ goes on in the thought of the believer: in following the development of his understanding, he simultaneously follows the method of this thinking” (*i.e.*, he controls the correctness of its activity), “constantly striving to raise his reason to a level where it can sympathize with faith” (II, 312). Thus, the corruption of our mind which resulted when it turned away from the wholeness of its primary nature is repaired by what faith brings into our spirit. This does not mean violence to the mind, which would undermine its freedom and creative powers, but the raising of reason from a lower level to a higher.

“Living truths are not those which constitute dead capital in the mind of man, which lie on the surface of his mind and may be acquired through external learning, but those which kindle the soul, which may burn or become extinguished, which impart life to life, which are preserved in the secrecy of heart and may not, by their nature, be obvious and common to all. When expressed in words, they remain unnoticed; when expressed in deeds, they remain incomprehensible to those who have not experienced their direct contact” (II, 340). To know the truth must be to dwell in the truth; in other words, this involves not just the mind, but the whole life. “Living” knowledge is acquired in the degree to which one aspires inwardly to moral elevation and wholeness, and it disappears when this aspiration ceases, leaving in the soul only its outward, formal aspect. Thus “spiritual enlightenment,” in contrast to logical knowledge, is bound with the moral state of the soul, and as such it requires effort and moral intensity. “It may become extinguished if the fire which has kindled it is not continuously fed” (II, 327). Abstract knowledge alone entails “tearing away from reality, and man himself becomes an abstract entity” (II, 305). The break with reality begins in the sphere of faith. Malady of the spirit, disintegration of its strength, is, first of all, reflected in the sphere of faith and results in “abstract thinking.” “Logical thought, separated from the other cognitive powers, is the natural characteristic of a mind which has fallen away from its wholeness” (I, 276). This falling away of reason causes also the loss of higher cognition bound with faith; and “natural reason” inevitably sinks below the level of its “primary nature.” The break with spiritual powers, this “amorality” of Western enlightenment, gives it an odd stability, whereas spiritual knowledge is dynamic by nature, and directly dependent on the continuously changing state of the moral sphere.

Such is Kireyevsky’s solution to the basic problem of epistemology: the inward union of faith and reason. As mentioned before, he drew his inspiration from the Church Fathers. Their doctrine of the levels of reason, as expounded by St. Demetrius of Rostov, further elucidates the doctrine of cognition.

1. Reason that is uncultivated and for a long time unpurified is an unreasonable reason, an iniquitous and untrue reason. There are distinctions in reason, as in all other external things. There is a perfect, spiritual reason, there is an average reason of the soul, and there is a rather coarse carnal reason.
2. The one who will not care to personally follow the narrow Evangelical path, and will neglect to purify his mind, is blind of soul, even if he has mastered all external wisdom; he keeps only to the letter that kills, without accepting the spirit that gives life.
3. Right and true reason cannot penetrate deeply into the soul without great and prolonged effort and labor; for to the degree that man's lusts are mortified, to that degree does true reason grow and flourish. But this ascetic labor must be of a particular kind; it must consist of external effort and mental activity. The one is not effected without the other.
4. All those who have complied with the instructions pertaining to external labor while neglecting inward spiritual activity — the enlightenment and purification of reason — have lost their senses, have become corrupted by various passions, or have fallen into pernicious heresies. *And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient* (Rom. 1:28).
5. The mind that is purified and enlightened can understand everything external and internal, because then the person is spiritual and *judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man* (I Cor. 2:15).⁵

Philosophy is the science of the apprehension of truth. But truth is one. *I am the Way, the Truth and the Life*, says the Lord (John 14:6). This Way is the only one for philosophical thought as well; whoever follows a different path — *climbeth up some other way* (John 10:1).

A laden camel could only with difficulty and on its knees squeeze through the low and narrow gate of Jerusalem called the "needle's eye," but despite all efforts, it is even more difficult for a thinker rich in *science falsely so called* (I Tim. 6:20) to enter God's Kingdom of truth and spiritual freedom: *Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty* (II Cor. 3:17). *If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free* (John 8:31-32).

5. *The Spiritual Alphabet* of St. Demetrius of Rostov, pp. 38-43. I. M. Kontzevitch wrote a whole treatise on St. Demetrius of Rostov, which was published in *Pravoslavny Put* (*The Orthodox Way*), although not totally in its original form (*editor*).

Based on the law of the dynamics of knowledge and its organic bond with the spiritual sphere, Kireyevsky assumes that the decline of the "indigenous Russian enlightenment," although it occurred in unfavorable external circumstances, was "not free of man's inner fault." "An aspiration towards external formality, which we observe in Russian Old-Believers, gives cause to think that the initial direction of Russian enlightenment became weakened already before the upheavals caused by Peter" (II, 327). At this point it is important to note that Kireyevsky places the beginning of this decline in the 15th and 16th centuries, which coincides with the beginning of the decline in spiritual activity, according to our own research.

Thus, Kireyevsky marked the beginning of a new inspired philosophy of the "wholeness of spirit," which could have formed the basis for an understanding of the development of an original indigenous Russian culture.

In Kireyevsky, Russian self-awareness already reached its full revelation. Russian thought was becoming free of its centuries-long captivity to alien principles and stepping out onto its initial independent path, turning to its primary sources. It was returning to the "father's house." But Kireyevsky did not have time to complete the task he envisioned — to write a philosophy; he only laid its foundation and indicated its direction. Death carried him away in the prime of his life. He was buried in Optina Monastery, next to Elder Leonid. Elder Macarius died soon thereafter. Everything that transpired in Optina had a mysterious meaning. Metropolitan Philaret himself was amazed at the honor shown to Kireyevsky.⁶

6. Kireyevsky's life was the confirmation of his teaching. His close friend Khomiakov said of him: "A heart full of tenderness and love; a mind enriched by the culture of our contemporary epoch; the translucent purity of a meek soul free of malice; a particular softness of feeling, which added a special charm to his conversation; a fervent yearning for truth; unusual dialectical refinement in arguments, accompanied by the most honest tractability when his opponent was right, and tender mercy when his opponent was obviously weak; aversion to everything coarse and abrasive in life, in expression and thought, or in relations with other people; loyalty and devotion in friendship; readiness always to forgive enemies and to be sincerely reconciled with them; deep hatred of vices and, finally, an irreproachable dignity which did not allow any blemish or suspicion to be linked with it, but which sincerely suffered from any meanness observed in other people. Such were the rare and invaluable qualities of Ivan Vasilievich Kireyevsky." *Russian Biographical Dictionary* (St. Petersburg, 1897), p. 695.