

## CRITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY IN SOVIET THOUGHT\*

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This essay attempts to inform Western readers about how critical philosophy of history in the English-speaking world is reflected in Soviet philosophical studies. The theme itself is obviously complicated, controversial, and not easy to cover for many philosophical and nonphilosophical reasons. There are numerous articles and books (published in the Soviet Union) that are more or less directly concerned with various aspects of theories offered by English-speaking critical philosophers of history.<sup>1</sup> As it is impossible to give a complete and comprehensive picture of them in one article, I will offer only some rough and selective guidelines about the problem. Furthermore, being one of the Soviet authors working on Western philosophy of history, I may be biased by my own personal conceptions and interpretations which are not necessarily shared by other Soviet specialists. But there are strong reasons in favor of at least trying to say something about the reception of Western philosophy of history here in the USSR because there has been almost no real dialogue between Soviet Marxist and Western philosophers of history. The extensive coverage and criticism of Western theories by Soviet specialists has had little impact on the actual development of Western critical philosophy of history, not only because specialists from both traditions of thought have different evaluations and assessments of so many central ideological and epistemological issues, but also because publications in Russian (and in other languages of the Soviet nationalities) are usually beyond the reach of English-speaking philosophers. Even moderate steps toward establishing a real dialogue in any field of human culture (including such narrow subjects as epistemological problems of history) should be welcomed.

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Although it is very difficult to give exact numbers, there are at least twenty to twenty-five relatively well-known Soviet authors who regularly write about English-speaking critical philosophy of history. Of course, the interests of these authors are not necessarily connected only with English-speaking philosophy.

Some examples from the vast quantity of publications are: I. S. Kon's book *Philosophical Idealism and the Crisis of Contemporary Bourgeois Historical Thought*<sup>2</sup> which gives a broad picture of the development of philosophy of history in the West, including some paragraphs about Bertrand Russell, Patrick Gardiner, and other English-speaking thinkers. In Kon's later writings, for example, "On the Argument about the Logic of Historical Explanation", he analyzes the emergence of the Hempel-Dray controversy in the theories of historical explanation offered by Karl Popper, Alan Donagan, Maurice Mandelbaum, Ernest Nagel, and others. M. A. Kissel has devoted a number of writings to critical philosophy in the English-speaking world, largely in connection with the analyses of R. G. Collingwood's role.<sup>3</sup> N. P. Francuzova has written extensively on Popper's contribution to Western philosophy of history.<sup>4</sup> Popper's philosophy of history is also analyzed by L. A. Zhuravlyev.<sup>5</sup> Criticisms of W. H. Dray, Popper, R. F. Atkinson, and other Western philosophers are frequent in A. I. Rakitov's writings, although his main focus is in developing Marxist epistemology of history.<sup>6</sup> V. I. Salov, in his book *Historism and Contemporary Bourgeois Historiography*,<sup>7</sup> covers a wide range of existentialist, phenomenological, Hegelian, religious, structuralist, and other approaches. Representatives of English-speaking critical philosophy of history (Popper, Hempel, Dray, W. B. Gallie, Arthur Danto, and others) are mostly analyzed under the subtitle "Neo-Positivist Approach." O. L. Vainshtein published in 1979 a special book on Western non-Marxist philosophy and methodology of history, where some material on Danto, Morton White, G. R. Elton, Haskell Fain, and other English-speaking authors is also included.<sup>8</sup> Most of the same names appear also in the studies by G. M. Ivanov, A. M. Korshunov, Y. V. Petrov, M. A. Barg, and others.<sup>9</sup>

Philosophers of Soviet Estonia have been quite active in studying critical philosophy of history. This tradition was established in the 1960s by Eero Loone at the Tartu State University and later developed by A. Uibo, myself, and some other specialists.

In his book *Contemporary Philosophy of History*,<sup>10</sup> Loone offers an elaborate picture of the development of analytical philosophy of history in the West, commenting on many Western authors who had previously been unknown in Soviet philosophy. Another Estonian philosopher, A. Uibo, gives in his writings on objectivity a critical review of Anglo-American theories<sup>11</sup>; the philosopher of law I. Gräzin has analyzed authors like H. L. A. Hart who are significant in philosophy of history.<sup>12</sup> I have tried to follow this general stream of investigation, publishing on theories of narrative and explanation in history.<sup>13</sup>

This active interest in Western theories of history among Estonian philosophers is stimulated also by the general intellectual climate in Tallinn and Tartu. Quite intensive research is carried out here also on some other trends of non-Marxist thought: sociology of knowledge, phenomenology, philosophy of culture, philosophy of science, by authors like J. Rebane, R. Vihalemm, U. Matjus, and others.

## II

The concept of English-speaking critical philosophy itself has specific nuances in the vocabulary of different specialists. In trying to find the right theoretical description for the writings of various philosophers of history from Hempel and Popper to Collingwood and Michael Oakeshott, Soviet authors usually turn to the relationship between these philosophers of history and various general philosophical trends like neo-Hegelianism (Benedetto Croce), neo-Kantian philosophy (Wilhelm Windelband, Heinrich Rickert), English absolute idealism (F. H. Bradley, Bernard Bosanquet, J. M. McTaggart), neopositivism (Morris Schlick, Rudolph Carnap, A. J. Ayer, Popper at certain periods of his development, Otto Neurath), linguistic philosophy (late Wittgenstein, Gilbert Ryle, J. O. Wisdom, John Austin), post-positivist historical school in the philosophy of science (Imre Lakatos, Thomas Kuhn), critical rationalism (Popper), and so on.<sup>14</sup>

Besides differences in epistemological and ideological approaches, there are also differences in the vocabulary used by Soviet and Western scholars. For example, the term "neopositivism" is much more frequently used by Soviet than by Western historians of philosophy, and more narrow phenomena like logical positivism are simply taken as subtrends of neopositivism by many Soviet specialists. The term "linguistic philosophy" is again clearly more widely used in the Soviet than in the English-speaking tradition to mark various trends of Wittgensteinian philosophy. Some leading Soviet authors (I. S. Narski for example) describe linguistic philosophy simply as one of the stages in the development of neopositivism.<sup>15</sup> Such differences in the general terminology are important because they also influence the image of critical philosophy of history in Soviet conceptions. At the same time it should also be kept in mind that (according to Soviet specialists) various philosophical schools in the West are becoming increasingly diversified and it is difficult and even impossible to capture that variety in the traditional classification into positivism, existentialism, neo-Thomism, and so on.<sup>16</sup>

It is commonplace in Soviet philosophy of history to emphasize the connection of English-speaking critical philosophy of history with various analytical trends. I. S. Kon says in his article "Philosophy of History"<sup>17</sup> that critical philosophy of history emerged at the end of the nineteenth century. Kon distinguishes two trends within that philosophy: gnoseological-epistemological and logical-methodological. The gnoseological tendency was founded by Wilhelm Dilthey and it tries to

interpret not only historiography but to understand historical consciousness in a broad sense. "Analytical philosophy of history," according to Kon, is connected mostly with the positivist tradition and is concerned first of all with logical and methodological studies of history. Kon emphasizes that analytical philosophers of history do not want to prescribe rules of investigation to historians. They simply try to describe and analyze historians' real cognitive activities, to understand their specific features. Among analytical philosophers of history Kon lists several leading philosophers of history of the English-speaking countries (Nagel, Hempel, Gardiner, Dray).<sup>18</sup>

Loone points out that in the middle of the twentieth century logical or linguistic analysis dominated in English-speaking philosophy.<sup>19</sup> He goes on to show that analytical philosophy of history is a theory of historical knowledge which applies the main principles of analytical philosophy to the study of historical knowledge. In another context Loone claims explicitly that analytical philosophy of history is a special part of analytical philosophy and that this form of the philosophy of history has a predominant position in the English-speaking countries.<sup>20</sup>

Asserting that the two key figures in the emergence of analytical philosophy of history are Collingwood and Mandelbaum, Loone does not try to simplify matters. In fact he understands well the complexities of Collingwood's general philosophical world-view, its ties with Croce's neo-Hegelianism and English absolute idealism. But, as Loone says, Collingwood's method in the philosophy of history is analytical, that is, he tries to show what historians are really doing.<sup>21</sup> While Collingwood is an idealist, Mandelbaum (according to Loone) represents a form of a "naturalist materialism."<sup>22</sup> Mandelbaum's book *The Problem of Historical Knowledge* contributed strongly to making philosophical analysis of historical thought the main task of the philosophy of history.<sup>23</sup>

While "analytical philosophy of history" is for Loone a term which applies to a majority of works produced by epistemologists of history in English-speaking countries, he also uses the words "analytical" and "logical positivism" as tools for bracketing the positions of various authors in concrete debates within analytical philosophy of history, giving to these terms a slightly different angle. One interesting example here is his attempt to interpret the covering-law "reactionist" controversy over historical explanation in terms of broad paradigms. Hempel's position is (from Loone's point of view) an example of the adherence to the LP (logical positivist) paradigm, whereas Dray represents the A (analytical) paradigm. The LP paradigm can be applied to technical language where an author is relatively free to introduce the meanings and ways of using the words. The A paradigm can be applied to ordinary language where the ways of using words form certain "families" that appear spontaneously, and a researcher can reflect (but not introduce intentionally) these ways. Loone thinks that LP and A paradigms do not necessarily contradict each other; they may also be treated as complementing one another.<sup>24</sup>

Loone also occasionally uses the term "neopositivism," without specifying, however, what the exact differences are between "logical positivism" and "neopositivism" in his vocabulary. But he stresses that neopositivism has never dominated Western philosophy of history because neopositivism is oriented toward finding laws, and this orientation is unacceptable for the majority of Western historians and philosophers of history.<sup>25</sup> Loone thinks also that for the same reasons, the post-positivist stage in the philosophy of science (started by Kuhn and other similar thinkers) has no equivalent in the philosophy of history.<sup>26</sup>

V. I. Salov connects the covering-law model explicitly with the term "neopositivism," saying that "the neopositivist theorists of history take as a basis the 'covering-law model'."<sup>27</sup> He says also that the neopositivist covering-law model was fiercely criticized by Donagan, Dray, and others, but he does not identify these others as belonging to a certain general philosophical tradition.<sup>28</sup> The covering-law model is identified as neopositivist also by M. A. Barg.<sup>29</sup>

Neopositivism and other related trends are not the only intellectual developments that are identified as a methodological basis for the epistemology of history in the English-speaking countries. I pointed out already that the wider idealist background of Collingwood is also mentioned in this connection (by Loone, Kissel, and A. Yaschuk for example).<sup>30</sup> Another complicated example is Popper's treatment in Soviet philosophy of history. Popper is naturally acknowledged as one of the most prominent philosophers of history in the West. In a number of critical studies that focus on certain aspects of his *Poverty of Historicism* and *The Open Society* he is regarded mostly as a typical representative of a (neo)positivist philosophy of history<sup>31</sup> whereas in other studies (where his philosophy of history is analyzed in the wider context of his intellectual development), he is quite persuasively identified as a "critical rationalist."<sup>32</sup> I do not think that these different classifications reflect a misunderstanding of Popper's views by Soviet authors. On the contrary: they seem to reflect the indisputable phenomenon that some of Popper's statements (on the covering-law model, for example) can rightly be classified as positivist in the philosophy of history while his general philosophical world-view clearly surpasses the positivist framework.

Connections with many other philosophical trends are also mentioned. Loone, for example, refers to the critique of structuralism by Hayden White.<sup>33</sup> Historical connections of modern Western philosophy of history with Dilthey, neo-Kantians, and so on, are also analyzed by a number of authors (Kon, Loone, Kissel).

I have tried in my writings (starting with a student paper about analytical philosophy of history)<sup>34</sup> simply to give a list of some authors who are usually considered as representatives of the epistemology of history and who are writing in English (for example, Laid Addis, R. F. Atkinson, C. Behan McCullagh, Isaiah Berlin, L. B. Cebik, Danto, Donagan, Dray, Fain, Gallie, Gardiner, Ernest Gellner, Leon Goldstein, Rolf Gruner, Hempel, A. R. Louch, Mandelbaum, Rex Martin, Raymond Martin, Alasdair McIntyre, Jack Meiland, Louis Mink, Murray Murphey,

E. Nagel, Patrick Nowell-Smith, Oakeshott, John Passmore, Popper, Michael Scriven, Quentin Skinner, R. Stover, W. H. Walsh, Morton White, Hayden White, J. O. Wisdom, and G. H. von Wright) and to say that the theories of history of these and other similar authors are usually marked by the terms "English-speaking analytical philosophy of history," "English-speaking critical philosophy of history" and others.<sup>35</sup> I have stressed that while the general philosophical orientation of these authors varies from modern versions of positivism to hermeneutic interpretations, their usual style of philosophizing is largely analytical. But in order not to stress the analytical element too much, I have preferred to use the term "critical philosophy of history" instead of "analytical philosophy of history" in my recent writings about Western theories.<sup>36</sup>

### III

Soviet authors usually pay a lot of attention to the social nature and ideological functions of critical philosophy of history. N. P. Francuzova emphasizes that the problems of historical knowledge comprise one of the fields of ideological battle in the contemporary world, that discussions about the methodology of history have a "class nature."<sup>37</sup> L. Zuravlyev adds that most positivist philosophers of history defend in a philosophical form liberal bourgeois values, and criticize Marxist theory of historic development.<sup>38</sup> Similar assessments can be found in most writings by Soviet authors on English-speaking critical philosophy of history. It is obvious that V. I. Lenin's analysis of Ernest Mach's and R. Avenarius's theories and other non-Marxist trends, in his book *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*, serve for Soviet authors as a methodological example of a Marxist approach to non-Marxist philosophy.<sup>39</sup> Of course it is impossible to review here Lenin's book in detail (and I think that the main points of that book are more or less known also for non-Marxist readers). But I should like to draw special attention to one idea of that book, namely to the idea that "behind the epistemological scholasticism of empiriocriticism it is impossible not to see the struggle of parties in the philosophy, the struggle that after all expresses the tendencies and ideology of the social classes of contemporary society that are hostile to each other."<sup>40</sup> This principle of finding social mechanisms of ideological and philosophical developments is naturally based on the main conceptions of the materialist understanding of history (interrelationships between social being and social consciousness; basis and superstructure; productive forces and productive relations; and so on).

Soviet philosophers have applied these general principles also to the analysis of critical philosophy of history. There are certain moments that are usually distinguished in that connection: social preconditions for the emergence of the present forms of Western philosophy of history, ideological meaning of the critique of Marxism by Western authors, and some others.

Loone says that Collingwood is partially right that changes in the philosophy of history reflect changes in general philosophical development. For example the emergence of analytical philosophy of history reflects the dominant position of general analytical philosophy in English-speaking countries. But Loone goes on to say that Collingwood's conception of the causes is still too narrow. Philosophy is made by philosophers but philosophers are not working in a vacuum—they are influenced not only by the ideas of the society but also by the material substance of the given society.<sup>41</sup> According to Loone, one of the main causes of the emergence (in the nineteenth century) of the conceptions that attempt to draw a sharp dividing line between natural sciences and social knowledge (that is, Dilthey's views, the approach of Windelband and Rickert, and so on) was a real decline of capitalist society: because the laws of social development were not working in favor of the bourgeoisie, it was useful to prove that there can be no social laws.<sup>42</sup> Loone assumes that largely the same social factors determined the emergence of analytical philosophy of history, although there were also some striking differences: the drastic growth of the socialist forces in the world, the growth of the importance of social sciences, and so on.<sup>43</sup> Analytical theories of history are fulfilling ideological functions, according to Loone, because they present works by bourgeois historians as norms, models of historical writing.<sup>44</sup> But citing these claims, it should again be stressed that Loone and other Soviet specialists are not attempting to trace direct links between the development of economic, social, and political structures on the one hand, and theories of the epistemology of history on the other hand. The general social processes are regarded first of all as a decisive factor in a broad sense, influencing the development of the main values and mental orientations of the given society and its social classes, but not determining the exact form of each philosophical theory.

One of the indisputable indications of the ideological orientation of critical philosophers of history is their explicit criticisms of Marxism. For example there are a lot of studies in the Soviet Union about the ideological functions of Popper's critique of Marxism.<sup>45</sup> But Popper's ideological commitments are naturally analyzed not only in the context of his relation to critical philosophy of history, but also in a broader framework. Criticisms of Marxism are identified by Soviet specialists also in the writings of many other English-speaking philosophers of history. O. L. Vainshtein quotes Danto, Morton White, and other Western philosophers, showing that they try to present Marxist philosophy of history as a form of theology or prophecy.<sup>46</sup> In my book of narrativism I also tried to show that the idea about the speculative nature of historical materialism is (in various modified forms) shared by many leading critical philosophers of history (Popper, Berlin, Gardiner, Danto, Gallie).<sup>47</sup> Differences (sometimes even striking differences) between approaches to Marxism among Western scholars are also noticed in works by Soviet authors. For example, a more flexible treatment of Marxism by W. H. Walsh is sometimes singled out.<sup>48</sup>

It is extremely difficult to sum up in a few words *the balance* of critical assessments of English-speaking philosophy of history by Soviet authors. To understand the methodological basis of Soviet approaches, it may be informative to quote Lenin again. In his short article "On the Question of Dialectics" (1915), he says that philosophical idealism is considered simply as nonsense from the point of view of primitive materialism. But from the point of view of dialectical materialism, idealism is an exaggerated, one-sided development of some particular feature, element, or aspect of knowledge, its magnification into an absolute which is separated from matter and nature, turned into a deity.<sup>49</sup> I think that the tendency of most Soviet authors to reject the general methodological principles of Western authors, but at the same time to acknowledge that many interesting and important problems of historical knowledge are raised in Western writings, can be interpreted as an implementation of Lenin's dictum not to see only mistakes in idealist philosophy but to find out also what real problems are analyzed (although perhaps in an exaggerated and one-sided form) in that philosophy. This methodological orientation is reflected also in a number of Soviet studies on general trends of Western philosophy. "The real problems of life and science, expressed in the distorted forms of contemporary idealism, must become subjects of our positive studies and get their adequate clarification by Marxist-Leninist philosophy," is stated in a recent publication on Western philosophy.<sup>50</sup> Loone, for example, says explicitly that non-Marxist theorists of history may have some cognitive results and an intensive Marxist critical analysis is needed to extract such possible particular results from the general body of unacceptable Western theories.<sup>51</sup> N. P. Francuzova fiercely attacks Popper's philosophy but admits also that some of Popper's statements (for example about the need to reconstruct the historical situations where certain scientific theories emerge) can be welcomed.<sup>52</sup> In my book on historical explanation I claimed that non-Marxist philosophers of history have some valuable results in formulating technical logical and methodological questions (although the Marxist and non-Marxist conceptions are totally opposed to one another on more fundamental philosophical problems).<sup>53</sup>

I could give other similar examples, but perhaps it is more informative to cite a concrete example illustrating the analysis of non-Marxist views in the context of Marxist theory. A very typical case here is some paragraphs on historical explanation in A. I. Rakitov's book.<sup>54</sup>

After stating that an explanation is a procedure of identifying causes, factors, bases, or (in special cases) the way a given situation, event, or process is formed, Rakitov shows that there are three main conceptions of explanation in the Western literature: 1) the covering-law scheme; 2) the rational explanation scheme; and 3) the intuitive understanding scheme. Then he gives an account of the Hempel-Dray controversy over explanation. Rakitov criticizes covering-law theorists for not



understanding the objective nature of the laws of history, and Hempel's opponents for denying the existence of historical laws. Rakitov thinks that the radical explanation scheme cannot be used to analyze the explanations of the functioning of society as a whole and its social institutions. The conceptions of intuitive understanding are connected by Rakitov with names like Dilthey, Georg Simmel, and so on. He says that this conception (if we take away its subjective idealist elements) reflects at best simply a particular psychological method of reconstruction of an alien individual mind based on the analogy between the subject's own and that alien "self." In addition to the three listed schemes, Rakitov rejects also the narrative model of explanation.<sup>55</sup>

Rakitov's own conception of historical explanation attempts to unite the dialectical materialist principle of historicism and the systems approach. He thinks that there are three main levels in the method of historical explanation. The first level includes an employment of general (Rakitov also uses the term "covering") laws. For example to explain the abolition of serfdom in Russia in the nineteenth century we have to rely first of all on general laws for the transformation from one socioeconomic formation (feudalism) to another (capitalism) to show that this act of abolition was historically inevitable. The second level (according to Rakitov) is concerned with the explanation of concrete forms, mechanisms, and motives for the act of abolition. To explain these we have to turn to the more limited "local" laws, to concrete data about the social class background of historical personalities, about their education, personal relations, and so on. All these moments are used, as Rakitov stresses, as a basis for rational explanations of the concrete actions of historical personalities. Rakitov thinks that the norms of common sense are also frequently used in historical explanations on that second level.

The third level is connected with the need to "take into account," as Rakitov puts it, the accidental character of many historical events. Rakitov refers here (if I understand him correctly) to intuitive understanding as one of the possible methods of explanation.

The main conclusion of Rakitov's conception is that different structures of historical reality require different models of historical explanation. The choice of a right model is also influenced by the hierarchical level (in the system as a whole) to which the explainable object belongs, and also by the content of the cognitive task of a researcher. Different models of historical explanation do not exclude but complement each other.<sup>56</sup>

I referred to Rakitov's conception not to discuss, review, or assess it in detail but simply to bring a typical example how a Soviet philosopher develops the Marxist theory in fact in a constant dialogue with non-Marxist (primarily English-speaking) authors. Of course this polemical dimension is not equally strongly represented in all Soviet philosophical studies. The situation also varies from topic to topic. So the Western literature is clearly more analyzed, for example, in Soviet studies on historical explanation than in studies, say, on historicism. But in general we may say that critical reflections on corresponding Western conceptions are a constant element in Soviet philosophy of history. Whatever the value

(from the non-Marxist point of view) of the conceptions offered by Soviet philosophers of history (and it is obviously one of the basic features of philosophy that the value of its results can be questioned almost endlessly), nobody can deny that Soviet philosophy of history is oriented toward a dialogue with non-Marxist thought. This dialogue has for decades been largely unilateral because the writings of Soviet authors have not (for various reasons) reached the majority of Western specialists.

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