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O RUS, WHERE ARE THOU?

MYTHS IN CULTURE AND POLITICS¹

ABSTRACT

The article attempts to define the role of a myth and mythical thinking in the Russian society. It shows a relationship between a socio-political myth and ideology, politics, and historical remembrance. Based on the myth about progress, the article discusses an issue of choice faced by Russia of the 20th century, namely national development or European advancement? It describes interpretations of economic, socio-political, and cultural aspects of Russia's backwardness, as presented by representatives of various trends of Russian thought of the 19th century. It lists examples of a paradoxical agreement among conservatives and revolutionaries that a move "forward and up" is not always progressive, whereas the development should always be "national". Therefore, Russia should not copy all forms of development that have taken place in European countries – from lower to higher. It argues that there is a possible historical explanation of the myth of progress. Namely, attempts to explain diversity and originality of national variations of development (*Whither, then, are you speeding, O Russia of mine?*) have proved historical differences of the Russian path, as an independent Russian-Orthodox civilisation, towards a better understanding of the "vicious circle" of the modern civilisation: "We are poor because we're stupid, and we're stupid because we're poor."

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DEFINITION OF MYTH

“MYTH [<Greek: *mythos*; word; legend, tradition]” – this etymology usually opens entries in reference books, such as dictionaries and encyclopaedias. In reality, the word “myth” has a more ancient (and complex) etymology going back to Sanskrit, in which this term meant “care for something”, “signify something” or “passionately desire”. For example, Homer used this word to denote “commandment”, “advice”, “order”, “meeting”, “intention”, “aim”, “message”, “promise”, “intention”, “threat”, “defence” or “boast”.² The very concept of myth is unclear and blurry so evidently there are different approaches to defining it. There can be distinguished interpretative myths, focused on the past but maintaining its explicative function in the present as they explain and justify a given person’s fate or certain forms of social organization; a myth can also be seen as a mystification, an illusion, or a reality-distorting mirage; and finally, a myth can be represented as a specific psychological reality which reflects the origins of the accepted convictions, values, and norms of living within a society and which offers people the meaning of living in the society.

A synthetic definition of a myth can be thus: a myth – i.e. a complex and complete system of convictions which does not require any justification besides its own statement and no logic other than its own is, on the one hand, a specific psychological reality, which is a sequential chain of images; on the other hand – it is a deformed, objectively unrelated to the reality intellectual interpretation with explanatory function and mobilizing power.

The foundation of mythologization is based on the ideas regarding emotional value, constructing a holistic, irrationally illusory form of consciousness, which – on the border between the conscious and the unconscious, on sensual and pre-reflexive level of world development – organizes value orientations that are the conditions, means, and waypoints of social behaviour and activities.

MYTH AND IDEOLOGY

The active regulatory function of a myth is assiduously used in politics to consciously construct specific mythologies and effectively influence consciousness. It can be repeated after an eminent historian of philosophy Arseniy Vladimirovich Gulyga that “politics is solid mythology”.³ Indeed, a myth as a peculiar psychological reality is

² А.Ф. Лосев, *История античной эстетики. Последние века*, vol. 2, Москва 1988, p. 169.

³ А.В. Гулыга, *Русская идея и ее творцы*, Москва 1995, p. 282.

a significant element of ideology and an integral part of politics. In this case we speak here about the socio-political myth created by collective imagination filtered through the lens of emotional, sensuous experiences living within the framework of everyday consciousness.

Furthermore, ideology as a form of organization of collective consciousness, based on the past and the present is oriented towards a specific future. On the one hand, it denotes system rules of interaction between social groups and institutions, differentiating between “our own” and “other”, which eliminates the problems that both individuals and the entire society might have with self-defining. On the other hand, it determines the goal as well as means and methods of achieving it – in other words, the sense of social development. Cumulating what is important for people, ideology constructs a certain hierarchy of values (in the ultimate analysis this order determines a specific ideology and distinguishes it from other ideologies). Support for and development of these values is the meaning of social development, the sense of a state’s existence.⁴ The next factor involved in self-identification, directly connected to ideology, is historical memory; language, symbols, and texts play a key role in its formation. In turn, historical memory is fixed, preserved, and transformed with socio-political myths.

Every history consists of events which are, firstly, experienced by each individual together with their contemporaries; secondly, arranged in a specific order according to their importance for each person and its contemporaries; thirdly, these events and their order are evaluated, depending on one’s world view, moral principles, and ultimately ideals. This is finally the field of a specific ideology which collects meanings and values, eliminates problems with self-identification of both an individual and the whole society, leading in the end to unification of the population into a civic society.⁵

THE MYTH OF ENLIGHTENMENT AND THE MYTH OF PROGRESS

Sometimes socio-political myths gain truly metahistorical proportions. Thus in the 18th century, the efforts of philosophers and intellectuals produced a cultural myth of Enlightenment, which continues to determine attitudes and psychology of many people. The myth was founded on the belief in the end of the period of evil and violence in the history of humanity. As eminent Russian cultural historian and semiotician Yuri Lotman ironically wrote, the offspring of superstition and fanaticism dissipated in the rays of the Enlightenment; the age was coming when the noble essence of Man would reveal itself in its entirety.⁶

⁴ A.A. Sziriniānc, “Konserwatyzm w przestrzeni ideologicznej i politycznej współczesnej Rosji”, in E. Jeliński et al. (eds.), *Political science, politische Wissenschaft i politologija. Antologia tekstów*, transl. by B. Hordecki, Poznań 2017, pp. 185-186.

⁵ С.С. Царегородцев, А.А. Ширинянц, “В поисках смысла: идеи как фактор политики”, *Вестник Российской нации*, no. 1 (2018), p. 74.

⁶ Ю.М. Лотман, “Архаисты-просветители”, in Б.Ф. Егоров, А.Д. Кошелев (eds.), *Из истории русской культуры*, vol. 5: XIX век, Москва 1996, p. 413.

The possibility for this beneficial change to come was connected with the spirit of anti-traditionalism.

For millennia or longer, the humanity lived in the past; science and social sciences were literally “reactionary” as the oldest doctrine, teaching and ideology were considered the most credible, and age was synonymous with wisdom. Orthodoxy, defined as “what everybody believed always, always, everything” (*Преподобный Викентий Лиринский*), regressed by entire centuries, remaining until the 17th century as the unquestionable foundation of scientific research. As Alexei Losev wrote in his characteristics of the “new European spirit”, permeated with rationalism and individualism, if the whole Middle Ages are based on the primacy of transcendental reality, the Modern Era emphasizes individual, varied subjective abilities or the whole subject by giving it an unnatural dimension; however, everything else turns into a sort of an amorphous monster, eyeless darkness, into infinitely blurred, black, and meaningless mechanistic world of Newton’s natural sciences. Hence such slogans as knowledge without faith, such credo and mythology regarding omnipotence of knowledge, this permanent hope for science, for enlightenment, for the blind dogma that “knowledge is power”.⁷

Furthermore, at that time (in philosophy this begins with Descartes) science turned its sight towards the future so decisively that the past became neglected in a truly Philistine manner, which was expressed by the formula “the older, the more wrong/dumb”.⁸ Formerly accepted truths were considered to be the fruit of prejudice, violence, and superstition. It is enough to recall here a conviction that history (e.g. the Middle Ages) must be known only to despise Voltaire, who stated in his *Essay on the Customs and the Spirit of the Nations* (1756) that history is nothing else but a collection of human mistakes, and the history of great events is merely a history of crime.⁹

The fruit of Reason and Enlightenment should grow from full renunciation of tradition, fathers’ beliefs, and centuries-old convictions. As Lotman described, the Enlightenment man in a strange way resembled a Christian from the first centuries: he renounced existence as a kingdom of darkness, denounced historical tradition and dreamed of the coming of a new heaven and a new earth. Evil was for him embodied in humanity’s true history, and good – in utopian theory. Like an early Christian, he was convinced that the Great Transfiguration should occur from day to day; however, to

⁷ А.Ф. Лосев, “Диалектика мифа”, in idem, *Из ранних произведений*, Москва 1990, p. 501. Losev maintains here that as all post-medieval thought represents liberalism and humanism, and as all socio-economic life of these centuries is based on detached individualism (i.e. it turns out to be capitalism) and on rationalism (i.e. turns out to be a mechanical culture), the myth of omnipotence of knowledge is a myth that is entirely bourgeois (ibid.).

⁸ А.А. Ширинянц, “Тоска versus надежда: размышления о времени”, *Sensus Historiae*, vol. 33, no. 4 (2018), pp. 71-72.

⁹ М. de Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations. Avec préfaces, avertissements, notes, etc. Par M. Beuchot*, vol. 1, Paris 1829, p. 351, at <http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/Voltaire/essai_sur_les_moeurs_t1/voltaire_essai_sur_les_moeurs_t1.pdf>.

achieve this, the man of Reason and Nature must break with prejudice and everything what Lermontov called precious beliefs of fathers.¹⁰

Educators of the Enlightenment enriched the world by introducing the concept of gradual development of the society – development influenced by the continuously perfected human mind. The liberal myth of incessant worldwide historical progress towards freedom (frequently described in literature as the myth of the French Revolution) does not allow any other histories besides the emancipated history of the world.¹¹ Trying to demythologize history (evoking reason!), the “Progressives” paradoxically discovered a desire for another mythologization when they considered progress to be invariable.

Having superseded religious faith, the notion of progress itself gained the status of a faith, fascinating minds for a long time, becoming the foundation of a stable perception of life and the world that has been adopted by many generations since the Enlightenment. This “rational” concept was an inherent element of all modern societies, giving the sense of greater reason and hope to millions of people in the situation when they lost the support of religious understanding of the world that for centuries had played an important role in psychological adaptation to the world.

The linear conception of progress, which understands the European development as cumulation, has been permeated by unshakeable faith in self-development and self-improvement of humanity, a conviction that the humankind is continuously developing through either revolution or evolution and ultimately can achieve the highest form of social organization.

Later historical disappointments with radical revolutionary movements strongly pushed the idea of progress towards all kinds of evolutionary theories – sociological, biological, psychoanalytical etc. Hence a quick jump to the longed-for kingdom was replaced by a long and difficult march; or, in the words of above-quoted German philosopher Odo Marquard, a fast trip to paradise was replaced by a long journey through biological species and social institutions; during its historical development, the humankind achieves technological perfection which guarantees its survival.¹² However, the pattern of the movement remained unchanged: what was earlier transforms into what comes later and what is primitive – into what is more developed; as Marquard notes, the raw gives way to the cooked, nature to culture, the wild to the tamed; the principles of desire are replaced by the principles of realistic possibilities, the force by the law, family by state, myth by logos, fortuity by science, want by abundance, fantasy by ob-

¹⁰ Ю.М. Лотман, “Архаисты-просветители”, p. 414. Discarding one’s own heritage led to paradoxical outcomes: for example, when thinkers in France attempted to simulate an “English point of view”, in other parts of Europe the Enlightenment ideas were speaking in French. Thinking in an educational way meant thinking like in the philosophers’ salons of Paris (ibid., p. 415).

¹¹ O. Marquard, “Lob des Polytheismus. Uder Monomythie und Polymythie”, in H. von Poser (ed.), *Philosophie und Mythos. Ein Kolloquium*, Berlin–New York 1979, pp. 46–47, at <https://books.google.ru/books?id=_01bDAAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=ru#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

¹² О. Марквард, “Эпоха чуждости миру?”, *Отечественные записки*, no. 6 (2003), at <http://www.strana-oz.ru/2003/6/epoha-chuzhdosti-miru#t*>.

servation, fiction by reality, illusion by criticism, inequality by equality, oppression by freedom, and primitive culture by a developed one.¹³

In other words, there is a constant movement towards the greater heights of dazzling perfection. The image of scientific, technological, and economic progress, considered natural and inevitable, was transferred onto the entire development of human society, its institutions, and forms of government.

The notion of progress was grounded in the conviction that scientific, technological, and economic progress automatically ensured implementation of humanistic values.

The actual history of human civilization shook these naïve ideas. The failure of the universal concept of progress revealed a paradox overlooked by many thinkers of the past: namely, that members of previous generations were perceived solely as means to create current and future historical perfection; they were refused the right to have intrinsic value. An original interpretation of this paradox was presented by Albert Camus in *The Rebel*. An earlier reference came from Nikolai Berdyaev, who noted in *The Realm of Spirit and the Realm of Caesar* that the optimistic, brazen theory of progress shared by Marxists represents the tragedy of mortal time, hopeless in its ultimate contradiction, turning people into means of the future.¹⁴

RUSSIA AND THE WEST: NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OR EUROPEAN PROGRESS?

Immanuel Wallerstein, the author of the seminal analysis *The Modern World-System*, presented an original version of the liberal myth of incessant historical worldwide progress towards freedom perceived from socio-economic perspective.¹⁵ The myth is quite simple in its interpretation: once, in the dark Middle Ages, Europe was feudal, inhabited by peasants owned by lords. After some time, there emerged a middle class, which started to strive for economic changes. The economic changes were followed by political and spiritual transformations. This ultimately led to the “industrial revolution”. Great Britain was the most successful, with other countries being less developed or entirely backward. However, considering the optimistic point of view that is the foundation of this legend, there is no reason to despair: the other nations could and should follow the path of progressive nations, thus accepting the fruit of progress.

The myth gave rise to three main problems that occupied the minds of numerous thinkers and ultimately was reduced to the following questions that required immediate answers:

- 1) How to explain the diversity and originality of national development options (“O Rus, where are you hurrying?”)?

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Н.А. Бердяев, *Царство Духа и царство Кесаря*, Москва 1995, p. 353.

¹⁵ И. Валлерстайн, *Мир-система Модерна. меркантилизм и консолидация европейского мира-экономики, 1600-1750 гг.*, vol. 1-4, Москва 2015-2016.

- 2) What are optimal ways and means to create a “democratic” state, which would ensure that a large part of the population, including even proverbial female cooks, would participate in governing, at the same time preventing anarchy?
- 3) And, most importantly: How a backward country can catch up with those who are ahead?

The answer to the third question in most cases was (and still is) connected to the need of most coherent repeating of the experiences of more developed states. Two solutions for the social problem are distinguished here, labelled as 1) “designing” – assuming an ideal theoretical model that has little in common with reality as well as “construction” (implementation) of this model; and 2) “pragmatic” – also focusing on a model, but one based on specific experiences of a given country or region and aiming predominantly at economic growth.

In the history of the 19th-century Russian political thought, the search for answers to the first and third question was stimulated by the fact that economic, socio-political, and cultural backwardness of Russia had been fixed in Russian national self-consciousness as a fact, differently interpreted by individual approaches and movements within the Russian socio-political thought. The first group of doctrinaires interpreted backwardness as a temporary obstacle to be simply conquered. In this case Russia follows the same path as the West, only somewhat delayed and with a distance still to cover, and must inevitably experience the main stages of historical development of the West (Pyotr Chaadayev, Vissarion Belinsky, and other so-called “occidentalists”). Another group of thinkers considered Russia’s backwardness as a key to its future greatness. In this case, Russia follows a unique path and has a particular destiny/vocation (Vladimir Odoyevsky, Mikhail Pogodin, Fyodor Tyutchev, Slavophiles, etc.). The third group of theoreticians, accepting the unity of human history, connected the peculiarity of the Russian path with Russia’s ability to pass certain stages of Western historical development (Alexander Herzen, Nikolay Chernyshevsky). The fourth group of doctrinaires, rejecting the unity of human history, considered Russia to be a specific cultural-historical model, a unique civilization opposing the West (Nikolay Danilevsky, Konstantin Leontyev, Vladimir Lamansky). The fifth group of thinkers preached Christian humanist synthesis of universal values and Russian spiritual culture, the idea of “unity” (Stepan Shevyrov, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Vladimir Solovyov).

Let us note that different theoretical variations of the “progress” theme are commonly present phenomenon in Russian and European science. The concept of “progress” was considered as entirely “scientific” and was professed by almost all participants of the “great intellectual debate” of the 19th century. Even conservatives, who, as known, opposed the essentially liberal understanding of progress by posing the notion of “balance and organic development”¹⁶ – not to mention Marxists and liberals – did not question the descriptive part of the myth; the conclusions, however, differed. Let me introduce a few samples of Russian thought on progress.

¹⁶ А.А. Ширинянц, *Нигилизм или консерватизм? (Русская интеллигенция в истории политики и мысли)*, Москва 2011, pp. 217-235.

Talking about conservatism, it is a common stereotype to perceive its adherents as opponents of any progress in general, and no differentiation is made between the notions of “progress” and “development”. In the early 1860s, Ivan Aksakov concluded that development that is alien to the fundamental principles of nationality is not progress but perversion of social activity, collapse of organic functions, ugliness, and a painful state,¹⁷ but “conservative” is only what is national, that is, what really lives and is viable; and only what is national (and thus conservative) is progressive.¹⁸ Years later Konstantin Leontyev continued these considerations, reaching a logical conclusion. He separated the notions of “progress” and “development” stating that an egalitarian-liberal process is an antithesis of a development process¹⁹ and attempted to prove that progress, which means a later stage of history, so to speak its tomorrow, is not always more emancipatory than the period that is ending or that has already ended.²⁰ Hence he considered that all kinds of *reactionary* means, both provisional and legislative, *can become progressive* – whenever the means that liberate a human person achieve the so-called *saturation point*.²¹ In this way Leontyev, using the idea of progress against the very “supporters of progress” obstinately convinces his readers that the time had come for reactionary movement if not in all, then at least in some aspects of life.²² Leontyev would have been no conservative if he had not defended traditional values and national principles. Progress that is “cosmopolitan”, “egalitarian-liberal”, which dissolves nations in the nameless mass of humanity and ensures the triumph of Western, bourgeoisie, standardized civilisation that debases a man spiritually and intellectually – such progress poses the greatest threat to colourful diversity and “blossoming complexity” of life. According to Leontyev, development cannot occur without including the diversity and richness of national, political, social, and cultural forms. Everything creative, everything that preserves what once made the history of the nation, has more or less isolating or distinguishing character, juxtaposing one nation with another. All that is liberal is colourless, destructive, and meaningless in the sense that it is equally possible anywhere.²³

Paradoxically, Leontyev’s ideas are in line with the thoughts of his ideological opponents, Alexander Herzen and Nikolay Chernyshevsky.

Herzen²⁴ became in the West a pioneer of a special world, non-European, non-Asian – the world of Russia, the Slavic world with its own natural life and its own

¹⁷ И.С. Аксаков, “О взаимном отношении народа, государства и общества”, in К.С. Аксаков, И.С. Аксаков, *Избранные труды*, Москва 2010, p. 403.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 404.

¹⁹ К.Н. Леонтьев, “Византизм и славянство”, in idem, *Избранное*, Москва 2010, p. 103.

²⁰ Idem, “Передовые статьи ‘Варшавского дневника’ 1880 года”, in idem, *Избранное*, p. 321.

²¹ Ibid., p. 321.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., p. 264.

²⁴ А.А. Шириныанц, “Герцен в контексте русского революционизма”, in А.Ф. Яковлева, В.Л. Шарова (eds.), *Александр Иванович Герцен и исторические судьбы России. Материалы Международной научной конференции к 200-летию А.И. Герцена (Институт философии РАН 20-21 июня 2012 г.)*, Москва 2013, pp. 219-222.

physiological specifics;²⁵ the world of barbarians feeling the coming death, announcing “*memento mori*” to the old world, offering this world a murderer if it did not want to commit suicide.²⁶ Previously a Moscow occidentalist, then a Russian exiled dissident, Herzen became inspired with the notion of Russian “peculiarity” after the European upheavals of 1848–49. After settling in Switzerland, Herzen tried to discover what differs Russia from Europe and explain these differences to Western Russophobic intellectuals.

Herzen’s first anti-Russophobic work directed at European readers was his 1949 letter “La Russia”. In that text, Herzen sketched the beginnings of the theory of Russian socialism, which he would develop in the coming years. According to Herzen, the “peculiarity” of Russia is determined by its peasant society and the intrinsic, not fully self-conscious, wonderful power of the Russian nation – “belief in itself”.²⁷ Considering this, Herzen clearly states that he sees no reason why Russia should go through all phases of European development.²⁸

In letters to William Linton (1854), Herzen repeats the question asked first in his work *Россия* [Russia]: should Russia undergo all the phases of European development? And he decisively denies that such repetition is necessary, claiming that they can and have to go through woeful, difficult stages of our predecessors’ historical development but in the same way as an embryo goes through lower stages of zoological existence. The work already finished, the result achieved can be reached and achieved by all capable of understanding: this is the circular guarantee of progress, the *majorate* of humanity.²⁹

Another – besides Herzen – pioneer of Russian socialism, Nikolay Chernyshevsky³⁰ went further than his older comrade and developed a law “allowing” Russia not to repeat all developmental levels of European countries from the lowest to the highest.

In his article “Критика философских предубеждений против общинного владения” [Critique of philosophical prejudices against communal ownership] published in 1858 in the magazine *Современник*, Chernyshevsky formulates a “universal law”, based on philosophical theories of Schelling and Hegel and quoting many “geological and physiological” examples of dialectical development of forms starting with the beginnings of the planet Earth, as well as numerous examples from other “spheres of existence”:

²⁵ А.И. Герцен, “Еще вариация на старую тему (Письмо к...)”, in idem, *Собрание сочинений в тридцати томах*, vol. 12: Произведения 1852–1857 годов, Москва 1957, p. 429.

²⁶ Idem, “Старый мир и Россия. Письма к В. Линтону”, in idem, *Собрание сочинений в тридцати томах*, vol. 12, p. 177.

²⁷ Idem, “Россия”, in idem, *Собрание сочинений в тридцати томах*, vol. 6: *С того берега. Статьи. Долг прежде всего, 1847–1851*, Москва 1955, pp. 199–200.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 205.

²⁹ Idem, “Старый мир и Россия...”, p. 186.

³⁰ A.A. Szirinianc, “Krótki szkic historii myśli społeczno-politycznej Rosji w latach 1850–1860”, in E. Je-liński et al. (eds.), *Political science...*, pp. 161–166.

1. The highest level of development of a form coincides with its beginning.
2. Under the influence of high development achieved by the known phenomenon of social life among advanced peoples, this phenomenon can develop very quickly in their nations, from the lowest level directly to the highest, bypassing the middle logical moments.³¹

Chernyshevsky maintains that communal ownership is not a “primitive” or “lower form, displaced by a higher form of private ownership of land, that this “obsolete” form does not have to be destroyed in order to develop and go forward.

According to this universal law, which maintains that the end of development in a form is a return to the beginning, Russia does not have to go through a period of private ownership of land, which seems to be an intermediary form. After communal property has been developed in the highest form of land ownership relations, the country can skip the intermediary period of capitalist development.³²

We can see here that both the religious conservative and revolutionary democrats agree that the forward and upward movement is not always progressive, but development must always have national character and Russia does not have to follow all forms of development of European countries from the lowest to the highest. Here I must mention a particular “justification” of conservatism, traditional values, and national traditions expressed by President of Russia Vladimir Putin, who in one of his annual addresses to the Federal Assembly³³ quoted Berdyaev – faithfully but not word for word – stating that the significance of conservatism lies not in the fact that it prevents forward and upward movement, but that it prevents the backward downward movement, counteracting a move into chaotic darkness, return to primitive state.³⁴ Here I would also like to quote another Russian thinker who asked in 1857 whether a road is a stationary state and whether one can stop midway as the road certainly leads somewhere ahead; it is an incessant movement and a return to a path previously trodden does not mean abandoning the strife to march forward; it does mean going forward, but in another direction. What can be disputed is only the essence of roads, only the question: which *forward* means going towards the truth?³⁵

³¹ Н.Г. Чернышевский, “Критика философских предубеждений против общинного владения”, in idem, *Полное собрание сочинений. В 15 т.*, vol. 5: *Статьи, 1858-1859*, Москва 1950, p. 389.

³² Ibid., pp. 364, 377.

³³ “Путин В.: Смысл консерватизма в том, что он препятствует движению назад и вниз, к хаотической тьме”, *Itv*, 12 December 2013, at <https://www.itv.ru/news/2013-12-12/55771-v_putin_smysl_konservatizma_v_tom_chto_on_prepyatstvuet_dvizheniyu_nazad_i_vniz_k_haoticheskoy_tme>.

³⁴ Berdyaev’s original sentence refers not to a primitive state but to the situation preceding the emergence of states and cultures. This fragment comes from his work *The Philosophy of Inequality. Letters to My Contemporaries, Concerning Social Philosophy*, written in 1918 and published in 1923 in exile. See the fifth letter, “On Conservatism”. Cf. Н.А. Бердяев, *Философия неравенства. Письма к недругам по социальной философии*, at <<http://www.vchi.net/berdyaev/neraven/05.html>>.

³⁵ К.С. Аксаков, “Передовая статья. Газета ‘Молва’ 17 мая 1857 г.”, [w:] А.А. Ширинянц (ed.), *Русская социально-политическая мысль XI-начала XX века: К.С. Аксаков*, Москва 2011, pp. 277-278.

Whatever has been said, attempts to explain the diversity and originality of national options have led (and will lead again) on the one hand to justifying the specificity of Russia's historical path as that of an independent, Russian-Orthodox civilization that does not need to catch up to anyone or repeat anything, and on the other hand to understanding clearly the vicious circle of the modern civilization, whose essence was very clearly captured by Dmitry Pisarev: We are poor because we are dumb, and we are dumb because we are poor.³⁶

To my mind, this last relation offers a possible historical vindication of the myth of progress.

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³⁶ Д.И. Писарев, "Реалисты", in idem, *Полное собрание сочинений и писем в двенадцати томах*, vol. 6: *Статьи, 1864 (апрель-декабрь)*, Москва 2003, p. 224.

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